

## SEWRPC Planning Report No. 58

### A REGIONAL FOOD SYSTEM PLAN FOR SOUTHEASTERN WISCONSIN

## Chapter 1

# Introduction

Note: The figures and map are at the end of the Chapter.

### 1.1 PURPOSE STATEMENT

The Southeastern Wisconsin Regional Planning Commission (SEWRPC) is the areawide advisory planning agency for the Southeastern Wisconsin Region, serving Kenosha, Milwaukee, Ozaukee, Racine, Walworth, Washington, and Waukesha Counties. SEWRPC is charged with “the function and duty of making and adopting a master plan for the physical development of the Region.” In accordance, the Commission prepared VISION 2050—the Region’s long-range land use and transportation plan—which recognizes the need to make healthy food accessible in all areas of the Region, acknowledges the relationship between the Region’s urban centers and agricultural resources, and recommends developing a regional food system. To support this recommendation, the Commission has prepared this Regional Food System Plan for Southeastern Wisconsin.

The food system is a complex web of activities and actors involved in the production, processing, aggregation, distribution, transport, consumption, and disposal of food products.<sup>1</sup> A sustainable food system supplies food security and adequate nutrition for all in a way that protects economic, social, and environmental interests for future generations.<sup>2</sup> This Plan will address the food system from a regional

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<sup>1</sup> Hahn Nguyen, *Sustainable Food Systems: Concept and Framework*, Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, 1 (hereinafter *Sustainable Food Systems*); American Planning Association, *APA Knowledgebase Collection: Food Systems*, accessed November 16, 2020, <https://www.planning.org/knowledgebase/food/>.

<sup>2</sup> Hahn Nguyen, *Sustainable Food Systems*, 1.

perspective and is aimed at identifying how to achieve several objectives concerned with ensuring accessible and affordable healthy and fresh food options for all residents, reducing economic and health disparities, supporting locally owned and sustainable farming operations, and preserving productive agricultural land and sensitive natural resources.

It is important to note that this Regional Food System Plan was prepared during the global COVID-19 pandemic. This was a time of unprecedented uncertainty, and the long-term impacts of the pandemic remain largely unknown. This plan documents the short-term impacts and responses to the pandemic in the Region to the extent possible. While the pandemic has presented many challenges, it has also provided an opportunity to evaluate and improve the Region's resiliency.

### **The Region and Need for Regional Planning**

Regional land use planning is necessary in a growing Region with seven counties and almost 150 cities, villages, and towns, where physical and economic issues transcend political boundaries. While the Region includes only 5 percent of Wisconsin's total area, it accounts for over one-third of the State's population, jobs, and wealth. Geographically, the Region is well-located for continued growth and development. The Region is bounded on the east by Lake Michigan, which provides a unique, substantial, and high-quality water supply; is an unparalleled recreation resource; and is an integral part of a major international transportation network. It is bounded on the south by the metropolitan region of northeastern Illinois and is bounded on the west and north by the fertile agricultural and desirable recreation areas found in the rest of Wisconsin. In addition, many of the most important industrial areas and heaviest population concentrations in the Midwest are within 250 miles of the Region. The Region and its counties are shown on Figure 1.1.

### **Building on Existing Initiatives and Assets**

This Plan will function as a tool for connecting stakeholders with organizations and government agencies that can help implement food system initiatives and connect residents with existing food system-related initiatives and programs within their communities. Appendix A provides a series of Asset Maps that show existing regional food system stakeholders and initiatives. Asset-based community development values small, grassroots, resident-driven approaches for learning and acting as agents for change-making, which can be supported by institutions and implementing agencies.

## Equity and Inclusion in the Planning Process

This Plan has been developed with equity and inclusion as guiding principles so that all residents of the Region can “participate, prosper, and reach their full potential” as stakeholders in the food system.<sup>3</sup> The importance and significance of residents’ lived experiences, input, and opinions has been valued throughout the planning process. Community members are resourceful and have strengths and assets that can contribute to growth when provided an opportunity to share. Community-driven problem solving can be useful because it draws upon local knowledge, needs, and assets, to build capacity and community leadership from within, providing a greater sense of community ownership over a solution.<sup>4</sup> While there have been initiatives related to increasing access and equity in our Region's food system, there is still a need for improved connectivity between stakeholders.

There is strong evidence of disparities in the Region between the white population and people of color in income, educational attainment, and poverty rates.<sup>5</sup> This is also true in terms of health equity. There are several social determinants of health, which are the conditions in the places where people live that affect a range of health risks and outcomes.<sup>6</sup> Food security is a social determinant of health, meaning residents that are food insecure are at a higher risk experiencing health issues and poor health outcomes.<sup>7</sup> For example, one study conducted by the Wisconsin Department of Health Services found that Black residents have worse overall health outcomes than white residents in the Region, including worse chronic disease outcomes, higher rates of mortality, higher rates of infant mortality, and an overall lessened sense of safety.<sup>8</sup> Many Black residents also live in areas of the Region that may have less access to fresh and healthy food. This Plan will serve as a tool for connecting stakeholders in the food system and as a resource providing workable solutions for addressing long-standing disparities in the Region.

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<sup>3</sup> *Ibid* (defining equity as “just and fair inclusion into a society in which all can participate, prosper, and reach their full potential.”).

<sup>4</sup> Lindsey Day-Farnsworth and Margaret Krome, eds., Chapter 12. *Community and Regional Food Systems Policy and Planning*, in “Good Food, Strong Communities: Promoting Social Justice through Local and Regional Food Systems” (University of Iowa Press, 2017), 212; Steve Ventura and Martin Bailkey, eds., Chapter 1. *Connections between Community Food Security and Food System Change*, in “Good Food, Strong Communities: Promoting Social Justice through Local and Regional Food Systems” (University of Iowa Press, 2017), 16 (“Community-driven change efforts are typically asset based; they identify problems and needs, then use assets and apply innovations to address these needs”).

<sup>5</sup> SEWRPC Memorandum Report No. 221, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition, *A Comparison of the Milwaukee Metropolitan Area to its Peers*, March 2020.

<sup>6</sup> “About Social Determinants of Health (SDOH),” *Centers for Disease Control and Prevention*, 2021, <https://www.cdc.gov/socialdeterminants/about.html>.

<sup>7</sup> “Social Determinants of Health Series: Food Insecurity and the Role of Hospitals,” *American Hospital Association*, 2021, <https://www.aha.org/ahahret-guides/2017-06-21-social-determinants-health-series-food-insecurity-and-role-hospitals>.

<sup>8</sup> Wisconsin Department of Health Services, *Healthiest Wisconsin 2020 Baseline and Health Disparities Report: Black Population* (PowerPoint Presentation, Wisconsin, January 2014).

## **Food Access**

A vital objective of this Plan is to guide improving food access throughout the Region. When looking at mapping compiled in 2019 by the U.S. Department of Agriculture, several areas within the Region were defined as low-income and low-access food deserts where many residents do not have access to a supermarket or grocery store within one mile.<sup>9</sup> These areas are located primarily in the Cities of Milwaukee, Racine, Kenosha, and Waukesha. The areas identified as food deserts in these cities increase substantially when looking at a 0.5-mile distance or incorporating lack of access to a private vehicle, particularly in Milwaukee. The areas identified as low-income and low-access food deserts also overlap with communities of color. Map 1.1 shows the overlaps of the Region's low-income and low-access food deserts with communities of color using the 0.5-mile measure. Food access is also an issue of importance in the rural portions of the Region. Although there are fewer low-income and low-access food deserts as defined by the USDA in these areas (access to a supermarket or grocery store within ten miles), food access can be an issue for residents that do not have reliable access to a vehicle, public transit, or live within safe walking distance of a store.

## **Agricultural and Natural Resources**

Other key objectives of this Plan, which are key recommendations of VISION 2050, are preserving productive agricultural land and preserving the Region's most important natural resources. Despite a significant loss in agricultural land in the Region over the past few decades, much of the total area of the Region remains in agricultural use, and agriculture remains an essential facet of the regional economy. While agriculture is essential to the Region's economy, it can also have a significant impact the environment, in both positive and negative ways. Water, soil, and air quality can all be negatively impacted by unsustainable agricultural practices; conversely, sustainable agriculture can create positive effects such as reducing flood risks and capturing greenhouse gases within soil and crops.<sup>10</sup> Proper management, planning, and use of productive agricultural land is essential to ensure environmental quality as well as quality of life for our rural communities. It is also essential for maintaining soil health, which is the capacity of the soil to function as vital living ecosystem that sustains plant, animal, and human life.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> U.S. Department of Agriculture National Agricultural Statistics Service.

<sup>10</sup> OECD, *Agriculture and the Environment: Better Policies to Improve the Environmental Performance of the Agriculture Sector*, OECD: Better Policies for Better Lives, accessed January 22, 2021, <https://www.oecd.org/agriculture/topics/agriculture-and-the-environment/>.

<sup>11</sup> U.S. Department of Agriculture Natural Resources Conservation Service.

## **Urban-Rural Link**

The Region balances both urban and rural interests. However, rather than balancing these interests in competition, both urban and rural stakeholders' long-term interests can create cooperative urban-rural links in the food system.<sup>12</sup> Urban agriculture is important for maintaining healthy ecosystems, creating jobs, improving food literacy, and increasing food security—but it rarely serves the entire community.<sup>13</sup> There is significant agricultural production taking place in rural communities, but much of the food being grown are commodities (e.g., corn, soy, wheat) and not going into the community for consumption.<sup>14</sup> Linking urban consumers with rural producers creates economic growth in both communities, provides better food access opportunities, allows better connectivity between stakeholders throughout the Region, and may help to support locally owned farms. A food system that is more “equitable, more geographically dispersed, diversified in production, and economically viable” will help both rural and urban communities in the Region.<sup>15</sup> This urban-rural dynamic will be explored throughout the Plan.

## **1.2 ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE**

The 30-member Regional Food System Plan Advisory Committee, named on the inside front cover of this report, guided the Plan's preparation. The Committee includes members appointed by the Regional Planning Commission from groups representing local and county governments; community organizations; farmers and organizations representing farmers; food distribution; finance and economic growth; and environmental conservation. The Commission's Environmental Justice Task Force (EJTF), named on the inside front cover of this report, monitored work on the Plan to ensure that environmental justice concerns were met as the Plan was prepared. In addition, Commission staff collaborated with interested individuals and organizations throughout the planning process as described in the Public Involvement and Outreach Section.

## **1.3 PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT AND OUTREACH**

This planning process included a robust public involvement and outreach strategy from the beginning. Public participation is a necessary and important part of government decision-making. Having people take

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<sup>12</sup> Oran B. Hesterman, PhD, *Fair Food: Growing a Healthy, Sustainable Food System for All* (PublicAffairs, 2011) (hereinafter *Fair Food*).

<sup>13</sup> Philip Ackerman-Leist, *Rebuilding the Foodshed: How to Create Local, Sustainable, and Secure Food Systems, The Community Resilience Guide Series* (Chelsea Green Publishing, 2013), 282 (noting that urban areas often “need what the rural communities can offer [the urban areas] in food”) (hereinafter *Rebuilding the Foodshed*).

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid* (noting that urban areas often “need what the rural communities can offer [the urban areas] in food”).

<sup>15</sup> Hesterman, *Fair Food*, 41.

part in its work can help to accomplish a number of positive things: 1) present opportunities to both provide and receive useful information, 2) explain issues and choices that are sometimes complex using non-technical language, 3) encourage residents to suggest ideas and make comments that can improve planning, 4) guide planning through advisory committees containing key representatives and topic experts, 5) create plans that are more likely to be carried out due to understanding and support, 6) expand knowledge so that participants are better equipped to act or to join in public debate, 7) give residents a voice while also meeting critical legal requirements, and 8) build meaningful partnerships and maintain key connections for success.

In recognition of the importance of public participation in the regional planning process, a Public Participation Plan has been developed that explains in detail the Commission's commitment to providing opportunities for public participation, how it will use the ideas and comments received, and how it is prepared to evaluate success and make improvements. All aspects of this Public Participation Plan were followed during the regional food system planning process. Figure 1.2 illustrates the process of public outreach and involvement throughout this planning process. Some of the public participation highlights follow.

### **Primary Organization Involvement**

Outreach with target populations over the years has led to an evolving list of 75+ organizations that serve as a formal distribution network for information about Commission planning activities. These organizations serve low-income areas; areas predominantly consisting of communities of color; people with disabilities; women's groups; veterans; seniors; and/or communities or neighborhoods where issues related to employment, transportation, land use, economic development, housing, and environmental deterioration relate directly to the Commission's planning efforts. Commission contacts with these groups are intentionally long-term, which is intended to generate lasting working relationships and familiarity with the Commission's work efforts. Information about the Regional Food System Plan was featured in contacts with the Primary Organizations during the two-year planning process.

### **Listening Tour**

SEWRPC has taken advantage of a unique opportunity to have a Fellow from Lead for America fill the role of lead planner for the Regional Food System Plan. In this capacity, the Fellow has conducted a "listening tour." The conversations that took place varied significantly depending on the interviewee and the context of their work but were all intended to help planning staff gain a better understanding of the current context

of the Region and to grow further connections within the community of stakeholders that already exists in the Region.

### **Web, Newsletter, & Email**

The web presence created for this plan helped to engage community members throughout the planning process. This online space was used to post fact sheets, information about the project, and surveys as discussed below. The Commission's quarterly newsletter, *Regional Planning News*, also served as a space to provide updates and information on the planning process, including plan progress and public input opportunities. Finally, an interested parties email listserv served as a tool for connecting with those interested in this project, for staying in touch throughout the planning process, and for providing notice of public input opportunities.

### **Public Meetings**

Traditionally, SEWRPC holds a series of public meetings in each of the Region's seven counties and often multiple meetings in the Region's more populous counties during crucial points in the planning process. These meeting series usually focus on presenting information critical to plan development, community visioning, soliciting ideas for plan recommendations, and presenting a preliminary draft plan for public comment. This model was followed while developing the Regional Food System Plan. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, some meetings occurred virtually. When it was safe to resume in-person public meetings, virtual options continued to increase public access and involvement in the planning process. Consistent with the Public Participation Plan for Regional Planning, staff provided broad notification of public meetings, including paid advertisements in newspapers serving communities of color and low-income communities. Advertisements were translated into non-English languages, as appropriate.

### **Public Meetings Hosted by Community Partners**

The Commission has identified nine community partners that represent or work closely with low-income communities, communities of color, or people with disabilities. The partners include Common Ground of Southeastern Wisconsin, Ethnic & Diverse Business Coalition, Hmong American Friendship Association, IndependenceFirst, Milwaukee Urban League, Renew Environmental Public Health Advocates, Inc., Southside Organizing Center, Urban Economic Development Association of Wisconsin, and Urban League of Racine and Kenosha. During this planning effort, the Commission staff worked with each of the community partners to host a parallel series of public meetings or other involvement opportunities aimed at gathering input from the communities that each partner represents to enhance and strengthen the

Commission's outreach to, and the level of public feedback received by the Commission from, these communities.

### **Focus Groups**

Focus groups provide helpful insight that can often be missed from standard surveys or large meetings. They provide an opportunity for people to express their specific views in detail, to listen to others, and to collectively develop ideas for solutions. Beyond its usefulness in guiding this planning process, focus groups on specific issues may lead to improved community networking and collaboration and may build trust in the planning process. Focus groups on topics including food access and food waste, consumer health and education, and agriculture and the environment were held during the planning process.

### **Surveys**

Surveys and polls, especially online, are great tools for including the community in the planning process. They can be useful as a convenient way for community members to provide feedback during the planning process, and for allowing space for community members to engage in storytelling. Online surveys, polls, and other activities were provided to the public during each public meeting series.

### **Site Visit Outreach**

This option was not feasible at the beginning of the planning process because of the COVID-19 pandemic but was conducted later in the planning process. Conducting site visit outreach to places like grocery stores, farmers markets, and food pantries allowed staff to connect with people in the community. This strategy provided opportunities to hear community input first-hand, make connections for further informational interviews, or just provide notice to the community regarding public input opportunities.

### **Asset Maps**

As touched upon in Section 1.1, Asset-Based Community Development (ABCD) focuses on the assets already within a community and works to mobilize individuals, associations, and institutions to come together and develop each other's strengths. This approach focuses on the assets that exist in the community and how we can better connect them and build on the assets of all those involved. Asset maps were developed for each of the seven counties in the Region (see Appendix A).

The goal of ABCD is to empower communities to utilize relationships to achieve their goals. This approach requires participation of residents and community members throughout all stages of planning and change. Through asset mapping, we can connect community stakeholders who can then learn through conversation.



The maps themselves are in a format that is easily accessible and simple to understand, so that community members and organizations can utilize them as tools for community change.

## **1.4 REPORT OUTLINE**

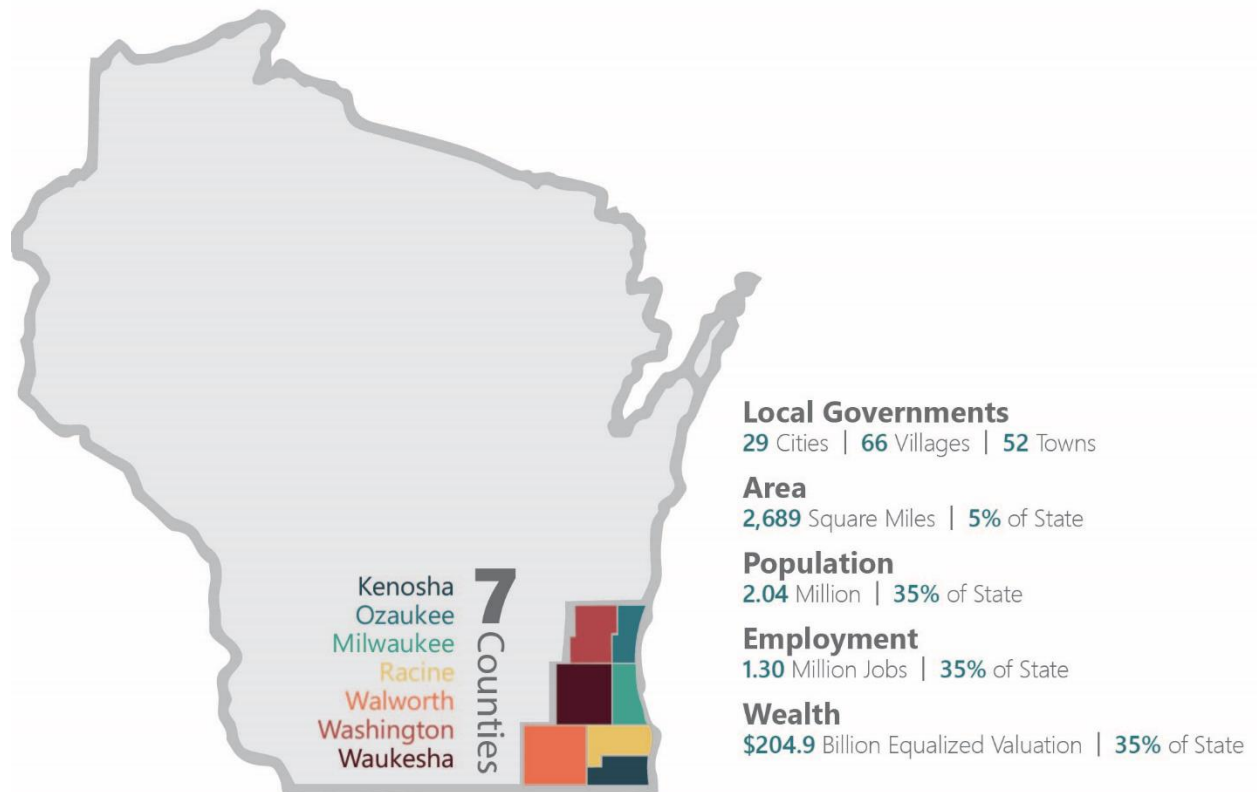
This report documents the Regional Food System Plan for Southeastern Wisconsin, along with the process used to develop the Plan. The Regional Food System Plan: (1) compiled detailed data affecting the food system within this Region, (2) identifies areas for growth and change within the food system, and (3) presents recommendations to effectively meet the current and probable future needs of all stakeholders within the Region's food system.

- **Chapter 1: Introduction**
  - Purpose Statement
  - Organizational Structure
  - Public Involvement & Outreach
  
- **Chapter 2: The Food System**
  - Introduction to The Food System
  - Agriculture
  - Food & Beverage Industry
  - Food Outlets & Retail
  - Institutions
  - Consumers
  - Food Waste
  
- **Chapter 3: Consumers**
  - Population
  - Economy
  - Health, Nutrition, and Health Equity
  - Education
  - Food Security & Access
  
- **Chapter 4: Environmental Stewardship**
  - Environmental Resources and Soil Health

- Agricultural Impacts
- Climate Change
  
- **Chapter 5: Recommended Plan**
  - Purpose Restatement
  - Objectives
  - Recommendations
  - Monitoring
  
- **Appendices**
  - Asset-Based Community Development Maps
  - Case Studies
  - Glossary

**Figure 1.1**  
**The Southeastern Wisconsin Region**

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**Figure 1.2**  
**Public Outreach and Involvement Process (to be prepared)**





## Map 1.1

### Overlap of Low-Income and Low-Access Food Deserts with Communities of Color

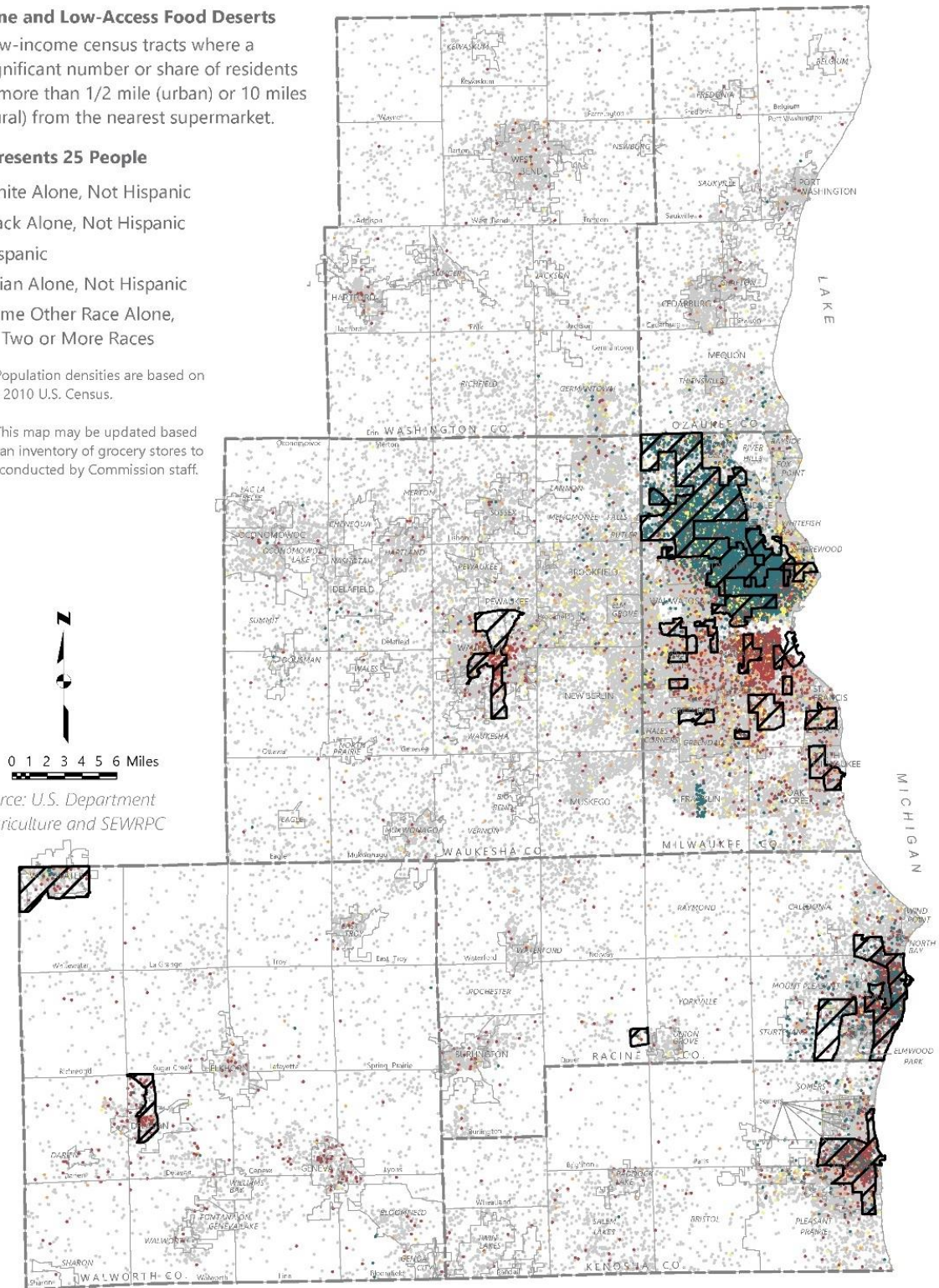
#### Low-Income and Low-Access Food Deserts

 Low-income census tracts where a significant number or share of residents is more than 1/2 mile (urban) or 10 miles (rural) from the nearest supermarket.

#### 1 Dot Represents 25 People

-  White Alone, Not Hispanic
-  Black Alone, Not Hispanic
-  Hispanic
-  Asian Alone, Not Hispanic
-  Some Other Race Alone, or Two or More Races

- Notes:
1. Population densities are based on the 2010 U.S. Census.
  2. This map may be updated based on an inventory of grocery stores to be conducted by Commission staff.



Source: U.S. Department of Agriculture and SEWRPC

PRELIMINARY DRAFT