

# The Rural Grocery Initiative: Sustaining Food Access in Rural America

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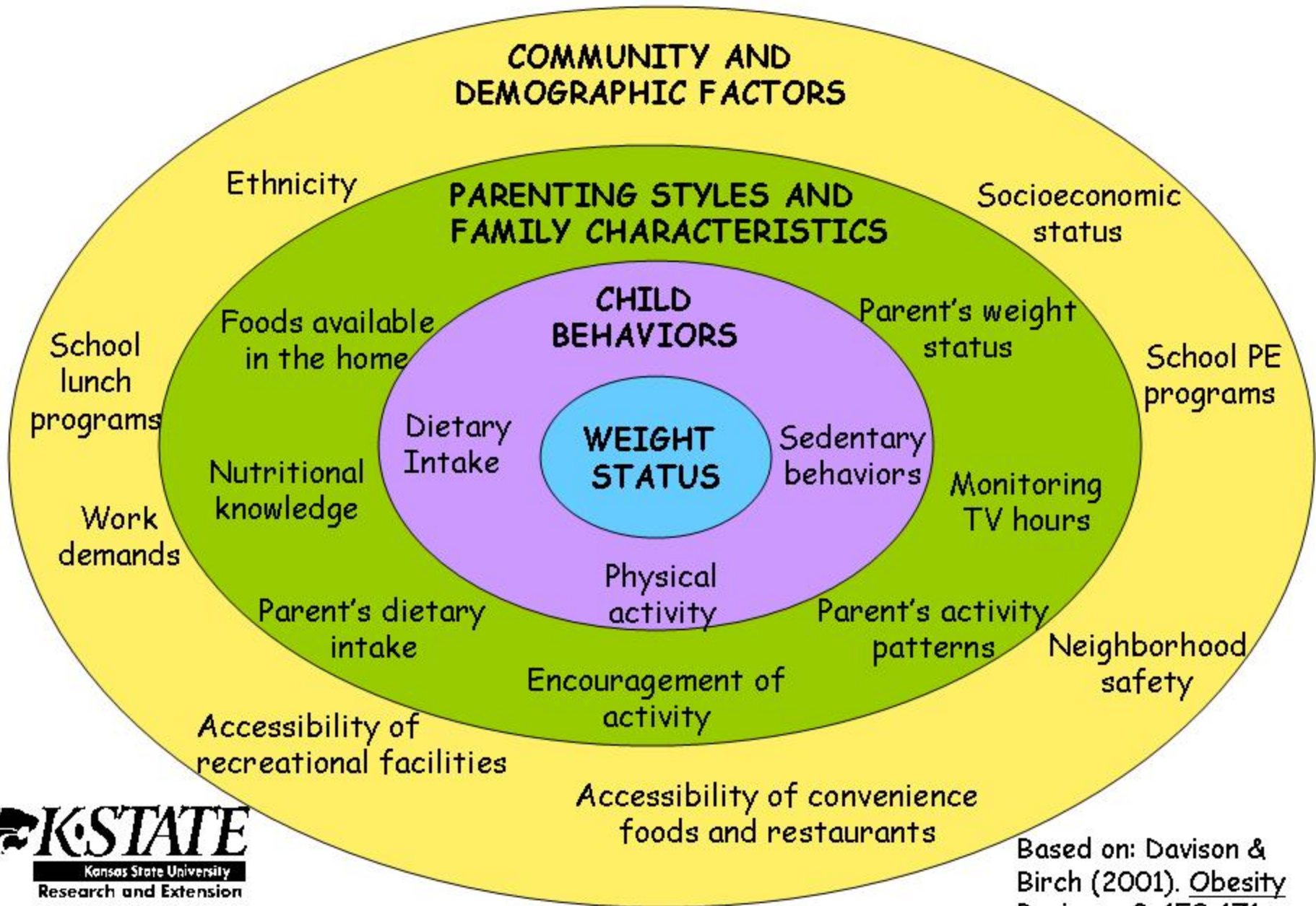
[www.ruralgrocery.org](http://www.ruralgrocery.org)

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# The Healthy Eating Goal

A healthy eating pattern limits intake of sodium, solid fats, added sugars, and refined grains and emphasizes nutrient-dense foods and beverages—vegetables, fruits, whole grains, fat-free or low-fat milk and milk products, seafood, lean meats and poultry, eggs, beans and peas, and nuts and seeds (Dietary Guidelines).

# Ecological Model of Childhood Overweight



# Food Access: Improving Nutrition's Availability

Many rural citizens live within food deserts

- “an area in U.S. with limited access to affordable and nutritious food,” (U.S. Farm Bill definition)
- “large and isolated geographic areas where mainstream grocery stores are absent or distant.”  
(<http://fooddesert.net/>)

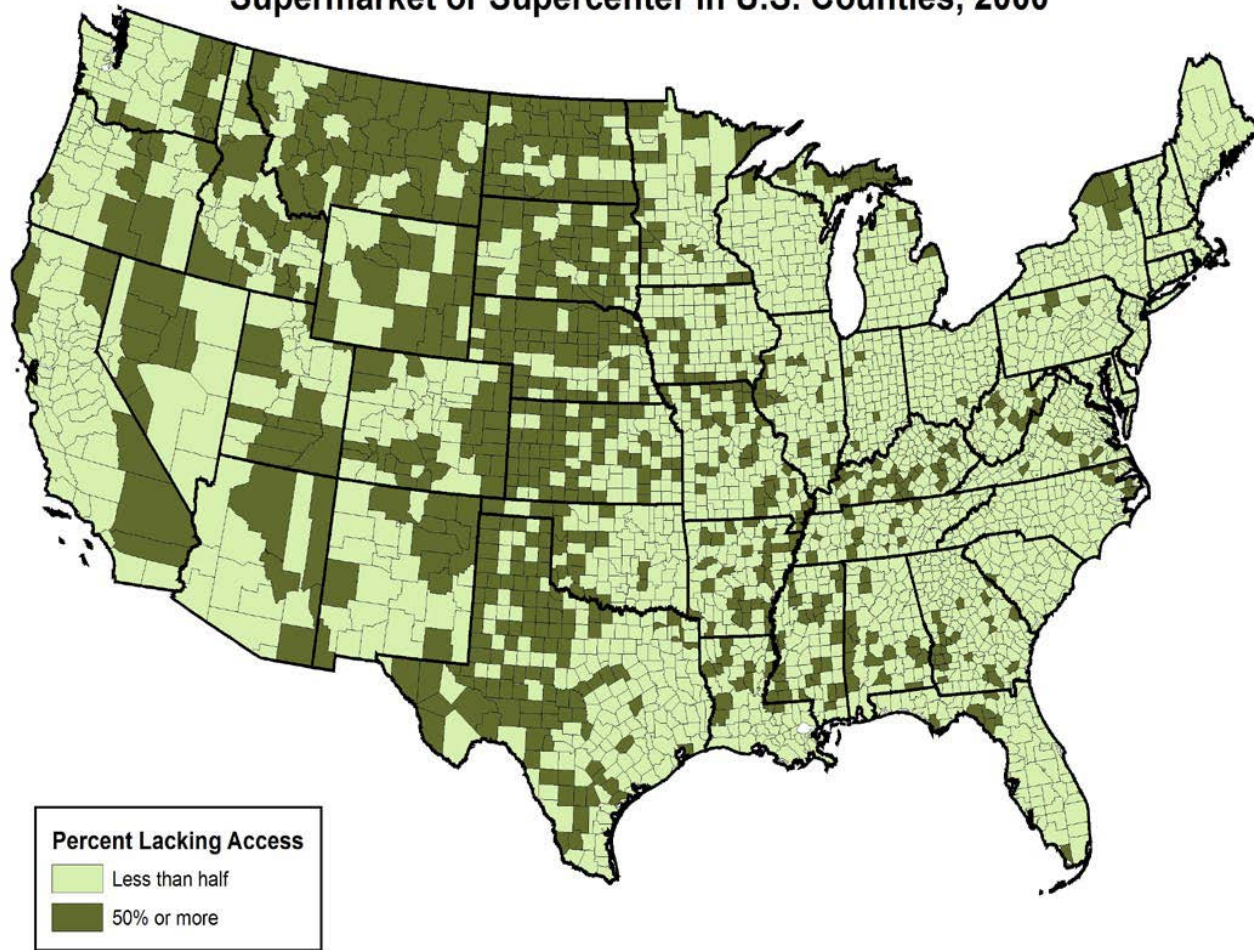


# Why Focus on Rural Grocery Stores

- Research confirms the higher prevalence of obesity in both adults and children living in rural areas
- The prevalence of grocery stores in non-metro counties is inversely associated with incidence of obesity. (Jilcott et al., 2011)
- Where they exist, rural grocery stores offer more healthy foods, at lower cost, than rural convenience stores. (Liese et al., 2007)
- Unfortunately, retail food development patterns in rural areas have eroded access to healthy foods. From 1997 to 2002, the U.S. experienced a 29 percent increase in the number of healthy food stores, but rural areas were largely left out of this growth

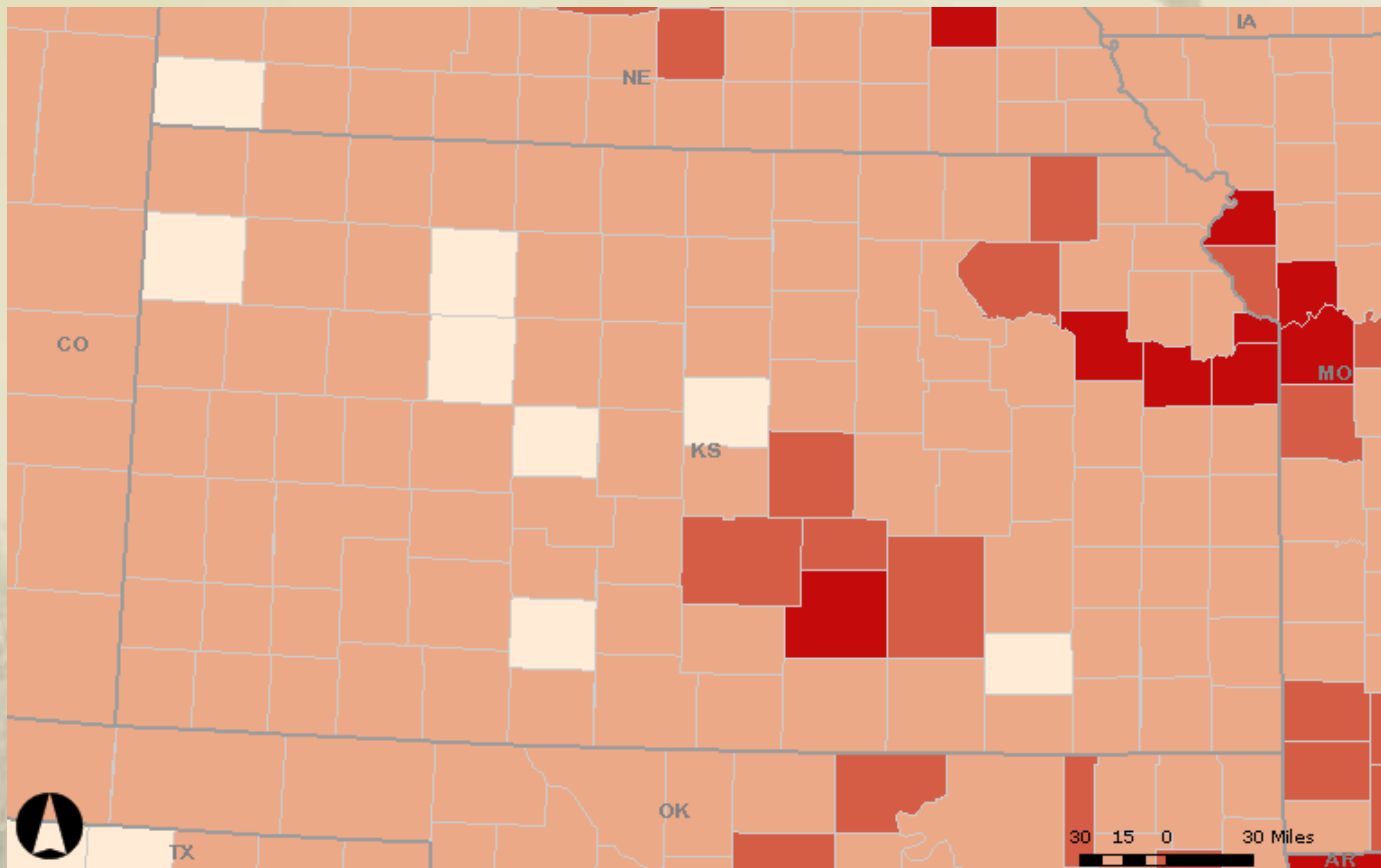
# Addressing Issues of Food Access: National Map of Food Deserts

**Figure 1. Percent Lacking Convenient Access to Supermarket or Supercenter in U.S. Counties, 2000**





# Availability of Kansas Grocery Stores County Data, 2008



# Our Rural Grocery Initiative Goals

- Identify challenges facing rural grocery stores (2,500 or less)
- Develop responses to those challenges
- Identify sustainable business models of grocer operation
- Develop information network for rural grocers

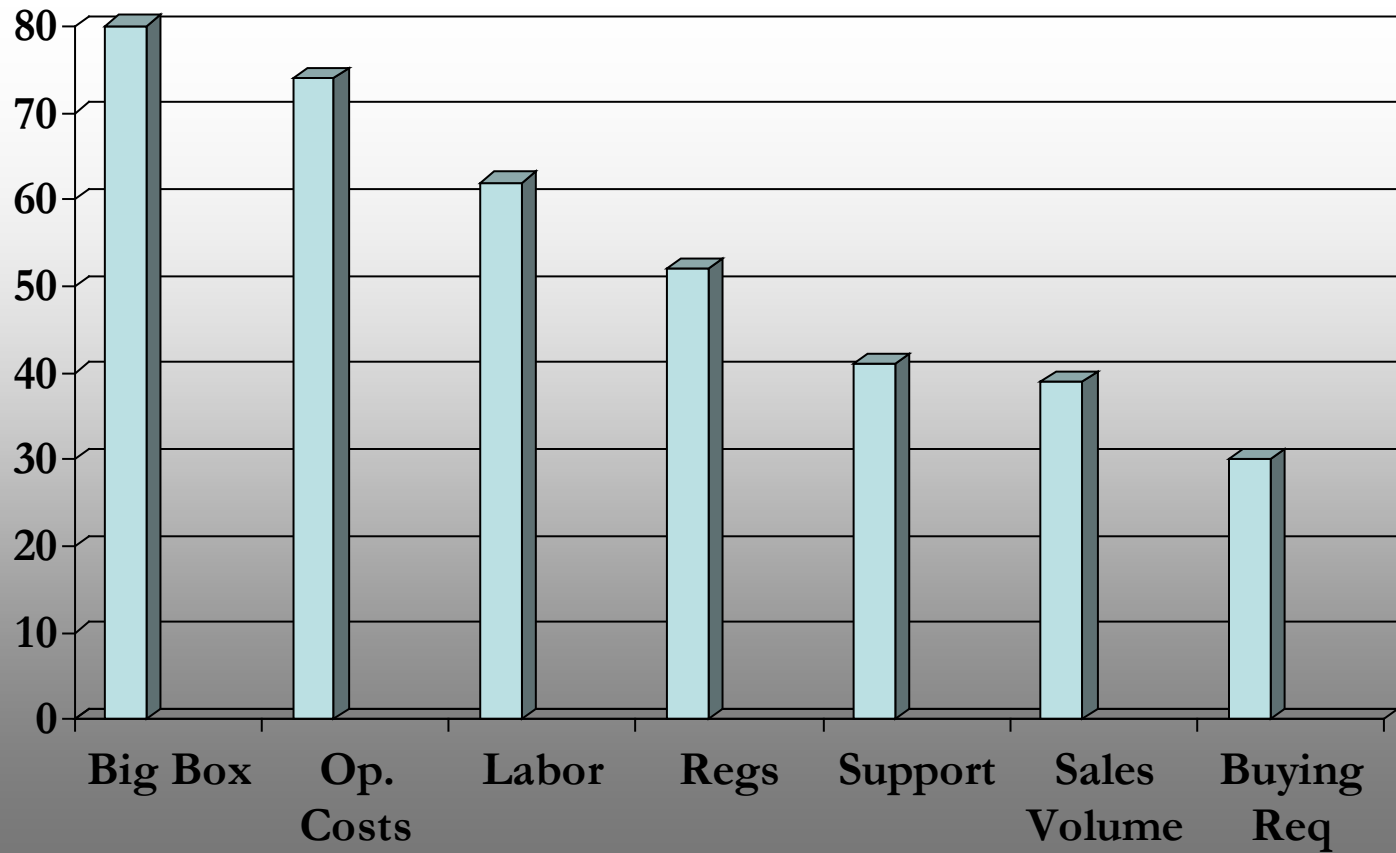


# Identifying Grocer Challenges

- Surveyed 213 KS rural grocers (86 responded)
  - View complete survey and results at:  
[www.ruralgrocery.org/survey](http://www.ruralgrocery.org/survey)
- Hosted 2008; 2010 Rural Grocer Summit (Over 300 participants)
- Interviewed numerous grocers
- From this data collection, we identified:
  - Challenges faced
  - Best practices



# Grocer Challenges



# Responding to Rural Grocer Challenges

1. Competing with big box stores
2. Coping with high energy costs
3. Meeting minimum buying requirements
4. Managing labor issues
5. Securing community support
6. Finding the right ownership model



## *Working to Save Our Rural Grocery Stores One Challenge at a Time*

### *Challenge 1: Competition with Big Box Chain Grocery Stores*

In the past twenty years, we have seen the dramatic rise in the number of big box stores, and it is difficult for rural grocers to compete with these stores. Customer surveys indicate that the top two reasons people select grocery stores are food price and variety of food choice – often the very strength of big box stores. At the same time, many rural citizens working in larger cities simply stop for groceries on their way out of town. Yet, local grocery stores are critical to our rural communities and we must strive to find ways to increase sales volume providing more dollars for community investment and rural community sustainability.



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#### *Fast Facts:*

- A 2005 study reveals big box grocery stores displace smaller, local food stores.
- Food prices may be up to 40% higher at rural stores, in part due to transportation costs.
- 42% of rural households have no access to public transportation.
- Incidences of diabetes, obesity, hypertension, and heart disease increase by a lack of access to healthy foods.

### *Solutions*

Surveys of rural grocery customers offer some possible solutions to pulling more people into local groceries. While the top two reasons people shop at particular stores are **price and food variety**, the next four

reasons people select stores offer rural grocers an opportunity to attract additional business. Rural customers reported important to their choice of grocery store were issues of: **customer service, store cleanliness,**

**convenient business hours, and supporting local business.** Each of these offer areas rural grocers can address. For additional information please visit our website at [www.ruralgrocery.org](http://www.ruralgrocery.org).

### *Kansas Best Practices:*

The goal of Little River's grocery store – the Garden of Eden – is to give complete, friendly, superior service. Owner David Nelson tells his customers, "This is your store. What would you like us to put on the shelves? Let us know what you need and we will get it. Let us carry your groceries and load your car."

# Challenge: Securing Community Support

## Best Practices:

- *The power of community support*
  - *Walsh, CO*
- *Processes of building community support*
  - *Community dialogue*
    - *Rural Grocery Dialogues*
    - *Community FEAST*
  - *Effective grocery store operations*
  - *“Buy Local” education*



# Challenge: Meeting Minimum Buying Requirement

## Best Practices:

- Identifying and facilitating grocery collaborations
- Facilitating food redistribution centers
- Looking for ways to increase food sales
- Mapping food distribution lines



# Challenge: Finding the Right Ownership Model

## Best Practices:

- *Community owned / Co-ops*
  - Gove, KS; Walsh, CO
- *Public / private partnerships*
  - St. Paul, KS
- *School-based enterprise*
  - Leeton, MO
- *Sole proprietorships*
  - Little River, KS; Jetmore, KS



# Web Resource for Rural Grocers

[www.ruralgrocery.org](http://www.ruralgrocery.org)

- Best practices
- Food suppliers / food networks
- Key research
- Inspirational stories / videos
- Rural grocery news
- Funding opportunities
- Rural Grocery Blog
  - <https://blogs.k-state.edu/ruralgrocery/>



Bush's Market in Solomon

# Conclusions

1. Rural grocery stores provide critical infrastructure for communities
2. Rural grocery stores provide healthy food options and are an important piece in the ecological model of child overweight
3. Community support is critical
4. Must think about broadly about the ecology of the food environment
5. More education and research is needed

# Thank You

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