

## From plant to plate



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### Northern Colorado Regional Food System Assessment

[www.larimer.org/foodassessment/](http://www.larimer.org/foodassessment/)

# Food Security and Access in Northern Colorado

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Food security is a complex issue: limited resource households, distance to food markets and other barriers to securing adequate, safe and nutritious foods all combine to create a food landscape that may not be conducive to good health in our communities. Recent data from the Northern Colorado region suggest there is increasing need for food assistance from government, community and school programs. Data on food assistance, food stamps outlays, and reduced/free school lunch eligibility are consistent in illustrating increased need for programs to mitigate food insecurity during this economic downturn. Community gardens and efforts to “map” food assets are explored as new approaches to improve access to raw foods and appropriate food market outlets for those who might otherwise have their dietary choices constrained by what is readily available.

Food security and access have been of concern to those who work on agriculture, food and health policy for many years, but only recently have food security issues become part of the broader public health debate. Specifically, in an economically challenging era, with increased food prices, there is some concern that diet-related poverty and support programs will be insufficient to meet community needs. USDA defines food insecurity as “a household-level economic and social condition of limited or uncertain access to adequate food.” One of the long-term community strategies to address food security is food assistance through various governmental, non-profit and faith-based programs.

There are many measures of food insecurity and responses to perceived needs; within the scope of this fact sheet we will present some overview data on emergency food assistance, cash benefits to those in need, and school meal programs. Further study is necessary to understand the geographic location of the food insecure within the northern Colorado counties (see the LiveWell Longmont study as an example), and the demographic profiles of those in need. The tables below present recent emergency food assistance data for the region.

## **Changes in Emergency Food Assistance from 2007 to 2010**

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### **Food Bank for Larimer County**

	<b>2007</b>	<b>2010</b>	<b>% Change</b>
Population of area served	251,494	292,825	16%
Population at poverty line or below	22,600	33,125	47%
Annual # of clients served	21,384	29,900	40%
Total # of clients served, per capita	9%	10%	20%
Total # of agencies served	68	132	94%
Pounds of food distributed	4,739,805	7,350,818	55%
Fresh produce received	889,341	527,383	-41%
Total # of local food donors	250	311	24%

### **Weld Food Bank**

	<b>2007</b>	<b>2010</b>	<b>% Change</b>
Population of area served	180,936	249,775	38%
Population at poverty line or below	22,019	29,374	33%
Annual # of clients served	20,500	22,500	10%
Total # of clients served, per capita	11%	9%	-20%
Total # of agencies served	115	116	1%
Pounds of food distributed	5,524,639	8,059,910	46%
Fresh produce received	697,751	1,179,405	69%
Total # of local food donors	219	147	-33%

## Community Food Share [Boulder]

	2007	2010	% Change
Population of area served	329,465	348,019	6%
Population at poverty line or below	28,406	31,977	13%
Annual # of clients served	19,300	33,000	71%
Total # of clients served, per capita	6%	9%	62%
Total # of agencies served	86	60	-30%
Pounds of food distributed	3,704,757	6,456,642	74%
Fresh produce received	681,951	181,768	-73%
Total # of local food donors	90	89	-1%

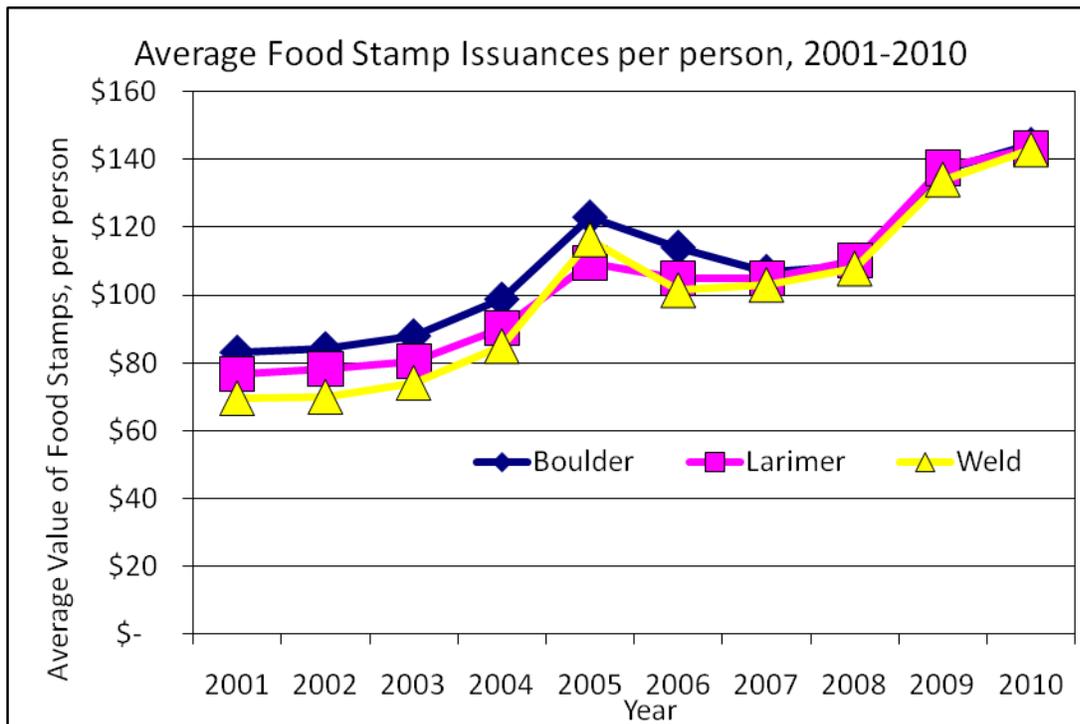
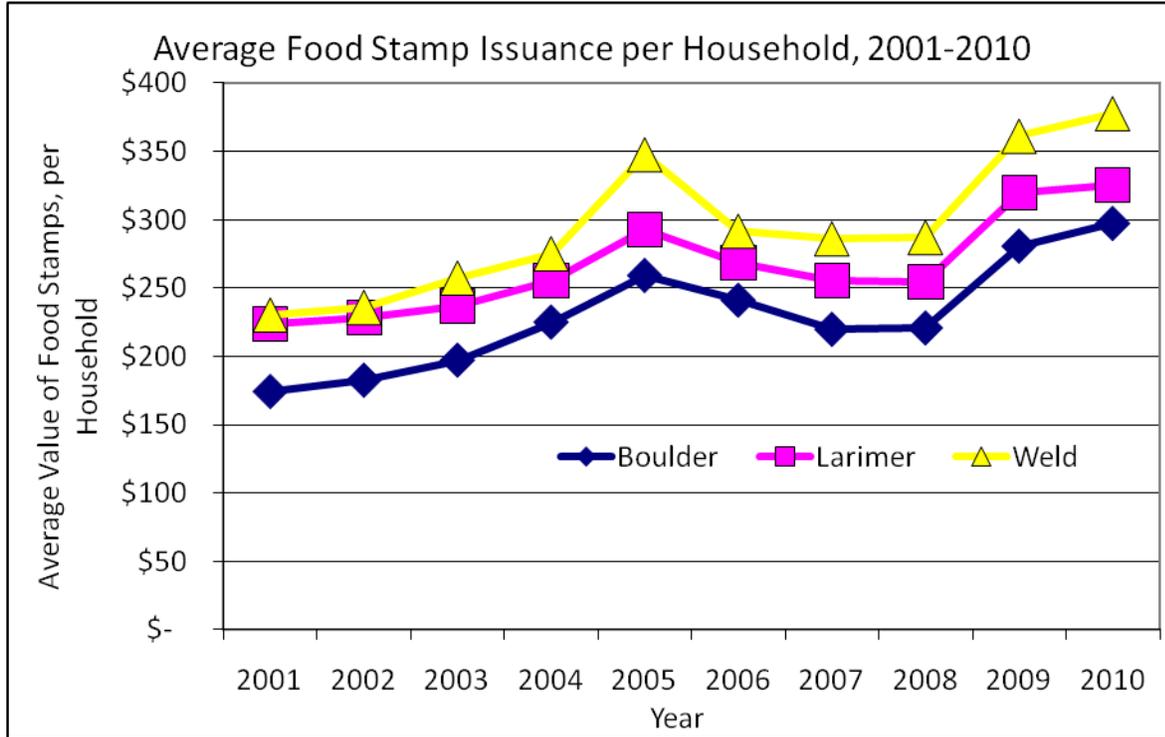
### Findings

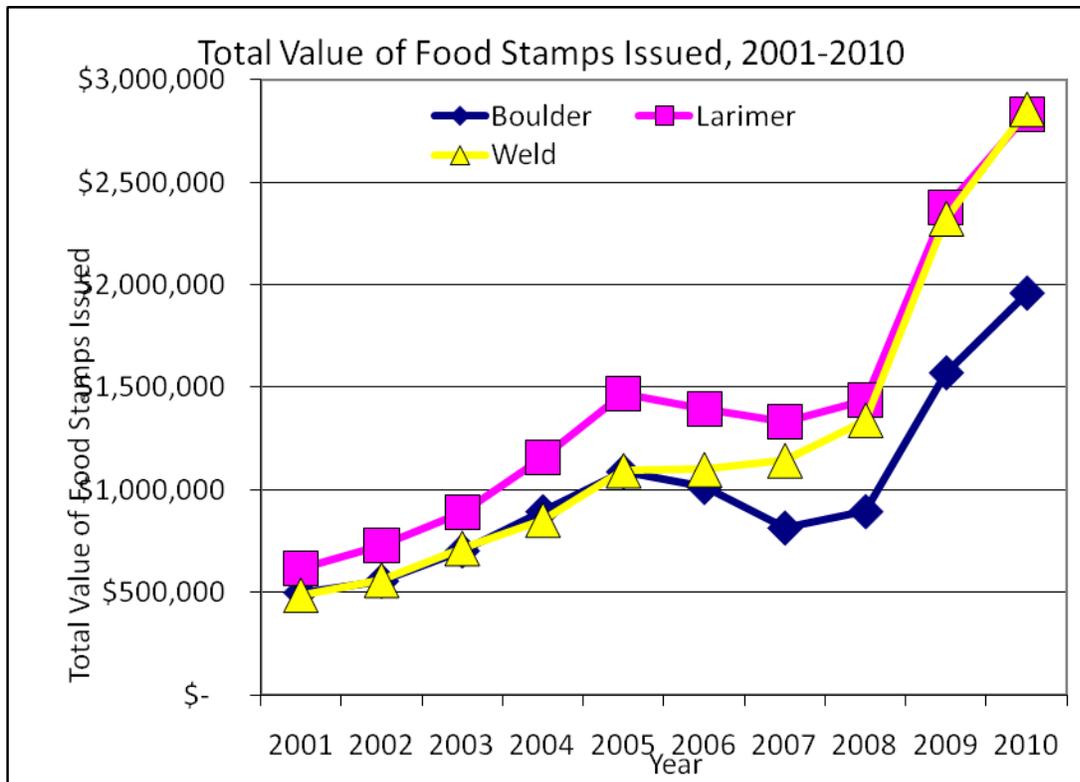
- ❖ Although population growth could explain some of the growth in clients served, the number of clients served has increased faster than the population, except in Weld county.
- ❖ Larimer county saw the greatest increase in population at or below the federal poverty level (47% increase over 4 years), compared to 33% in Weld and 13% in Boulder.
- ❖ The number of agencies served by the Food Bank for Larimer County has nearly doubled, meaning it is playing an even greater role in distributing food to clients in need.
- ❖ Growth in pounds of food distributed is still faster than growth in clients served, but only Weld has seen an increase in fresh produce it receives.
- ❖ Community garden access may be another source for fresh produce donations, and will be discussed later in this paper.

### Food Stamp Usage and Trends

The policy response to food insecurity has historically been focused on food stamp programs, school meal programs, WIC and the Child and Adult Care Food Programs. As of October 2008, the new federal food stamp program was renamed SNAP (Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program). Similar to the food assistance trends above, the demand for, and usage of, food stamp assistance has grown significantly over the past few years in the region.

## Changes in Food Stamp Issuance from 2001 to 2010





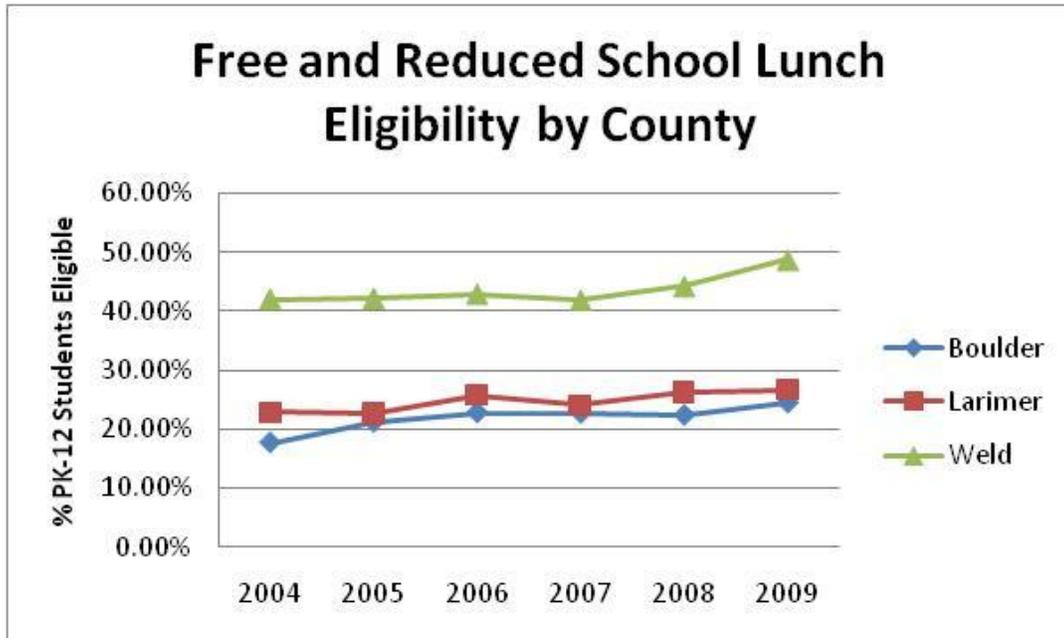
- ❖ 2010 food stamp outlays in the region have almost doubled since their previous high in 2005, and almost tripled from their lows in 2007
- ❖ Average food stamp benefits have doubled from \$77 per person in 2001 to \$143 per person in 2010, and have increased by 39% since 2007
- ❖ Weld county had the lowest average number of clients in the region until 2009, when the number reached nearly 20,000 in December 2009 (at this time Boulder had 13,000 and Larimer had 19,000)
- ❖ From 2007-2010, the number of clients receiving food stamps increased as follows:  
Larimer – 63%                      Boulder – 78%                      Weld – 89%

## Resources for Food Access: School Meal Programs

The National School Lunch Program (NSLP) is a federally assisted meal program operating in public and nonprofit private schools and residential child care institutions. It provides nutritionally balanced, low-cost or free lunches to children each school day. The program was established under the National School Lunch Act, signed by President Harry Truman in 1946. Usage of the program is yet another indicator of potential food security challenges, particularly in the context of youth and their dietary outcomes. The data from our region show:

- ❖ The total percentage of students eligible for free or reduced price (F&R) school lunches has grown much more rapidly than growth in the total student population. For example, across Boulder county school districts, the number of students increased by 11% while those eligible for F&R lunches grew by 54% (from 2004 to 2009).

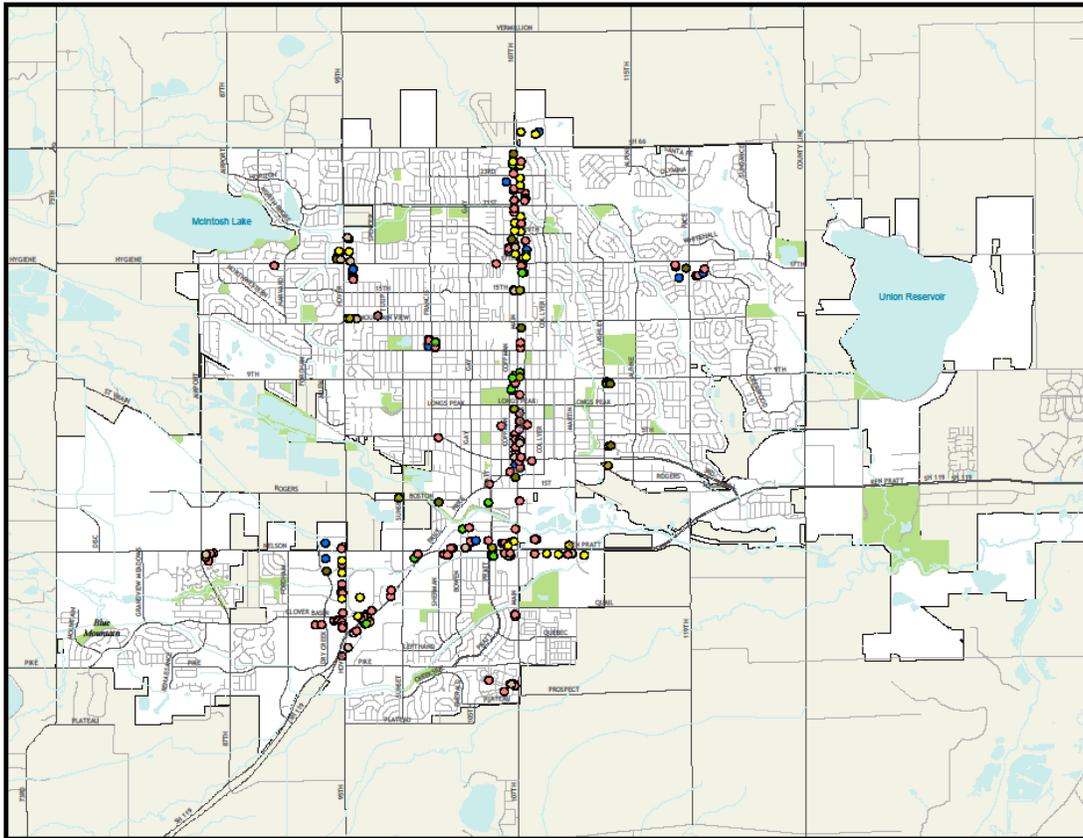
- ❖ Although Weld county had the smallest 2009 student population at 36,754, it had the largest number eligible for F&R lunches at 17,909 (nearly 49% of the pre-K through high school student population).
- ❖ Although Boulder and Weld both saw increases of 12% in the number of F&R eligible students from 2008-2009; Larimer county saw an increase of only 3%.



### Access to Food: A Closer Look at Longmont

LiveWell Colorado’s community investment strategy funds community coalitions works on healthy eating and active living strategies at the local level. In 2010, LiveWell Colorado awarded \$3.7 million in funding to 22 communities across the state. LiveWell Longmont started in Fall 2008 to address the city’s food security issues.

One of the first steps the community took was to assess how distance and transportation barriers may affect purchases and consumptions of fresh produce. In their analysis, they both mapped food system “assets”, delineating between types of food and beverage outlets (below) and, then, because there were clearly dense and sparse areas of their community, used a survey to determine if distance was a barrier to residents’ food choices.



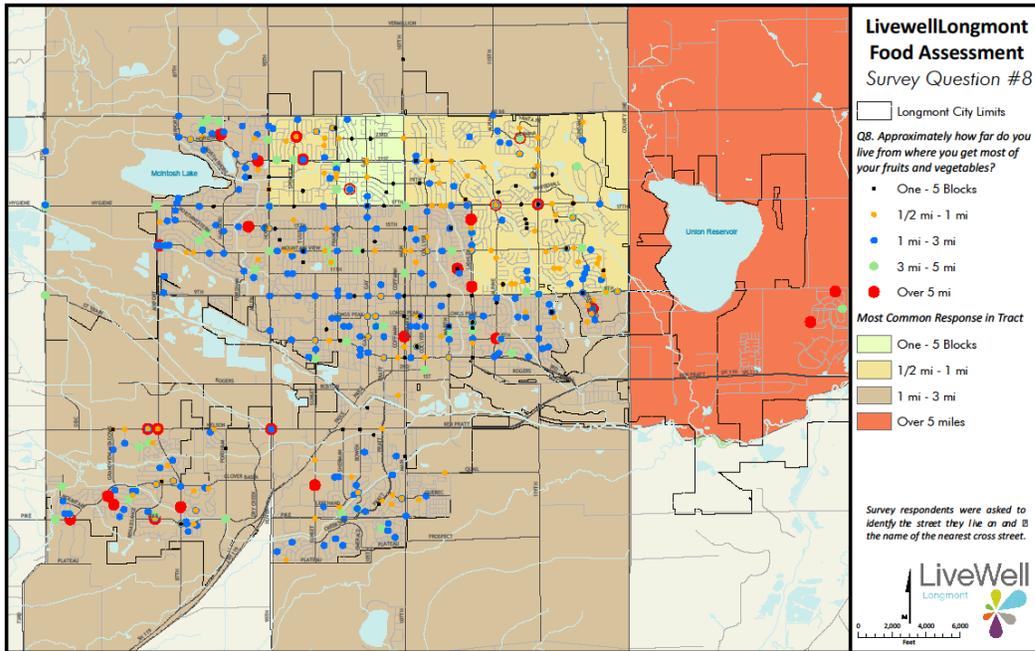
**LivewellLongmont**  
**Food Assessment**  
*Food Outlets*

- Convenience Store/  
Gas Station
- Grocery Store
- Speciality Market
- Liquor Store
- Restaurant
- Fast Food
- Coffee Shop
- Desert/Ice Cream Shop



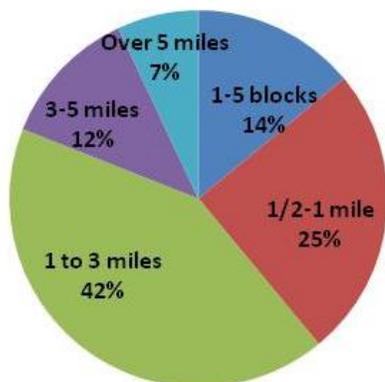
Updated: July 2010

As the next figure shows, residents of several areas of the Longmont community have significant distances to travel to access the foods they shop for. However, this is not a challenge if sufficient transportation (private or public) is available to get to those markets. Therefore, respondents to the 2010 community survey were also asked about their perceptions of distance, and any transportation barriers in their food shopping.

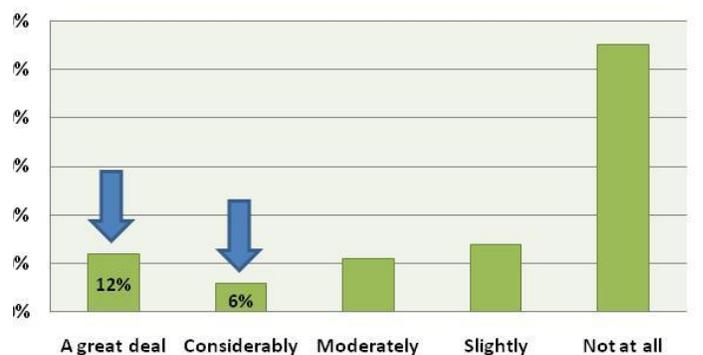


These findings suggest that there are a significant number of households (almost 20%) that see distance as a challenge to their attainment of food security, especially for the fresh produce commonly recommended as a dietary change for at-risk households. In further analyses LiveWell intends to explore how distances traveled, demographics and shopping preferences interact with these perceived barriers

### How far do you live from where you get most of your fruits and vegetables?



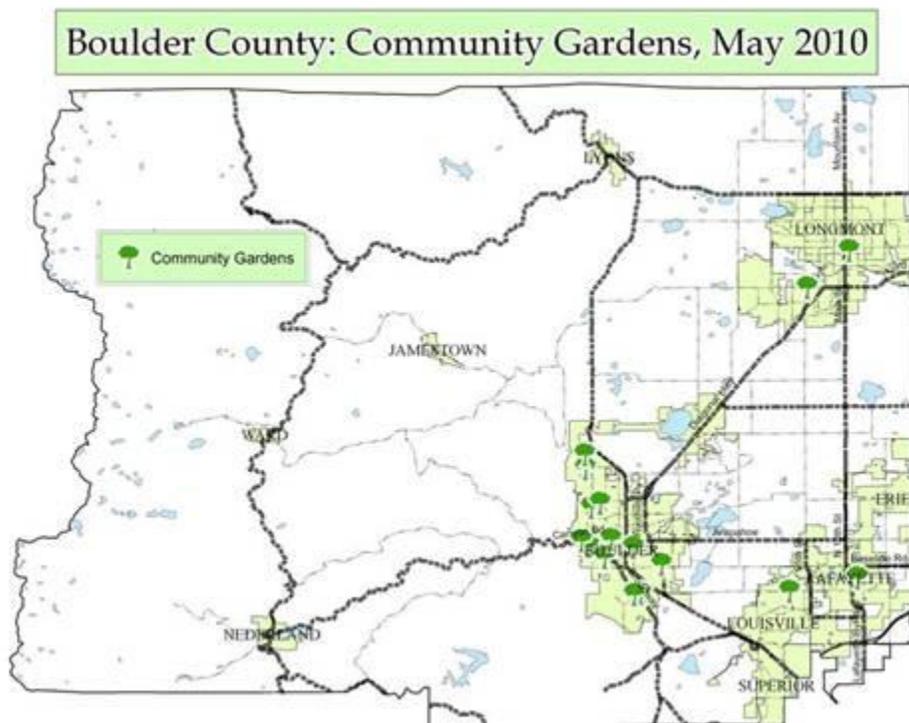
### To what extent does your lack of transportation or far distance make is challenging for you to get to where you purchase or receive most of your fruits and vegetables?



## Community Gardens and Local Food Initiatives

As mentioned earlier, community gardens have been one community response to address food security and access, and may complement other food assistance programs. Gardens are developed and operated by a variety of organizations in Northern Colorado, including LiveWell Colorado, the Boys and Girls Club, City of Greeley, churches, City of Fort Collins, housing developments, CSU Extension, and other nonprofits.

Many of these gardens serve two purposes: to provide food for the growers and to donate a portion to the local food bank. Note that nearly all community gardens are clustered along urban corridors, such that people with limited financial access to food may also be limited by distance to these gardens. Although no data trends are available, there is consensus in the local food community that community gardens are more prevalent, visible, diverse and important linkages in communities in recent years.



Source: Growing Gardens and Longmont Parks and Recreation, May 2010.