

Food insecurity continues to be a major challenge in New Mexico, and this year we are building on the foundation we established in last year's project by expanding our research, strengthening our analysis, and refining our proposed solution. Our previous work introduced the concept of using technology to support communities facing limited access to nutritious food, and this year's project improves on that idea by using new data, expert insight, and community perspectives. By continuing this project, we aim to deepen our understanding of the systems that shape food access and develop a more effective and informed approach to addressing the issue.

Food insecurity in New Mexico is a persistent and complex problem that affects families across the state at rates higher than the national average. It is defined by the United States Department of Agriculture as a lack of consistent access to enough food for an active and healthy life. In recent years, New Mexico has repeatedly ranked among the states with the highest levels of food insecurity, with research from Feeding America showing that the state's hunger rates have remained above national levels between 2022 and 2024. This situation is driven by a combination of economic, social, and structural issues that limit access to nutritious food and create long term challenges for individuals in low income communities. During the recent government shutdown many families in New Mexico faced delays and uncertainty with their SNAP benefits which made an already difficult situation even harder. Moments like this show how fragile our food system is for people who rely on consistent support.

Over the past year, we have expanded our understanding of food insecurity by engaging directly with organizations, experts, and community members who work on the front lines of this issue. Our work has included volunteering at Roadrunner Food Bank, attending workshops led by researchers such as Dr. Mariana Chilton and Dr. Lauri Andress, and participating in an interview with Generation Justice about CommuniEats, an radio broadcast organization involved in statewide community outreach. These experiences helped us identify the structural factors that shape food access and guided the development of our conceptual application, CommuniEats. Moving forward, we plan to strengthen the project by incorporating more detailed data analysis, refining the design of the application, and exploring how technology can support community based distribution systems. We also intend to continue gathering insight from local leaders and organizations to ensure that our approach remains grounded in the needs and reality of the communities most affected by food insecurity.

Addressing food insecurity in New Mexico means looking at the real systems that create hunger and not just the symptoms. Throughout this project we learned from experts, community leaders, and people doing the work every day. Our interview Brian Brown reminded us that most people facing food insecurity are working families which shows how deep the problem goes. Because of everything we learned we decided to take real steps forward with CommuniEats. We reached out to Roadrunner Food Bank about doing a trial run so we can test how the app could support their distribution system. We also contacted Joseph Olonia to help us start building a functional version of the app so it can organize data route, deliveries, and actually serve people in need. CommuniEats is still in development but these partnerships show that the idea can move beyond a concept.