

Spatial analysis of the charitable food system in Georgia

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Food banks and food pantries play a pivotal role in supporting food security among low-income households in the United States. According to Feeding America, 49 million people (or 1 in 6 residents) in the U.S. used charitable food agencies in 2022. Despite this widespread usage, comparatively few studies have analyzed the spatial distribution of food pantry sites and their spatial accessibility to potentially food insecure households. The few studies that do exist focus at a regional or metropolitan scale.

Our research helps fill this gap, presenting results of a statewide analysis of public food pantry availability in the state of Georgia. Our study draws from data provided by the nine regional food banks in the state, through coordination with Feeding Georgia, along with census figures. From these data, we create a composite measure of spatial proximity that combines distance to any pantry with two measures representing choices available in the local area. Controlling for underlying population density, we identify hot and cold spots for pantry proximity throughout the state. These results show significant challenges for residents in several locations throughout the state, including regions of metropolitan Atlanta and sections of rural south Georgia. We close by reflecting on challenges of data collection and analysis of data on charitable food distribution.

Sources:

Feeding America. (2023). Charitable Food Assistance Participation in 2022. Available at <https://www.feedingamerica.org/sites/default/files/06/Charitable%20Food%20Assistance%20Participation%20in%202022.pdf>

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