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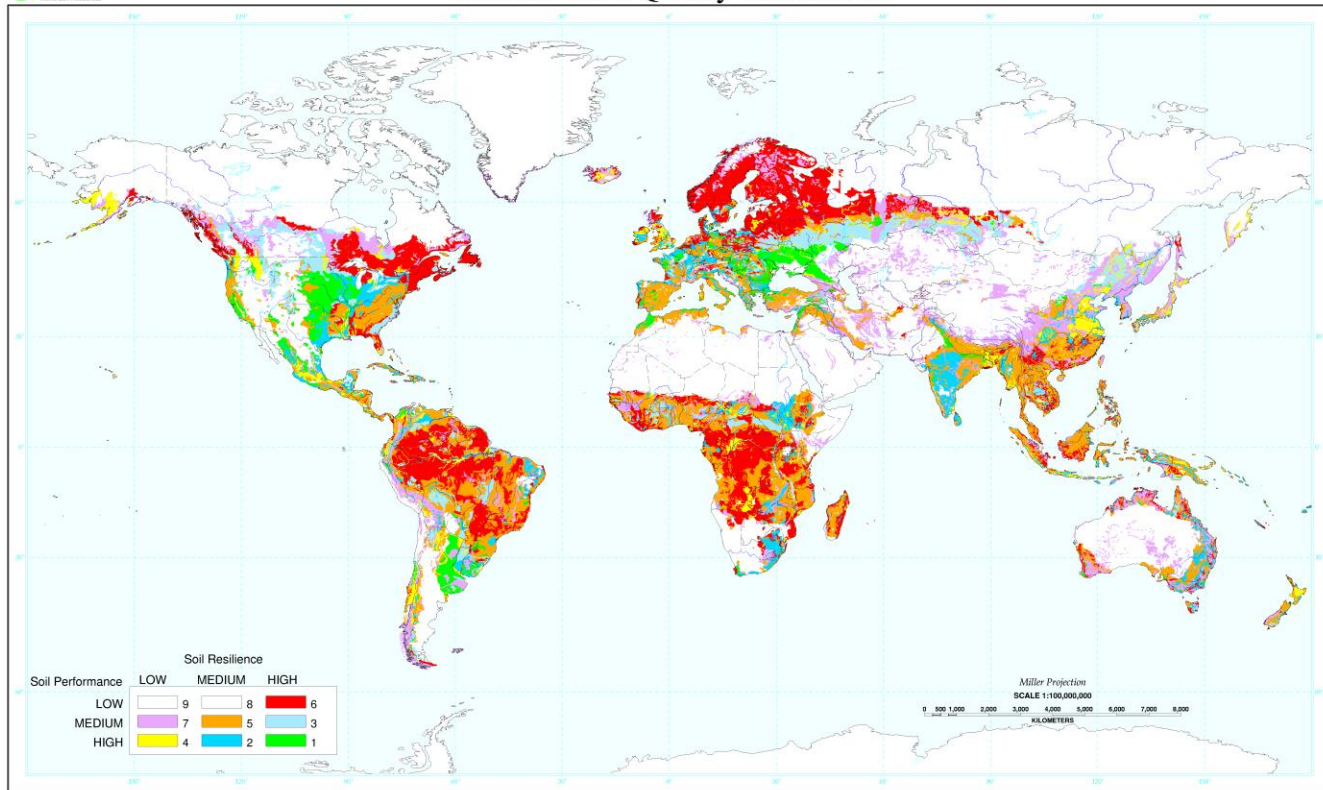
The reality of *Food Is Medicine* in rural America

The paradox of food deserts in farm country

Eater / Rao-Middleton



Inherent Land Quality Assessment

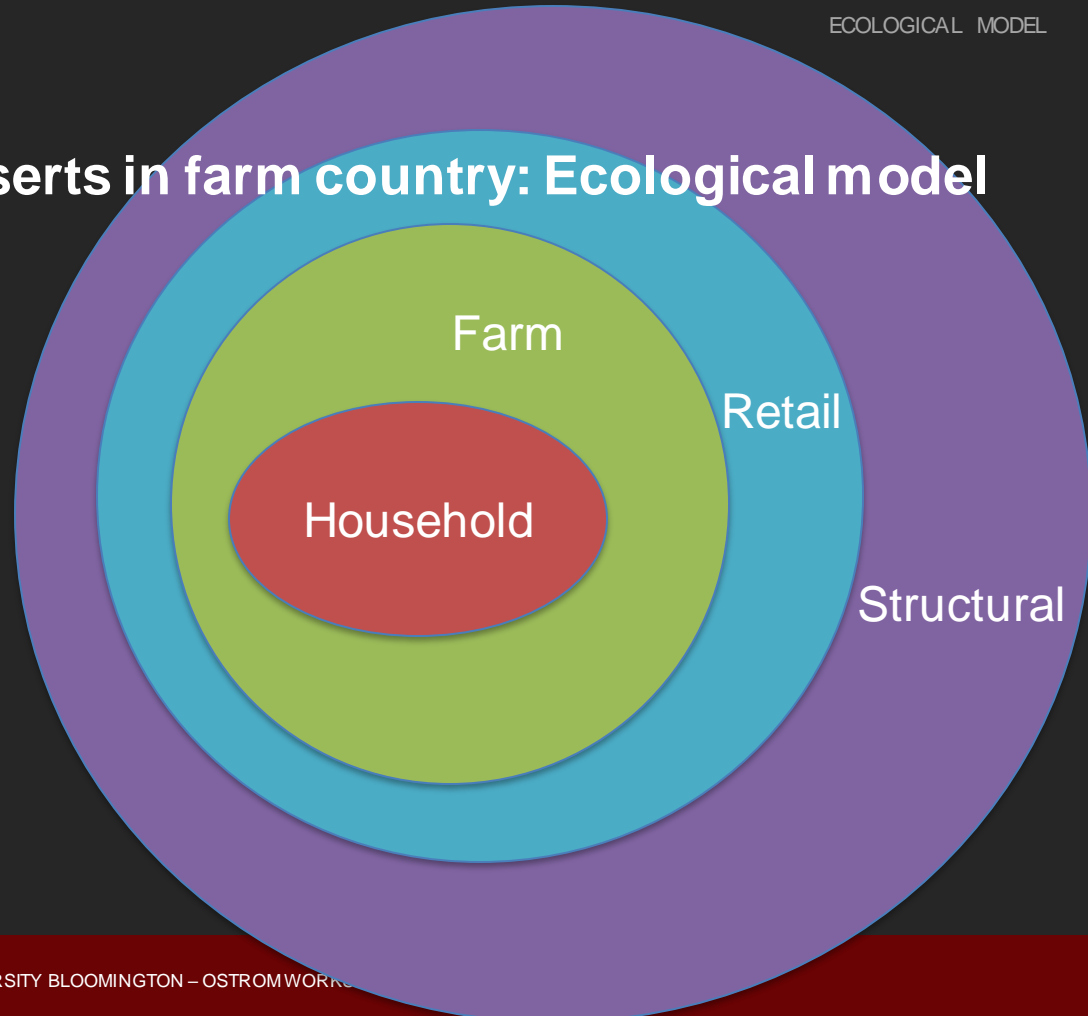


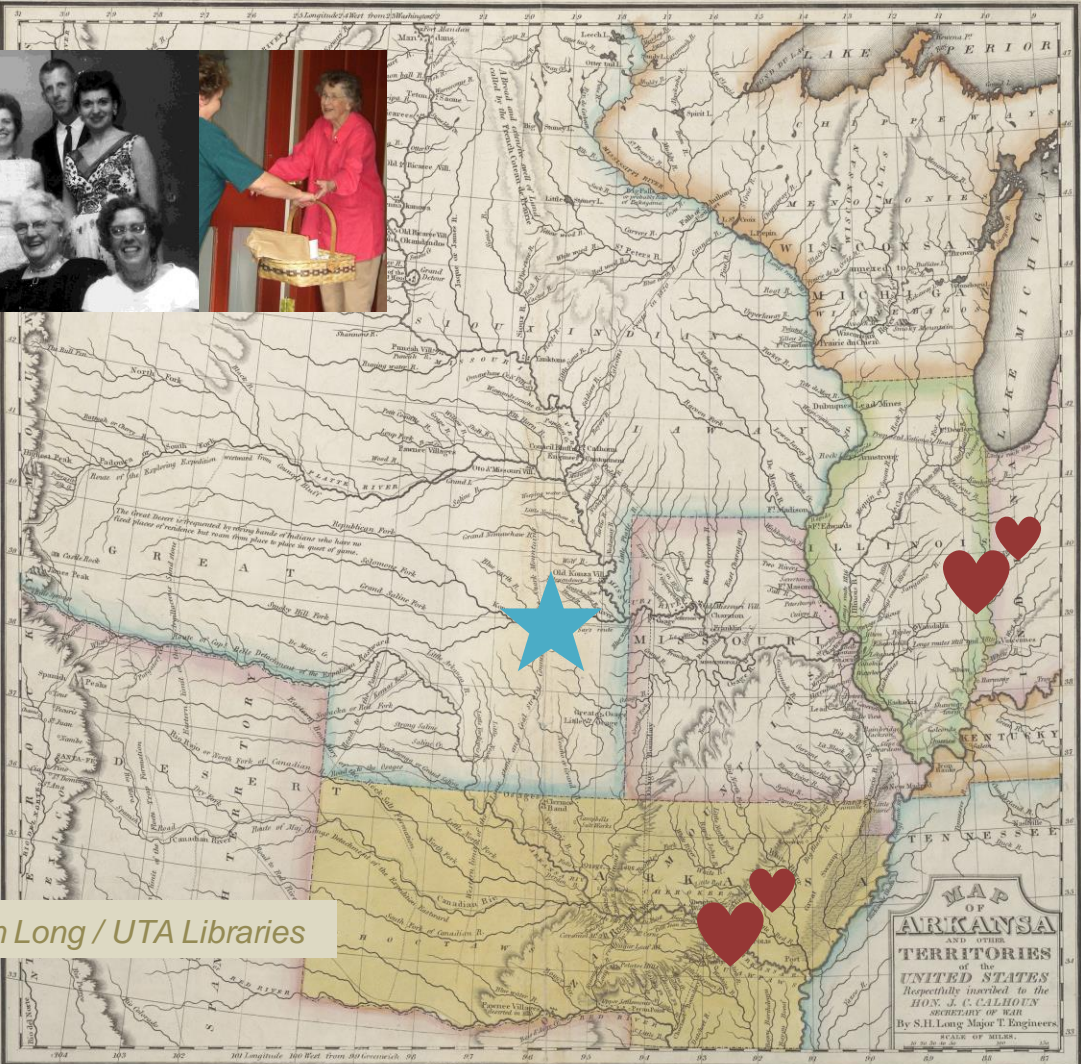
Country boundaries are not authoritative.

Washington DC, 1998



Food deserts in farm country: Ecological model





Harriman Long / UTA Libraries



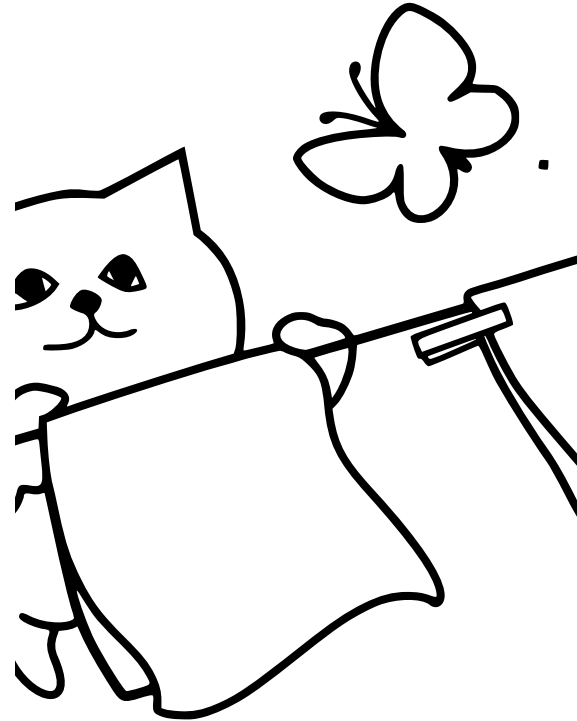
“The Tufts-Delta pharmacies stocked food along with medicines, and practitioners who worked there wrote vouchers for food at local stores.”

- 1960s Mississippi
White, Freedom Farmers, 2018



Rural food inaccess: Present & longstanding

- Geographic poverty concentrates in rural areas
- Less economic diversity (and income inequality) than in cities
- Persistent poverty and food insecurity are most widespread in rural counties versus urban (*Feeding America*)
- Yet we still often idealize “country purity” (*Dupuis*)



LAYER ONE: HOUSEHOLD

Household / family level



Changing ties between food and home

- Our interviews with food insecure rural older adults:
- When today's elders were children,
- Home food production and hunger could co-exist
- Fluctuations: times of plenty / times of scarcity (*Quantz*)
- Previously seasonal fluctuations now reflect school calendar or monthly checks

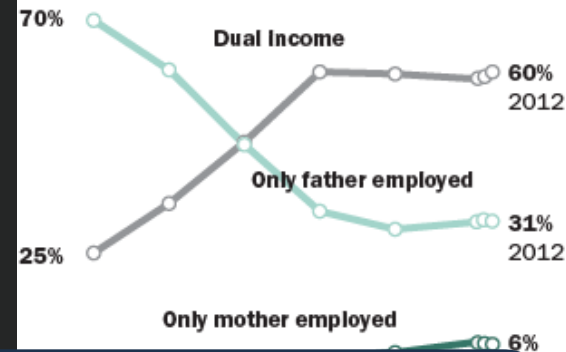


Shifts toward multiple-earner households affect foodways

- When all the adults work, their jobs speak for their time
- Decreases time is available to cook, raise, process, and preserve food
- Work schedules: long, unpredictable, or both

The Rise in Dual Income Households

% of married couples with children under 18

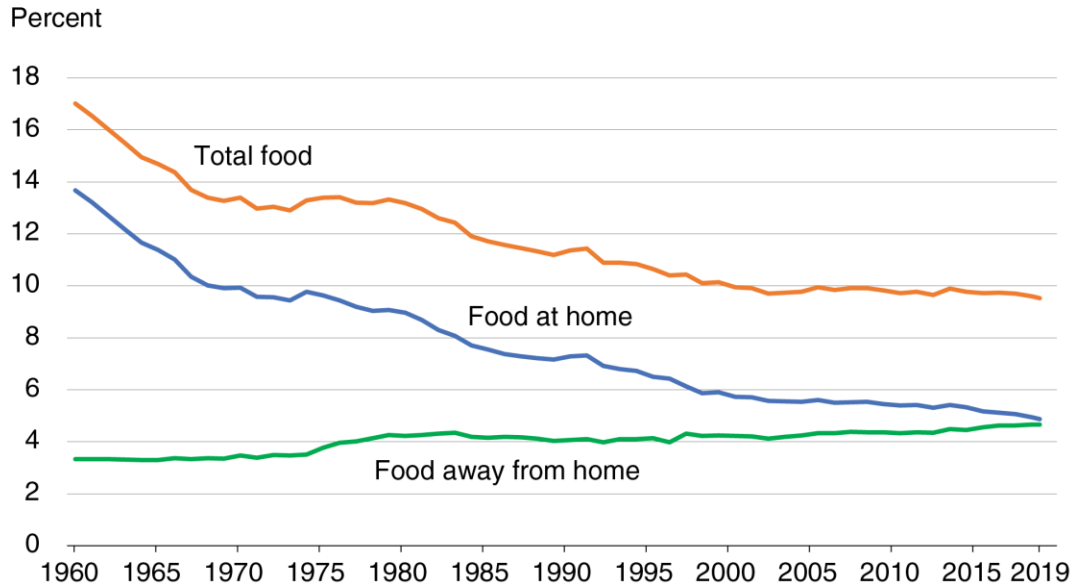


"We've always ate out. I'm a nurse, so I work long hours. I work crazy shifts at the dialysis center. I get up at 3am and I'm there 10 to 12 hours, and I never know what time I'm going to get off, so by the time you've worked a long shift, you just want to come home, eat, and go to bed. This [FIM] pushed me to cook more."

- Southern Indiana Farm to Health FIM participant

We value very low food prices & take them for granted

Share of disposable personal income spent on total food, food at home, and food away from home, 1960-2019



Source: USDA, Economic Research Service (ERS) using data from the ERS Food Expenditure Series.





Farm level

Farms: From diversified to specialized

- US farms are becoming more simple and homogeneous
- In 1950, farms produced over 4 types of products on average
- In 2000, they produced just one product (*Gardner 2002, Dimitri 2010*)
 - Same in 2012 (*Effland 2017, 2012 Ag Census*)
- Crop diversity has declined since 1978
 - Crop diversity is lowest in the Corn Belt (*Aguilar 2015*)
- **Today's diversified food farms pull a lot of weight!**



Structural level

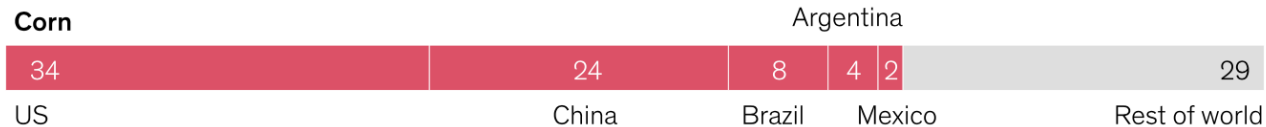
Goshen, Indiana grain elevator

USA grows 1/3 of the world's corn and soybean

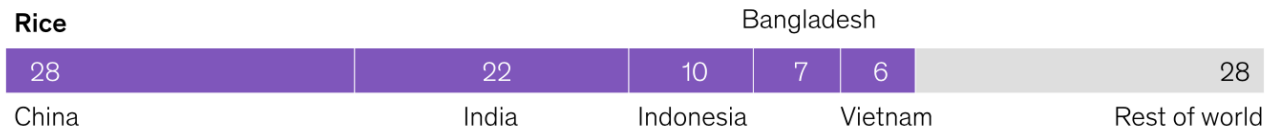
Share of grain production by country, 2015–17, % of average annual production



Corn



Rice



Soy

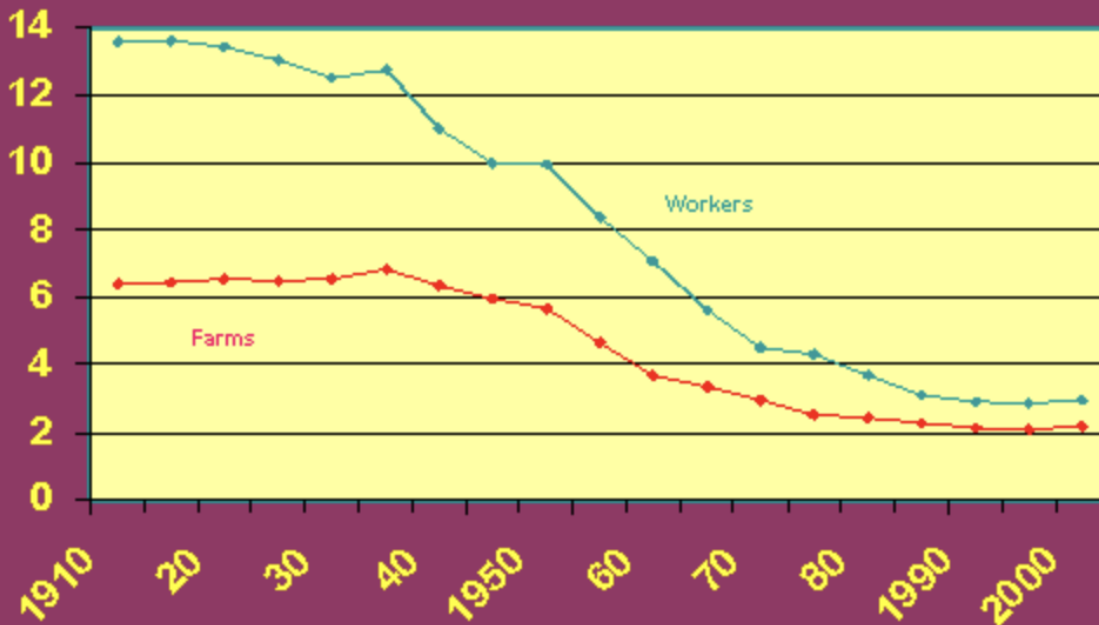


Wheat



U.S. Number of Farms & All Farm Workers 1910 – 2000

Millions



RETAIL LEVEL



Paoli, Indiana rural grocery

Rural retail level

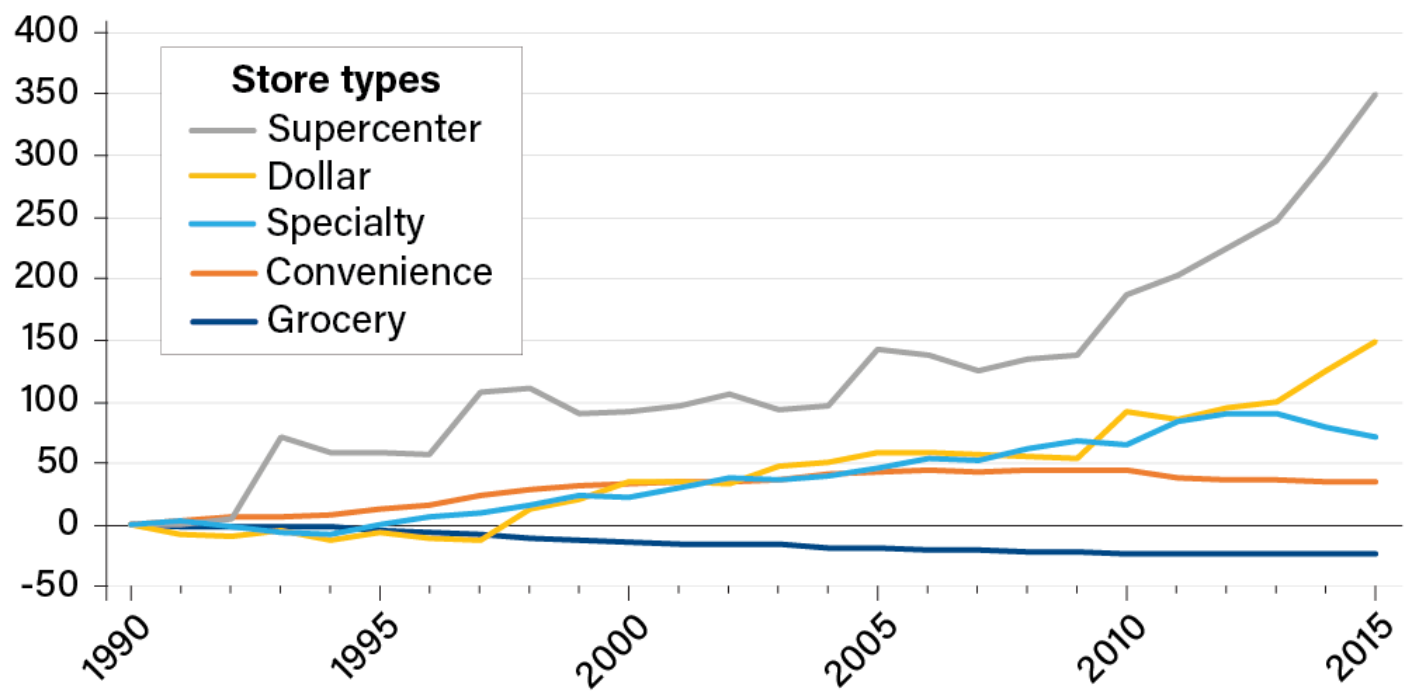
Changes to rural food shopping

- Rural households are buying:
 - Less food from grocery stores
 - More food from supercenters and dollar stores (*Feng 2023*)
- Food stores are farther from people
- Selling raw perishables is tricky
 - Need options to add value

Dollar stores and supercenters had the greatest percentage growth in rural nonmetro counties from 1990 to 2015

RETAIL LEVEL

Annual percent change in share of stores



Source: USDA, Economic Research Service using data from National Establishment Time Series from 1990 to 2015.

Paradox parking lot

- Food miles
- Definitions of healthy and good food
- Corporate landownership and rights
- Land and water rights
- Federal farm subsidies
- “Get big or get out”
- Capital gains tax policy
- Specialty crops policy
- Food imports and exports
- *<your suggestion>*
- *<your suggestion>*
- *<your suggestion>*
- *<your suggestion>*



Ways forward: Building rural food access

- **Household level:** FIM! Covered by medical insurers and employer benefit packages
- **Farm level:** Support for farm product diversification with perennial staple foods as a backbone
- **Retail:** Support stores (and institutions!) in local sourcing and community commercial kitchens
- **Structural:** Subsidy and policy support for diversified farms, value aggregation close to the farm, quality farm jobs



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- **Indiana Uplands Senior Food Insecurity** (*Knudsen, Burris-Howe, Giroux, Waldman, Babb*)
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- **US Midwest Staple Tree Crops** (*Heeter, McKenna, Shoemaker*)

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