

## Food Deserts and Farmers Markets

Written by Elisha Smith

Tuesday, 14 June 2011 11:45

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In the United States 803 counties are classified as "food deserts," where the average resident of the county lives 10 or more miles from a full-service grocery store. The Great Plains has the highest concentration of "food desert" counties, with 418, and 98 percent of those counties are rural.

Fortunately, USDA has made addressing the food desert challenge a priority for the 2011 Farmers Market Promotion Program. Proposals are due July 1, 2011, which is a tight timeline, but priority will be granted to projects that expand healthy food choices in food deserts.

Moreover, \$10 million in funding is available nationally for Farmers Market Promotion grants, which provide an excellent opportunity for market farmers, market gardeners and rural communities to recoup some of the costs of establishing a local farmers market, promoting an existing market or other direct-to-consumer food marketing as well as satisfying the need for fresh, nutritious food in places where people hunger for that access the most.

The Center for Rural Affairs has always tried to assist rural communities with this application process because farmers markets are good for rural communities. They bring farmers and consumers together to create a stronger local economy, opportunities for farmers and ranchers and they provide consumers with fresh, nutritious, affordable local food. We have been disappointed in the past because too few rural communities have applied for these grants and too few have been awarded grants. However, we are hopeful that prioritization of food deserts will shift that trend.

For more information and how to apply visit - <http://www.ams.usda.gov/AMSV1.0/FMPP> - or contact John Crabtree at

[johnc@cfra.org](mailto:johnc@cfra.org)

or

[402-687-2100](tel:402-687-2100)

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. The Food Desert Finder at  
<http://www.ers.usda.gov/data/fooddesert/fooddesert.html>  
will help you find food desert locations across the country.

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