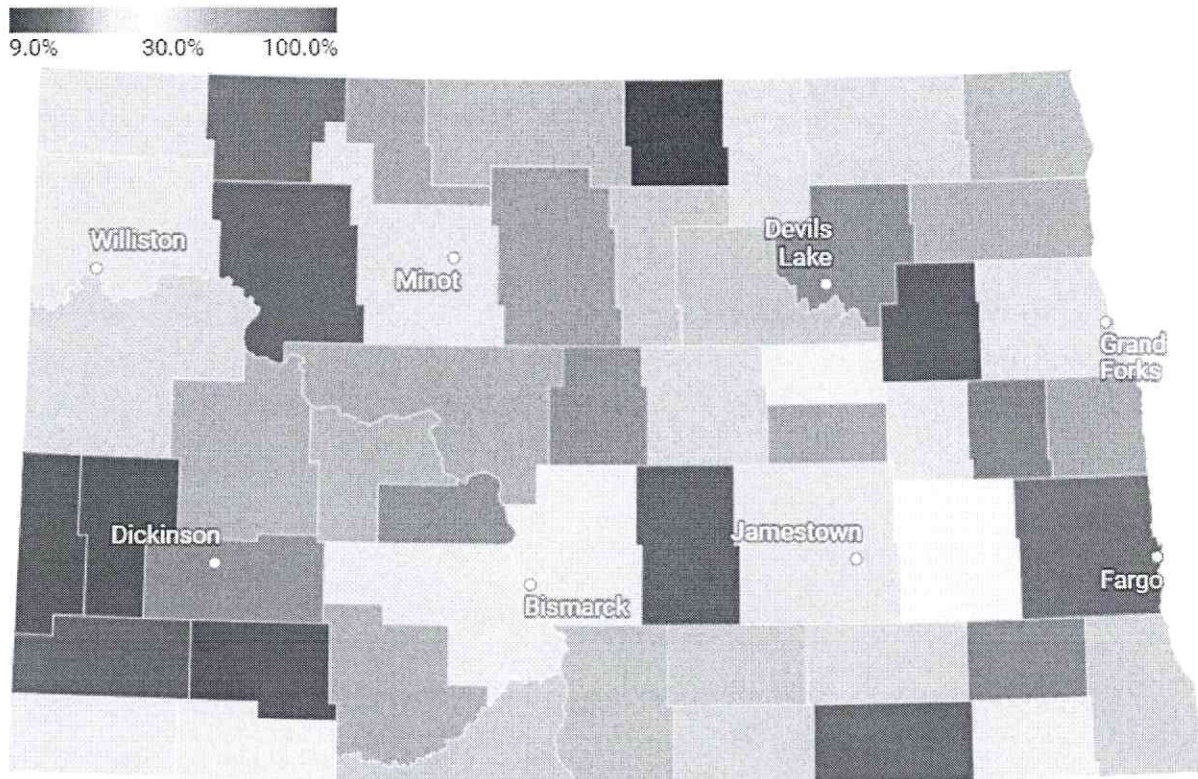


## Food deserts: 34 ND counties with low access to grocery stores

On average, 45% of rural residents in 34 ND counties live 10 to 20 miles, or more, from a grocery store, about 5x more than rural areas nationally. Two counties do not have a grocery store. The USDA defines these tracts as Low Access Areas, or food deserts. Rural grocery stores are essential for well-being, local businesses, tourism, workforce attraction, and competitiveness.

Percentage of residents with low access to a grocery store.



Map: Red River Regional Council • Source: USDA ERS Food Access Research Atlas (2015, 2019) • Get the data • Created with Datawrapper

Link to interactive map: [https://www.datawrapper.de/\\_/9fGoN/](https://www.datawrapper.de/_/9fGoN/)

### More than 45% of rural residents in North Dakota live in a food desert

According to the USDA, convenience stores and dollar stores that stock milk and a few fresh items do not count as grocery stores.

- While 92% of rural residents in the United States have easy access to grocery stores
- Only 8 percent of rural residents in the entire nation have to drive 10 to 20 miles or more to access a supermarket or grocery. Only 8% of rural residents live in a food desert.

That's not the case in North Dakota.

Here, nearly every county has an area that would be considered a food desert. **On average, more than 45% of rural residents in North Dakota have Low Access to Healthy Foods.**

Nearly every county in the state has an area that meets the definition of a food desert. (map).

- In 19 counties, nearly half of residents live 10 to 20 miles, or more, from a supermarket.
- In 11 counties, nearly all residents live 10 to 20 miles or more from a supermarket.
- And, across the entire nation, there are only 23 counties that do not have a grocery store – and **TWO of those are in North Dakota.**

### **Impacts**

Rural grocery stores that sell fresh foods are essential for health and well-being, and they are critical for sustaining a vital local economy, attracting workforce, and growing tourism.

Local grocery stores keep money and jobs in the community.

Local foods are a growth industry. The USDA says locally produced foods sold in local groceries and farmers markets accounted for 3 percent of all agricultural sales in the US in 2017 and its share is growing.

### **5 things happened during the pandemic:**

- More people bought more groceries locally.
- People from larger cities drove out to small towns to buy groceries.
- With more business, smaller grocers were able to buy more from suppliers.
- There were big supply chain problems that showed the value of locally produced foods and meat for schools and grocery stores.
- Small grocery stores had to get creative to help customers

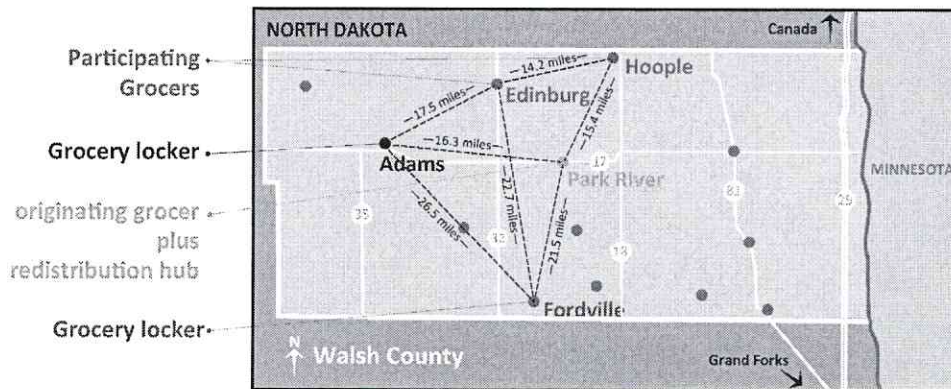
We have seen that here in North Dakota, and SB2273 harnesses North Dakota ingenuity to power local solutions to the challenges that small grocery stores face.

### **A cooperative approach to addressing food deserts in North Dakota**

One of these is the Rural Access Distribution Cooperative that started in 2021 in Walsh County.

This cooperative , allowing three rural grocery stores to order groceries in bulk collectively and distribute items between the three stores and to other grocery pickup locations in the region.

## Walsh County Distribution Hub



*The grocery cooperative in Walsh County developed among communities that are 15 to 27 miles apart to overcome the mileage barriers residents experience by living in a food desert.*

The cooperative model, between Jim's Supervalu in Park River, Hoople Grocery in Hoople and the Market on Main in Edinburg, has resulted in lower grocery prices and lower delivery costs for the stores, which carries through to customer prices. In the future, a grocery locker in Fordville will extend the program to Adams, a community without a grocery store.

To lower food prices and use online ordering to reach rural customers who live further than 10 miles from a grocery store (the federal definition of a food desert), food business owners in Park River, Adams, Hoople, Edinburg, and Fordville have created the first rural food access and distribution cooperative. The Rural Access Distribution Cooperative includes three grocery stores, one bar and restaurant, and a community development organization. The cooperative will allow the small-town grocery stores to share the costs of an online shopping platform, purchase products cooperatively to increase volume and reduce wholesale prices and deliver grocery

orders to climate-controlled grocery lockers in outlying communities. The cooperative's goals are to allow more local residents to shop for food at local or nearby grocery stores, which increases rural residents' access to food, preserves 117 jobs, and bolsters the sustainability of three of Walsh County's four grocery stores.