

Building Resilience: Food Security and Community Support for Older Adults in Central Indiana

Unai Miguel Andres, Rachel Seymour





The Central Indiana Senior Fund is partnering with The Polis Center on the State of Aging in Central Indiana Report to achieve their vision of providing reliable, up-to-date information about trends and emerging issues related to the older adult population.

The Central Indiana Senior Fund is a fund of the Central Indiana Community Foundation.

State of Aging Website

<https://centralindiana.stateofaging.org/>

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Purpose: To explore food security challenges and the role of community support in promoting resilience among older adults.

How do community programs and social networks contribute to older adults' food security and resilience?

What barriers do older adults face, and how can community centers help?



Food Security vs Food Insecurity

- Food insecurity affects physical health, mental well-being, and social connection.
- 1 in 10 older adults in Central Indiana faces food insecurity.



Availability



Accessibility



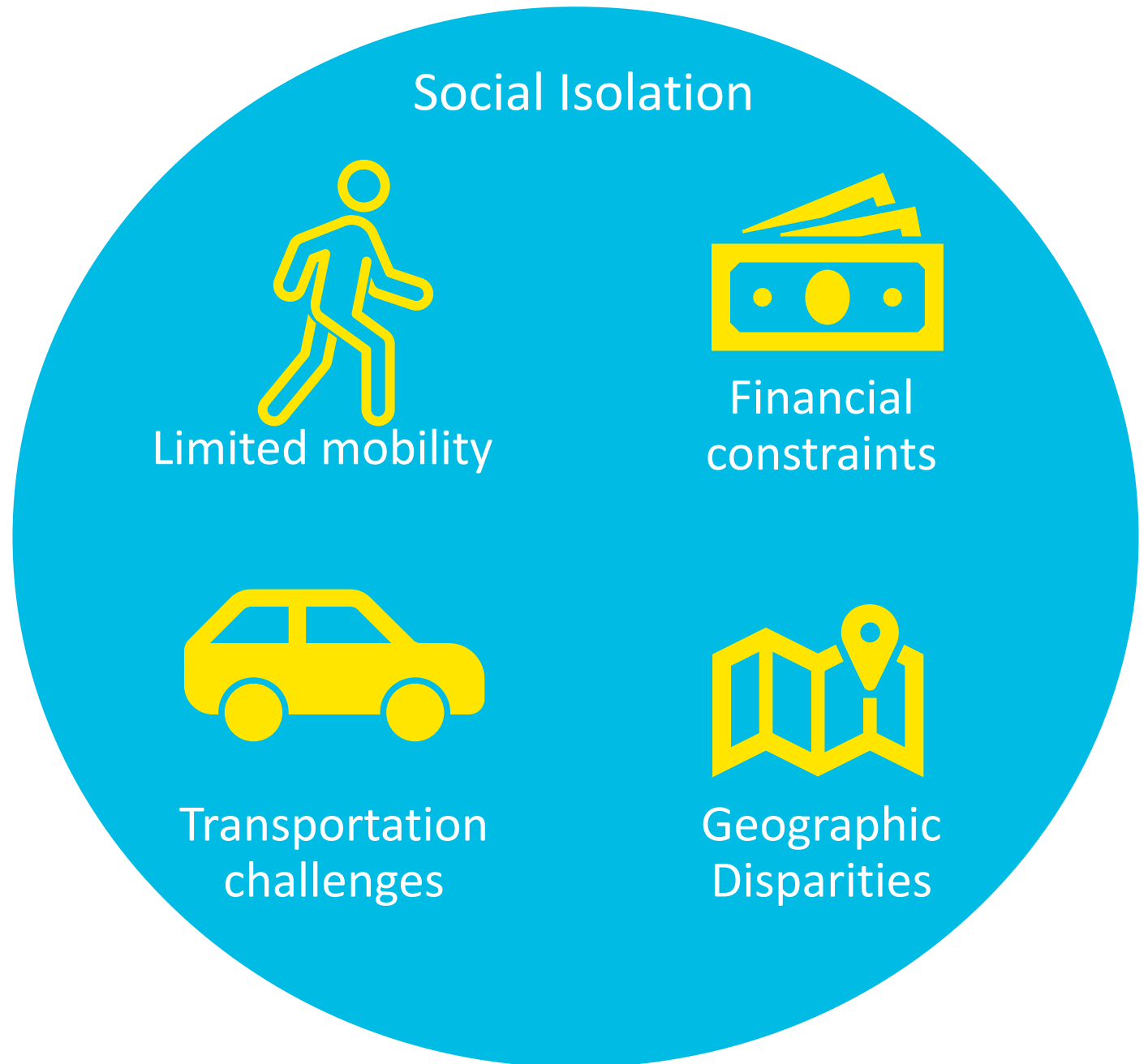
Utilization



Stability



Key Issues in Food Security for Older Adults



The Importance of Social Connections and Resilience

- Social Isolation and Food Insecurity:
 - Limited social networks and family support can restrict food access.
 - Isolation worsens mental health and compounds food insecurity.
- The Resilience Framework:
 - Focuses on how individuals and communities adapt to challenges.
 - Emphasizes social resilience: the capacity to use social networks and community resources to meet needs.
- Significance for Older Adults:
 - Highlights the role of community and informal support systems in overcoming barriers to food access.



Key Programs Supporting Food Security in Older Adults

- National Programs
 - Commodity Supplemental Food Program (CSFP)
 - Meals on Wheels
 - Senior Farmers' Market Nutrition Program
- Central Indiana Programs (CICOA)
 - Congregational Meals
 - Dine Dollars
 - Produce for Better Health
 - Home-Delivered Meals



Methodology Overview

- **Research Approach:** Mixed methods to capture both spatial and personal aspects of the food security environment of older adults.
 - **Spatial Analysis:** To identify older adults' specific resources and their geographic accessibility by Census Block Groups
 - **Qualitative Interviews:** To understand lived experiences and social support dynamics.



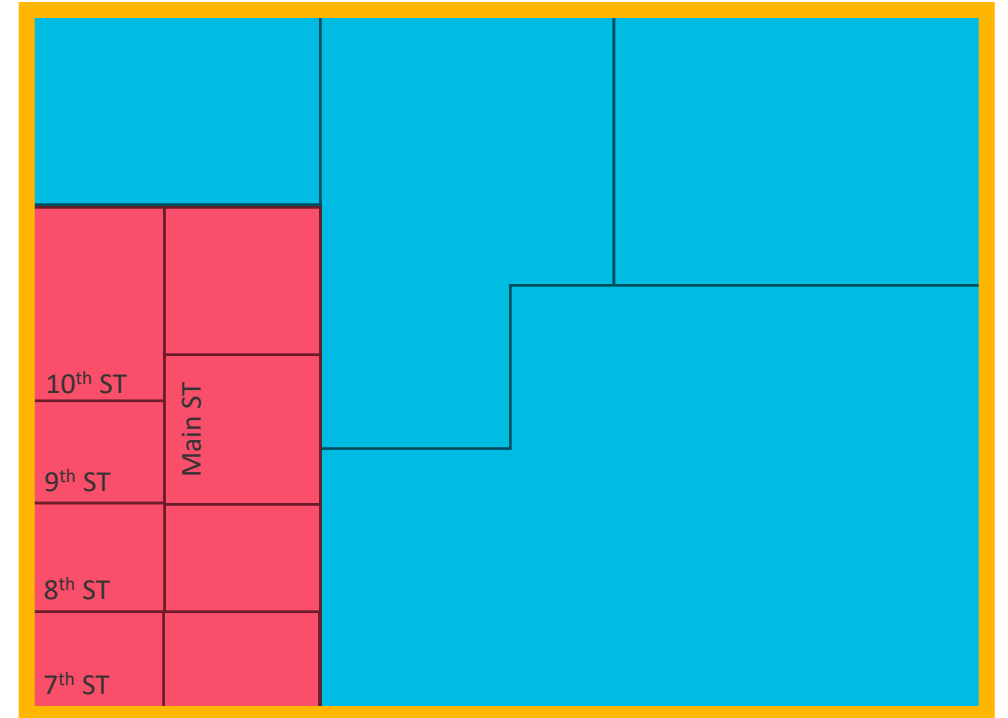
Spatial Analysis – Methodology

- **Data:**
 - Older Adults congregational meal sites.
 - Pantries just for Older Adults or with Older Adults specific shopping dates.



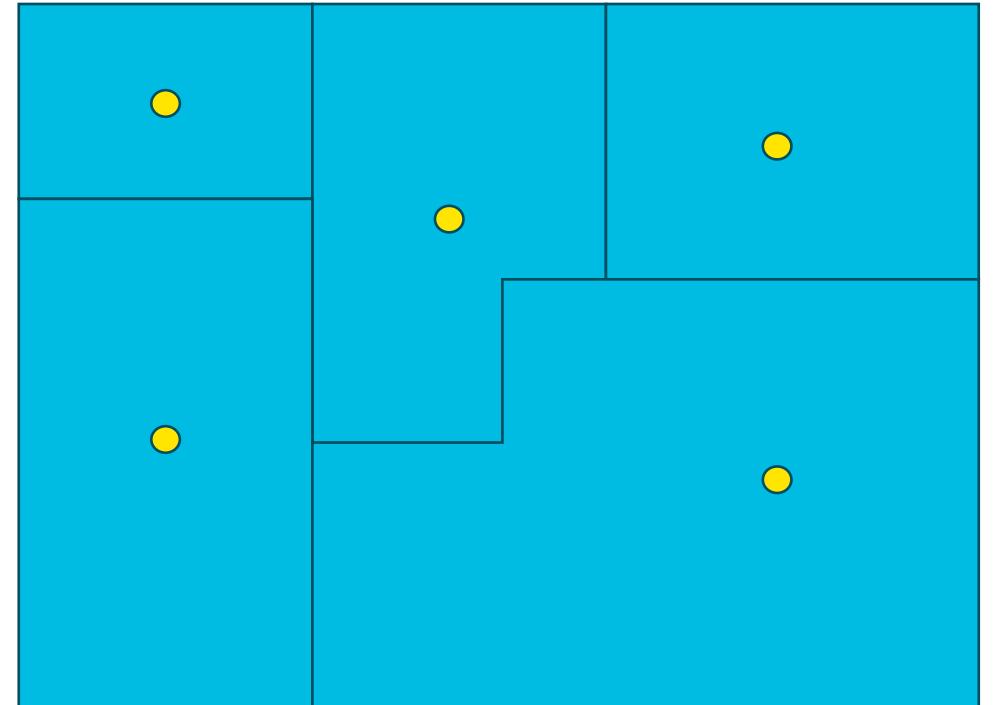
Spatial Analysis – Methodology

- Unit of analysis: 2024 Census Block Groups (BG)



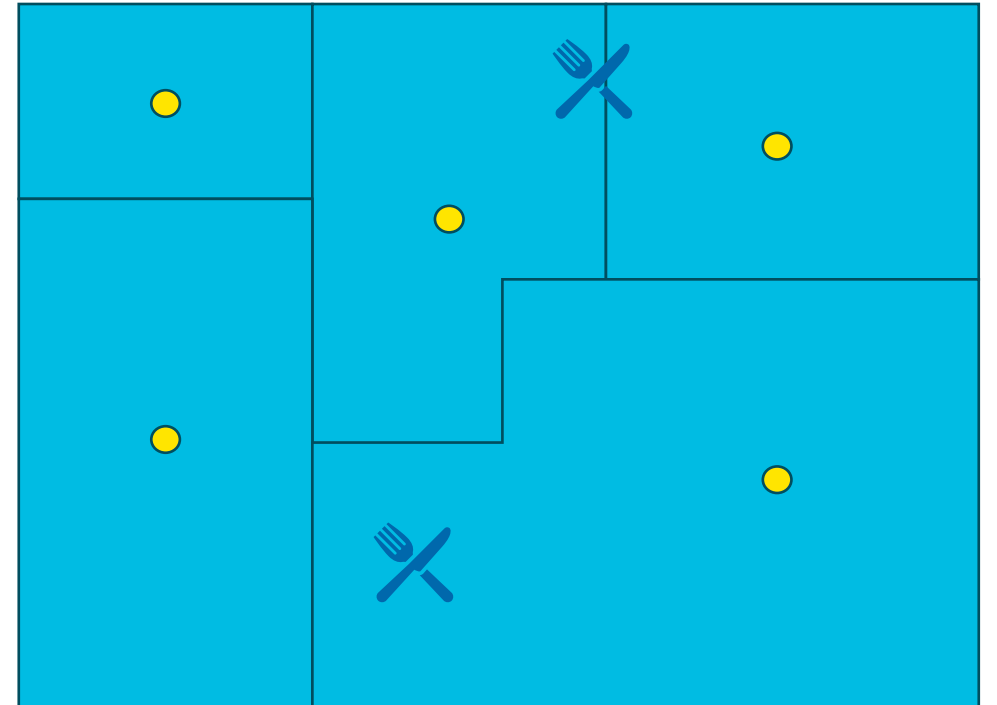
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- BG Centroids were identified.



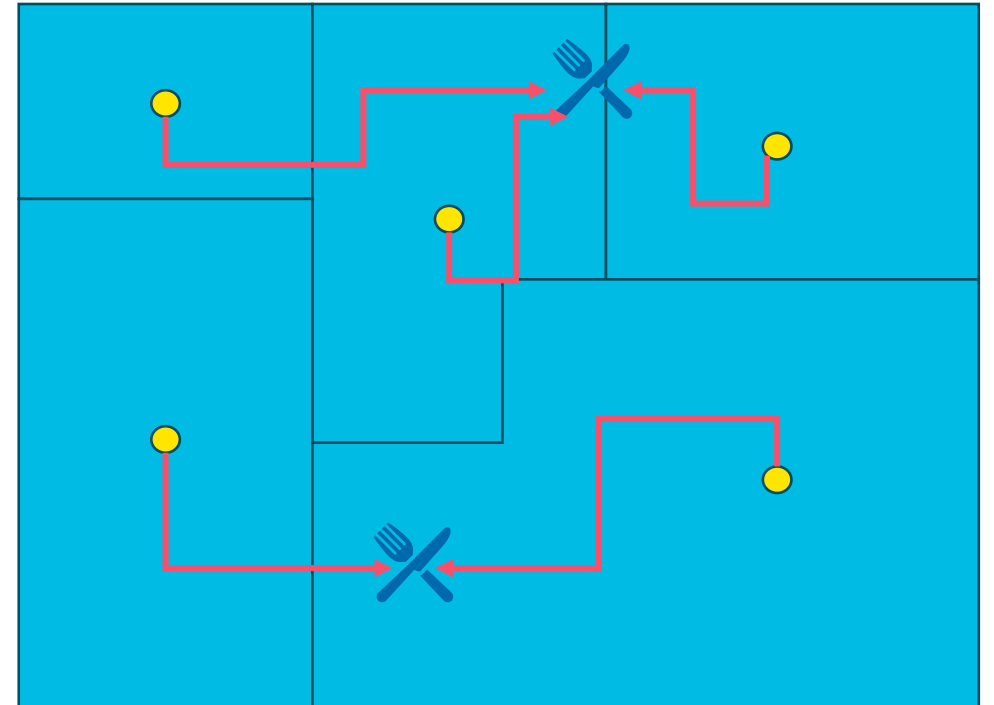
Spatial Analysis – Methodology

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- Meal sites & pantries were geocoded using ArcGIS Online.



Spatial Analysis – Methodology

- Unit of analysis: 2024 Census Block Groups (BG)
- BG Centroids were identified.
- Meal sites & pantries were geocoded using ArcGIS Online.
- Driving distance & time was calculated from centroids to sites.





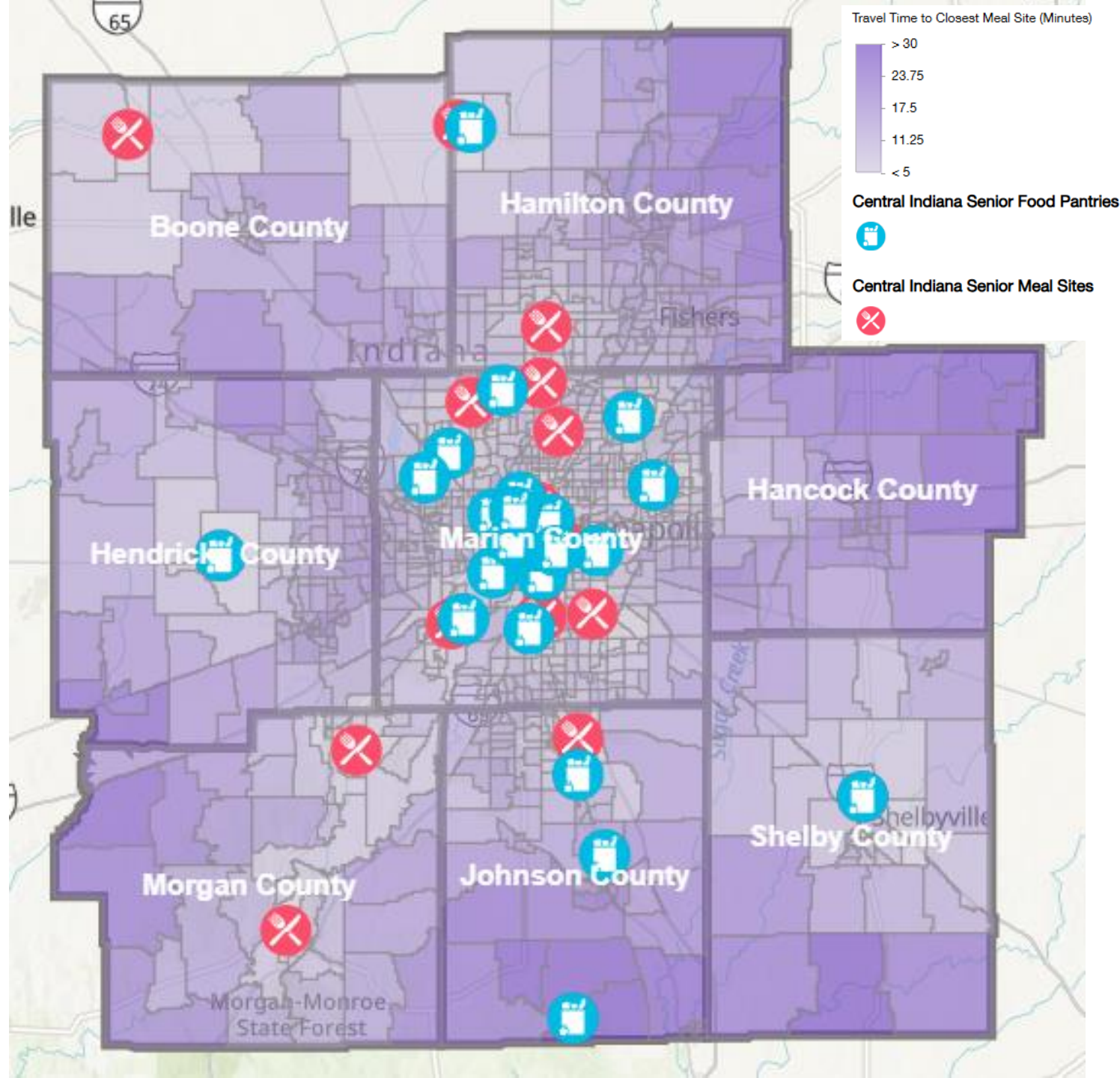
Spatial Analysis – Resource map

Senior Food Pantries: 26

- Average travel time: 12 minutes
- Average distance: 6.1 miles
- 24/26 monthly senior shopping days (2 to 3 hours)

Meal Sites: 23

- Average travel time: 11 minutes
- Average distance: 5.5 miles
- 19/23 serving meals from Monday to Friday





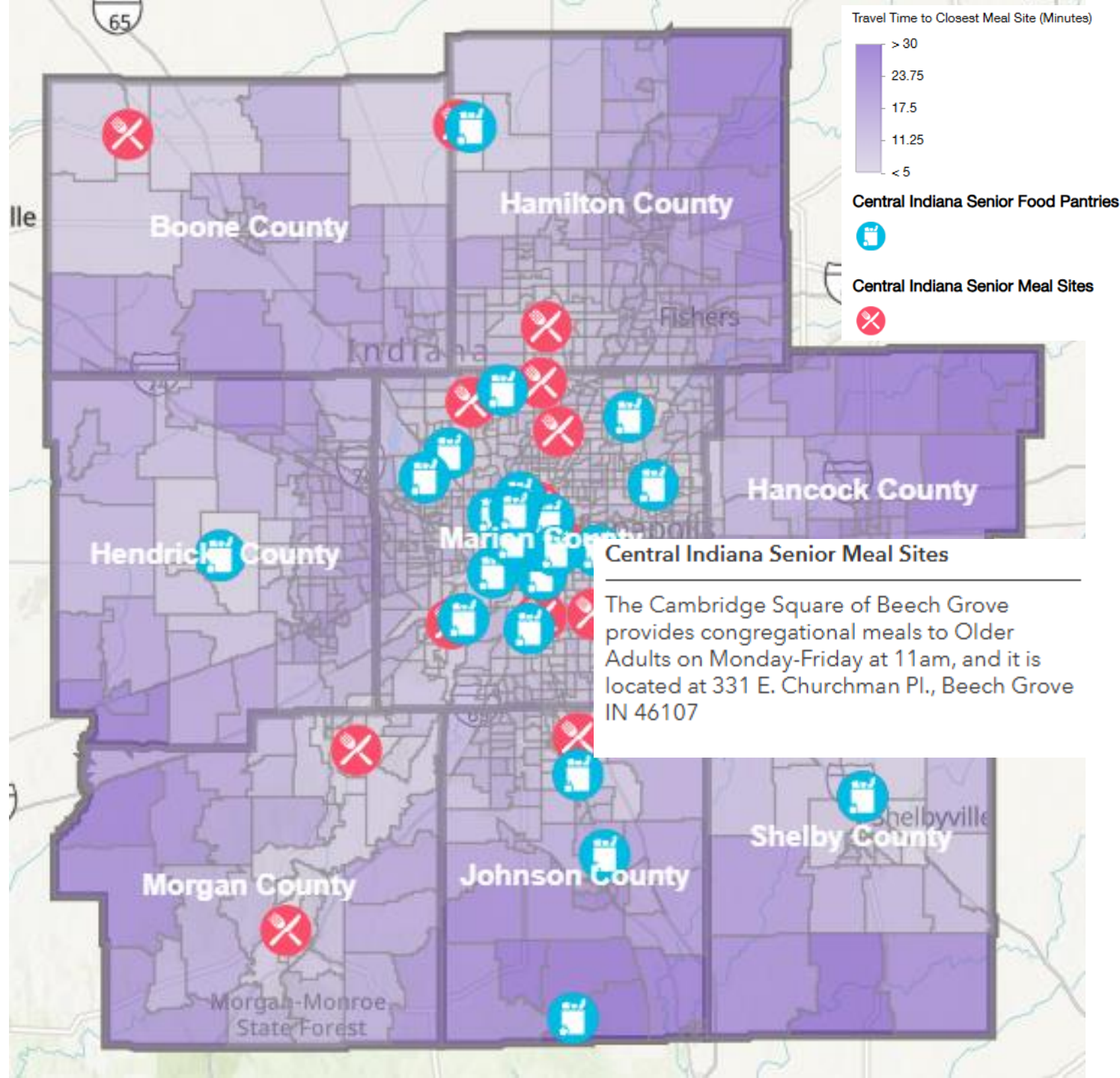
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Qualitative Interviews

- **Purpose:** To understand lived experiences of Older Adults in Central Indiana and their Caregivers in relationship with the food system.
- IU IRB Approved Study
- Semi-structure questions about their live experience.
- USDA Household Food Security 6-Question



Qualitative Interviews – To date

- 11 interviews with Older Adults
- Conducted over Oct 15-28, 2024
- Location: Rural Congregational Meal Site location
- Participant Demographics:
 - Majority female (82%)
 - 100% White
 - Varying degrees of social connectivity
 - 100% food secure



Qualitative Interviews - Results





Qualitative Interviews - Results

Community Centers as Essential “Third Spaces”:

- Provide food access, social connections, and support networks, reducing isolation

Social Resilience through Informal Networks:

- Older adults rely on peer support to manage food access challenges, demonstrating community-driven resilience

“If someone doesn’t show up and you’re not here for a couple of days and you didn’t say anything to anybody, then usually somebody will come check on ya.”



Qualitative Interviews - Results

Older adults use senior centers and congregational meal sites as a resource hub:

- Using both those made available through community programming, as well as those resources available through mutual aid, such as peer-support
- Program participation boosts resilience

“I haven’t driven since I had the stroke, so when I need transportation, [the public bus] helps. Today they’re going to pick me up from here [the Senior Center], and take me to Walmart, then pick me up from Walmart and take me home.”

Vignettes - Maggie

- Long-time member of the Senior Center.
- Maggie's presence at the center is known to many.
- In the middle of our conversation, a table mate asked, "Maggie, would your friend on social security eat my fruit? I don't like canned pineapple." "I'm not sure, but I'll take them anyway!" She said as she accepted the fruit.
- Although Maggie was not navigating food insecurity herself, she was helping a friend feel more food secure by navigating the food systems she knows and is comfortable with.



Vignettes - Mark & Lilly

- They are new to the Senior Center.
- While caregiving for a brother who is navigating complicated health concerns, Mark and Lily are attending these two meal sites in hopes of networking and socialization.
- The second meal site is farther away from their house, but it allows them the opportunity to gain a greater social network with people going through similar medical challenges to them.
- This opportunity wouldn't had been afforded to them if they had not networked through the congregate meal program.



Vignettes - Kelly

- Kelly recently moved into a four-generation household after having a stroke.
- She attends many types of local social groups. One of her social groups meets at the local super store to socialize and shop together. Together they share a meal after shopping because these meals are affordable, convenient, and the ability to meet up on a regular basis to socialize while running errands.
- She also regularly meets with her friends at the Senior Center. Because of her stroke, she is unable to drive, therefore she relies on public transportation resources to get around.
- The Senior Center helps connect her with resources like filling out government paperwork and paperwork with the VA.



Community Recommendations

- **Expand Access Points in Underserved Areas:** Add senior-focused food resources closer to rural and high-need communities.
- **Enhance Community Partnerships:** Collaborate with local organizations to extend reach and integrate food programs with social services.
- **Increase Transportation Support:** Support options like shuttle services to senior centers to bridge access gaps for seniors.



Policy Recommendations

- **Invest in Senior Center Programs:** Fund holistic initiatives that provide food security, social connection, and caregiver resources.
- **Simplify Access to Food Programs:** Make enrollment in food support programs more accessible, especially for culturally diverse and rural populations.



Limitations and Next Steps

- Limitations:
 - **Demographic Scope:** The sample was majority white, female, and food-secure, limiting the breadth of perspectives.
 - **Geographic Focus:** Concentrated on a rural senior center; future studies could include more urban and diverse senior populations.
- Next Steps:
 - **Expand Participant Diversity:** Include seniors from various backgrounds to understand diverse food security experiences.
 - **Broaden Geographic Analysis:** Examine additional rural and urban areas to identify other potential gaps in food access.
 - **Enhance Program Integration:** Investigate how different food programs can collaborate to create more comprehensive support networks for seniors.



Questions?



Thank you!

State of Aging Website

<https://centralindiana.stateofaging.org/>

Research Brief from Presentation

[Link coming soon!](#)

Panelists

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Caregiver of an Older
Adult

