

# RURAL FOOD

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AN INVESTIGATION INTO  
RURAL FOOD POVERTY AND  
INSECURITY IN  
NORTHAMPTONSHIRE  
2020



# AN INTRODUCTION

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In Autumn 2020 Northamptonshire ACRE carried out a survey to investigate food insecurity and poverty in rural Northamptonshire.

Increasingly rural communities in Northamptonshire are reporting food insecurity and poverty. Working with key partners we sought to investigate and establish the key causes of rural food poverty in the county.

As well as investigating poverty and insecurity we sought to understand how living in a rural location impacted on diet and shopping habits. We were particularly interested in how many respondents shopped locally.

The aim of this report is to help inform decision makers of the difficulties that are faced in rural communities. These issues have been exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic and we are concerned that many people are falling through the cracks, unable to access or are unaware of the support that is more readily accessible to urban communities.

Rural food poverty is defined as: the inability to obtain sufficient healthy affordable food.

Rural food insecurity is defined as: not having reliable access to a sufficient quantity of affordable, nutritious food.

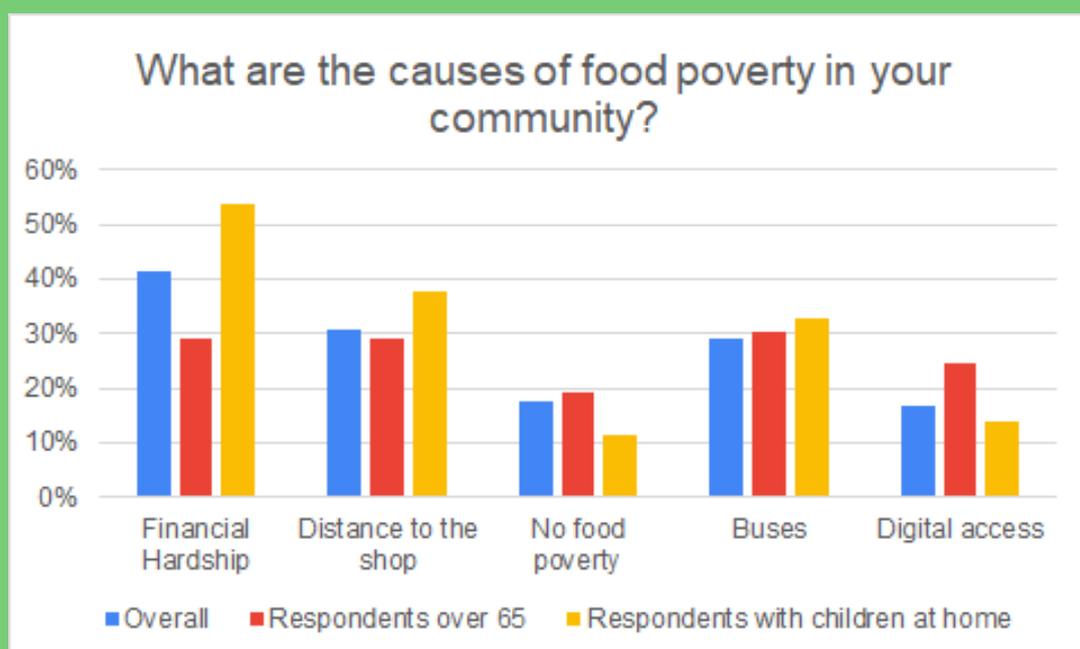
Having access to reliable, affordable nutritious food is important not just for physical wellbeing, but mental wellbeing too.

# CAUSES OF FOOD POVERTY

40% of respondents mentioned financial hardship when asked 'what are the causes of food poverty in your community', however the data showed a complex web of issues including infrequent or non-existent bus networks, poor rural broadband, a lack of confidence online and villages without a local shop stocking a good range of nutritious food at affordable prices.

Older people were more likely to comment that financially they could afford food, but were unable to get to a shop due to a lack of transport whereas people with school aged children living at home were more likely to state financial hardship and the cost of food contributed to poverty in their community.

“Our community members are quite well off so no financial hardship. Main problem is lack of bus service and all village shops closed/closing.”



**FIGURE 1.**

*People with children were more likely to report financial hardship as the cause of food insecurity in their community whereas in over 65's were more likely to cite digital access or say there was no insecurity.*

# CAUSES OF FOOD POVERTY

25% of respondents worried about the cost of food and 45% said that food was more expensive because of their rural location.

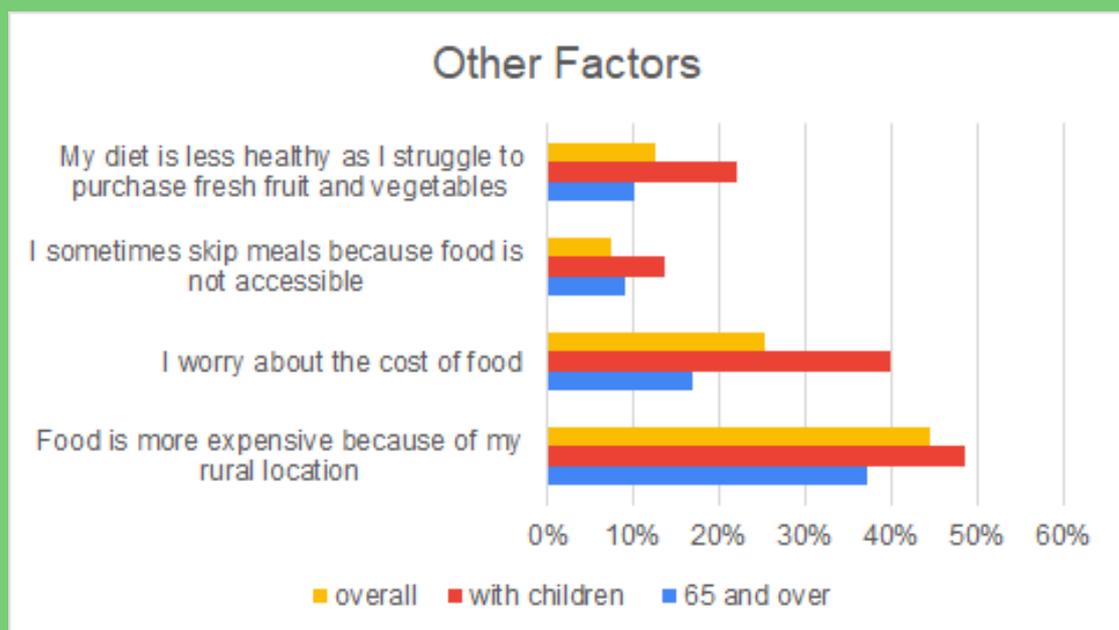
Its not just finances that cause food poverty, poor access to food can be just as damaging. Responses reported the elderly living on tinned soup purchased in a post office despite being financially able to afford food. 22% of respondents with children said they struggled to buy fresh fruit and vegetables.

Respondents with children were also more likely to skip meals as food was not accessible.

Respondents added additional comments about struggles to buy basics such as baby milk and dietary specific food like gluten and dairy free.



I think in some of the more affluent small villages like this, where most have cars & are able to order online, its very easy for people who are not well off to fall through the gaps. Maybe they wouldn't want to admit to neighbours that they have problems?



**FIGURE 2.**

Respondents were asked about other factors that impacted on their food security. Many reported that food was more expensive, this was backed up with comments explaining that because of their rural location and the poor bus networks this meant that they were unable to travel to cheaper food sources.

# ACCESSING SUPPORT

The survey provided clear evidence that respondents were unable to name a source of help if they found themselves in food poverty.

60% of respondents were not sure where they would get help, and although 9% mentioned a town foodbank, many commented that although they were aware of a food bank in the local town, they were unable to get to it, or that the value of the food received was lower than the cost of public transport.

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I know there is a food bank in the town, but i can't get to it

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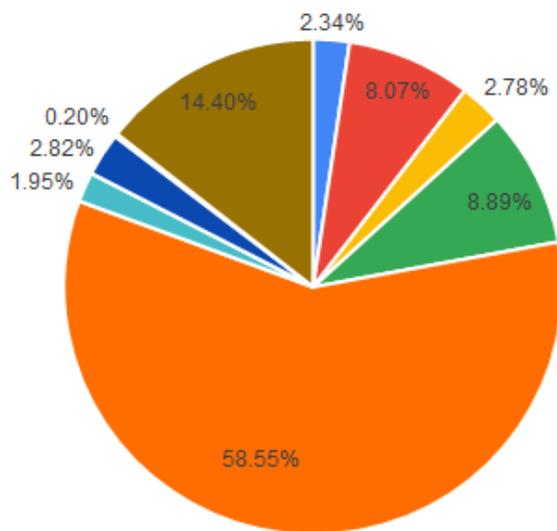
This highlights a need for more localised support or outreach from the urban foodbanks as well as more publicity for the support that is available in rural locations.

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Food bank in Daventry but no idea how people in rural villages will get to it with little to no transport. Left out on a limb some people

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If you needed support accessing food, do you know where you could go for help?



- Church
- Good Neighbours
- Local or Parish council
- Informal Group
- No
- Town Foodbank
- Village food bank
- Health Visitor
- Yes- Unspecified

The questionnaire asked respondents if they knew where they could access food support if needed. Worryingly just under 60% of respondents did not. Of those that did they overwhelmingly relied on local support either an informal community group (8.89%) or Good Neighbours Scheme (8.07%).

**FIGURE 3:**

*If you needed support accessing food, do you know where you could go for help?*

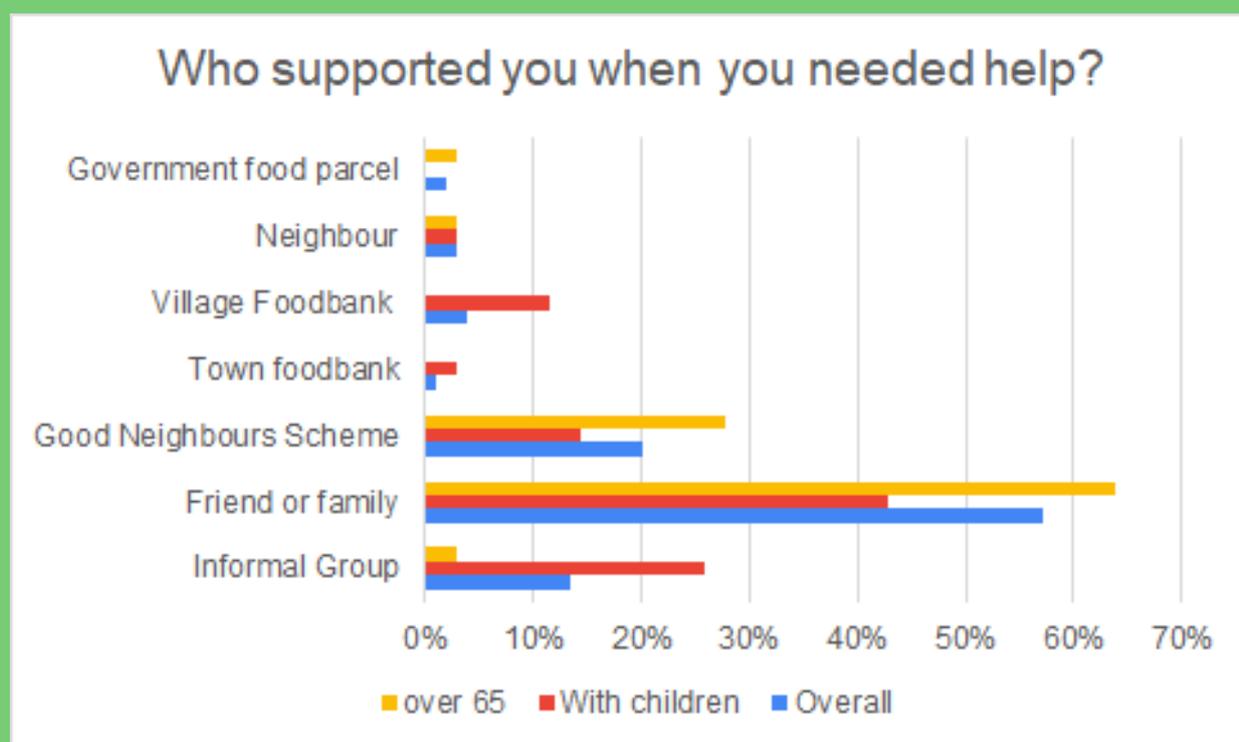
# THE GOOD NEWS

Of the respondents that needed support many of them reached out to their local community. Highlighting the need for local trusted support networks. The nature of these groups means that as they become ingrained into the community, trust is gained, and people that would otherwise worry about being a burden or the stigma attached to asking for help feel confident to seek help.

There are now over 30 existing and pending Good Neighbour Schemes in the County, and parishes with schemes have reported how valuable the schemes were when the pandemic struck. In the Daventry district alone over 7000 individuals were supported by Good Neighbours Schemes between March and August.

We are still looking for new schemes, so if you have a pop up village group that would like to become a Good Neighbour Scheme please get in touch.

“ We have a foodbank and food table supporting the villages of Bozeat and Wollaston. 60% of the table footfall is the elderly. 80% of foodbank users are families. Mainly because the elderly do not like to ask for help so gain it anonymously. On average, it take me 2 years to build up the trust of an elderly person.”



**FIGURE 4.**

*Respondents that needed help during the pandemic reached out to friends and family, as well as village support schemes, very few utilised support available in towns.*

# SUMMARY AND KEY FINDINGS

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Food poverty is an ever increasing complex issue in Northamptonshire and has been exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, it has shone a spotlight on rural communities struggling with the impact of rural bus and shop closures.

Many people assume that rural communities are affluent and do not suffer from food poverty, but we know that this simply isn't the case. There is a need to challenge the stereotypes, because this assumption can be dangerous and cause people to fall through the gaps.

Local trusted support networks are valuable resources and were heavily relied on in the pandemic, they should not be underestimated. Their ability to connect with individuals—without stigma, is vital when ensuring that people are not afraid to ask for help when they find themselves in difficulty.

Rural finances can come under extra pressure with longer journeys increasing fuel costs, many reporting food is expensive and inaccessible.

Our rural communities should be able to obtain affordable, accessible, nutritious food and know who to turn to when they find themselves in need.

“ No transport restricts the ability for some residents to access good food and a fair price, no real public transport is killing our community in many ways. Some of those that are affected in outward looking affluent village will not speak up but will suffer in silence. shameful in 2020 ”

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the prices at local shops would make living on tight budget very difficult, frozen and tinned food is very expensive. A single jacket potato costs the same as 4 from a supermarket and frozen chips are 3 times as much as supermarkets.

Buses were infrequent during lockdown and now are going through village with full up signs as due to social distancing can only accommodate lower numbers. Groups such as parents and toddlers and youth groups which may have offered snacks as well as noticing food poverty are still shut down... Also concerning for spotting mental health and domestic abuse.

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# HOW TO HELP

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Northamptonshire ACRE is committed to reducing food poverty and insecurity in our county. You can be involved by:

## **Check on your neighbours**

Even a simple 'hello' in the street can make a difference, small actions like these can reduce isolation, and may lead to someone reaching out and asking for help.

## **Remember Rural Communities**

Rural communities often struggle to access the same level of support and services that are available to urban communities. If you would like to do more to connect your organisation to rural Northamptonshire please contact Northamptonshire ACRE.

## **Support your local Good Neighbours Scheme**

There are 30 existing and pending schemes in Northamptonshire, all supporting our rural communities. You can support your local scheme by volunteering, giving a donation or the gift of a food parcel. If there isn't a scheme in your area you could even start your own! Contact Northants ACRE for more information.

## **Share available support in as many different ways as possible**

Our research has shown that many people are not aware of the support available to them. By sharing the information in as many ways as possible you can ensure that the people most in need of help know exactly where they can find it.

## **Remove Stigma**

Anyone can find themselves in food poverty or insecurity, its important that people are able to access support with dignity and without fear.

# LOCAL VOICES

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Here are just some of the voices behind the statistics

"Single parent with 2 young children money is tight. Don't always know how I'm going to afford food and make ends meet. Covid also caused issues with shopping for food as taking the children in to shops was not practical. Getting a delivery was not always possible and everything seems to have gone up in price."

"People with mobility challenges have problems accessing food supplies if they cannot get out of their house (eg no longer drive) whatever their means. Informal community support, or more formal support, keeps them at home where they are at less risk of eg covid. However, as well as food, they need company - the person we cook for weekly wanted to get out of the house, but was not confident to go alone, so we now walk with her (weather permitting) once a week. She'd like more, I'm sure. This social/exercise/fresh air need is often overlooked. It's not just about food, important though that is!"

"It was difficult during lockdown to get food, we normally use online deliveries but slots were not available and we were shielding so had to rely on family living 20 miles away to deliver food. There is an expensive farm shop just about it walking distance but nothing else and nothing in the village so if you don't drive or don't have a car it would be hard to access food."

"Elderly lady living alone, in poor health with no car or online access, usually manages to go to the shop twice a week using her walking frame. The local neighbourhood scheme made sure she received groceries throughout lockdown and I believe they still do, to enable her to stay safe from the people who do not seem to care."

"Access to dietary breads and milk. Living in a village with no shop and mobility problems I can't get always get the gluten & lactose free foods I have to have & they always cost more than supermarkets. This must also apply to Mums & non drivers"

# NORTHAMPTONSHIRE ACRE

(ACTION WITH COMMUNITIES IN RURAL ENGLAND), IS A COUNTYWIDE, INDEPENDENT CHARITABLE ORGANISATION WORKING WITH RURAL COMMUNITIES IN NORTHAMPTONSHIRE TO IMPROVE THEIR QUALITY OF LIFE, ESPECIALLY THE DISADVANTAGED. "WORKING WITH RURAL COMMUNITIES TO IMPROVE THE QUALITY OF LIFE FOR ALL"

## CONTACT US:

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