

Addressing Food Insecurity and Food Apartheid

A report to the Milwaukee County Board

March 16, 2026



County Board Request

- In November 2025, the County Board approved File 25-705 declaring food apartheid a public health emergency in Milwaukee County and directed DHHS and the Office of Equity to do the following:
 - 1) Incorporate measures of food apartheid and related disparities into the County's racial equity budget tool.
 - 2) Collaborate with state, municipal and community partners to identify strategies to address food apartheid in Milwaukee County, starting with Metcalfe Park.
 - 3) Recommend options for addressing food apartheid in Milwaukee County.

Overview



Background



Current Impacts



Community Efforts



Proposed Strategies

Background and Definitions

- **FOOD INSECURITY:** inability to reliably access affordable, nutritious food.
- **FOOD APARTHEID:** structural outcomes from racist systems/policies (e.g., redlining, long-term disinvestment) denying neighborhoods fair access to healthy, affordable food.
- **SNAP/FOODSHARE CONTEXT:** Wisconsin FoodShare supports grocery & farmers' market purchases via EBT; Milwaukee County benefits administered by State's Milwaukee Enrollment Services (MILES) Unit.

Current State

- Federal changes: H.R.1 (One Big Beautiful Bill Act) to result in an estimated 20% SNAP reduction and expected to increase food insecurity.
- About 233,000 (about 680,000 in WI) people rely on FoodShare in Milwaukee County to buy groceries.
- SNAP Ed elimination (Dec 31, 2025) removed long-standing nutrition education funding (Hunger Task Force, FoodWise local administering agencies).
- Multiple grocery closures concentrated in higher-poverty neighborhoods intensifying food insecurity.

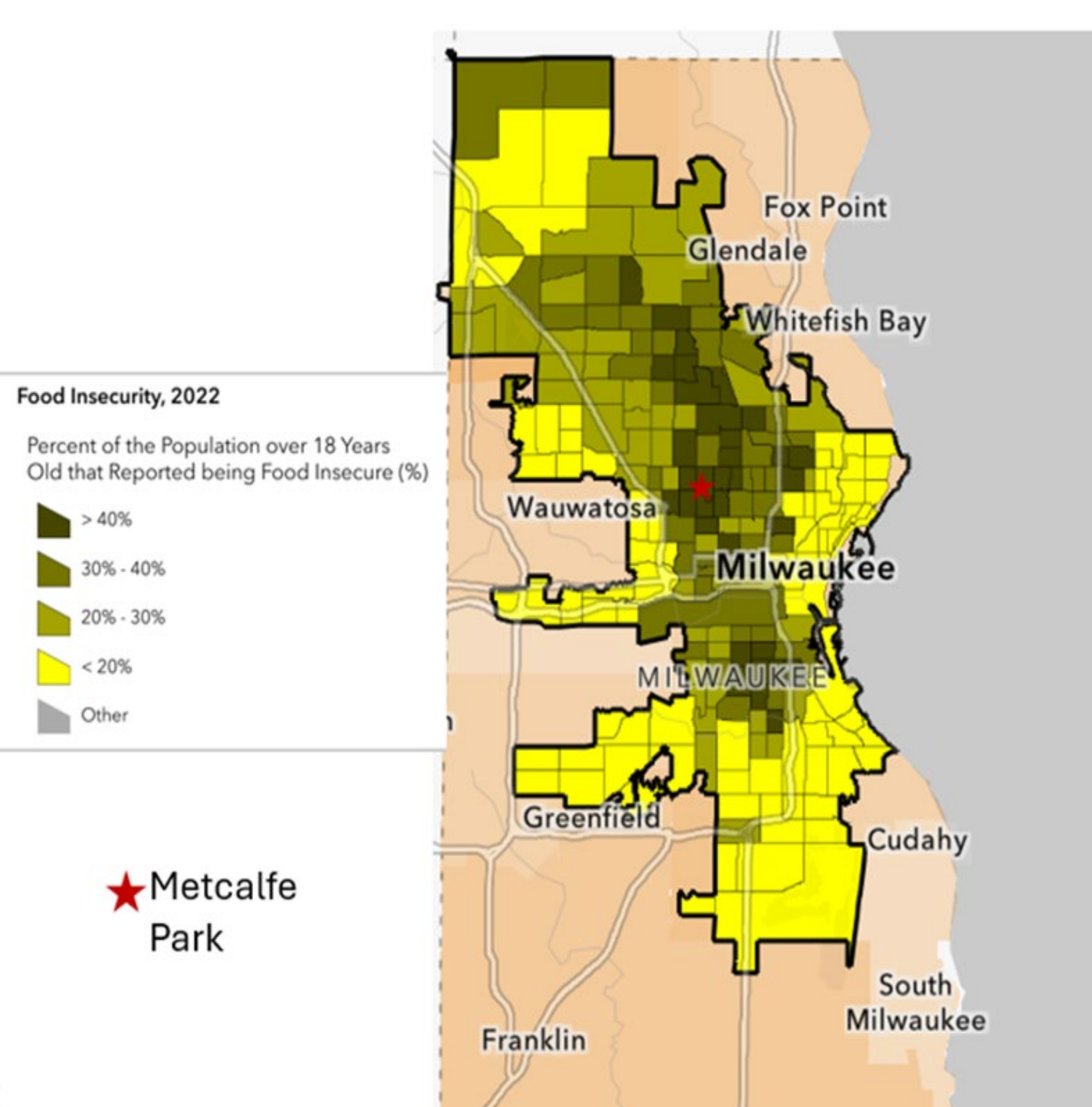
Milwaukee County Grocery Store Closures 2023-Present

- Total of 11 grocery store closures occurred since 2023
- 4 closures clustered near a 6-mile stretch of Silver Spring (see red circle)
- 3 of these 4 closures occurred within last few months
- Remaining closures spread out across county



Reported Food Insecurity

- Reported food insecurity across Milwaukee County partly caused by grocery store closures with higher concentrations on the northwest side.

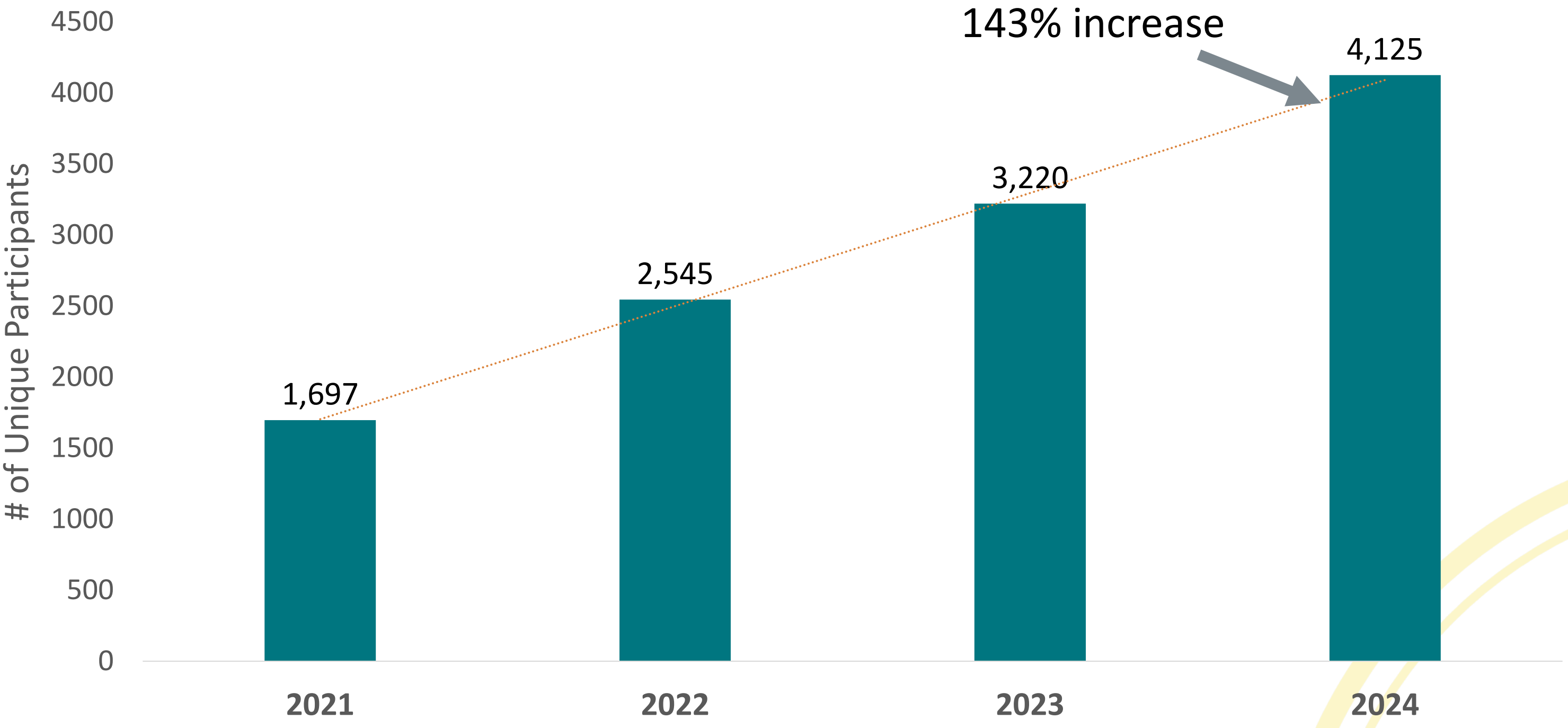


Key Community Efforts



- **Metcalfe Park Community Bridges (MPCB):** resident-led food access effort; pursuing Liberation Hub (food pantry + commercial kitchen) via CDIG/WEDC funding
- **Sherman Park Grocery Store:** Milwaukee's only full-service Black-owned grocer; offers a soul food deli; ~46% of Sherman Park residents rely on SNAP benefits for food access.
- **Hunger Task Force Mobile Market:** Paid grocery store (not a food pantry) selling groceries at 25% below store prices. It runs Monday–Friday with two daily stops—at senior centers and other locations including Meinecke Plaza (former Pick n Save site, in Metcalfe Park).
- **MKE Match** makes fresh, local foods more affordable by matching FoodShare benefits. Milwaukee County funded it with nearly \$1M in ARPA dollars and the County Board and County Executive included \$150,000 to continue the program in 2026.

Participation in MKE Match



Practices in Other Communities

- **The Food Trust (Philadelphia): Health Food Financing Handbook:**
 - Addresses challenges of underserved communities in accessing healthy and affordable groceries
 - Argues supermarkets improve public health outcomes by providing nutritious options and fuel local economies
 - Established Healthy Food Financing Initiative (HFFI) model — offers grants, loans, technical assistance for healthy retail
- **Detroit Food Policy Council:** Offers toolkits on innovative food system programs and established Grocery Store Coalition to increase capacity of grocers and equitable access.

Racial Equity Budgeting Tool (REBT)

- Office of Equity to incorporate food apartheid measures into the REBT
- Original question: "What is your department doing to dismantle barriers to diverse and inclusive communities, including meeting multilingual needs and other communication or accessibility barriers?"
- Updated question: "What is your department doing to dismantle barriers to diverse and inclusive communities, including meeting multilingual needs, accessibility barriers, food apartheid, financial empowerment or other factors that impact the stability and wellbeing of people in Milwaukee County?"

Proposed Strategies

1. Establish a Community-led Coalition



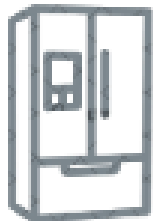
Support existing food access partners in coordinating and aligning efforts to ensure continued grassroots engagement.

2. Review Hunger Task Force Mobile Market Stops



Analyze utilization by mobile market location redesign schedule in response to community input/outreach with the goal of increasing users.

3. Explore Community-Managed Power Fridges



Explore the use of community fridges stocked with surplus food (that would otherwise be thrown away) as an option for high-need locations.

4. Pursue Foundation, State, and Federal Grants



Grant development (e.g, SBP, WEDC) to sustainably fund Market Match, potentially expand HTF mobile market, and support new initiatives.

5. Develop Healthy Food Financing Initiative (HFFI)



Work with City to explore re-establishing Fresh Food Access fund and pursue public-private seed funding.

6. Expand Health Corner Store Initiative



Support corner stores to stock fresh produce through incentives and technical assistance.

7. Support Urban Agriculture and Farm Connections



Expand urban farming and distribution to local markets and institutions.

8. Leverage Building Bridge Small Business



Grow food-related entrepreneurship within impacted communities and seek ways to add food access with existing businesses.

9. Utilize Zoning & Grocery Closure Notification



Advocate for standardized ordinances across municipalities within Milwaukee County to regulate grocery closure notification process and outreach.

Questions?