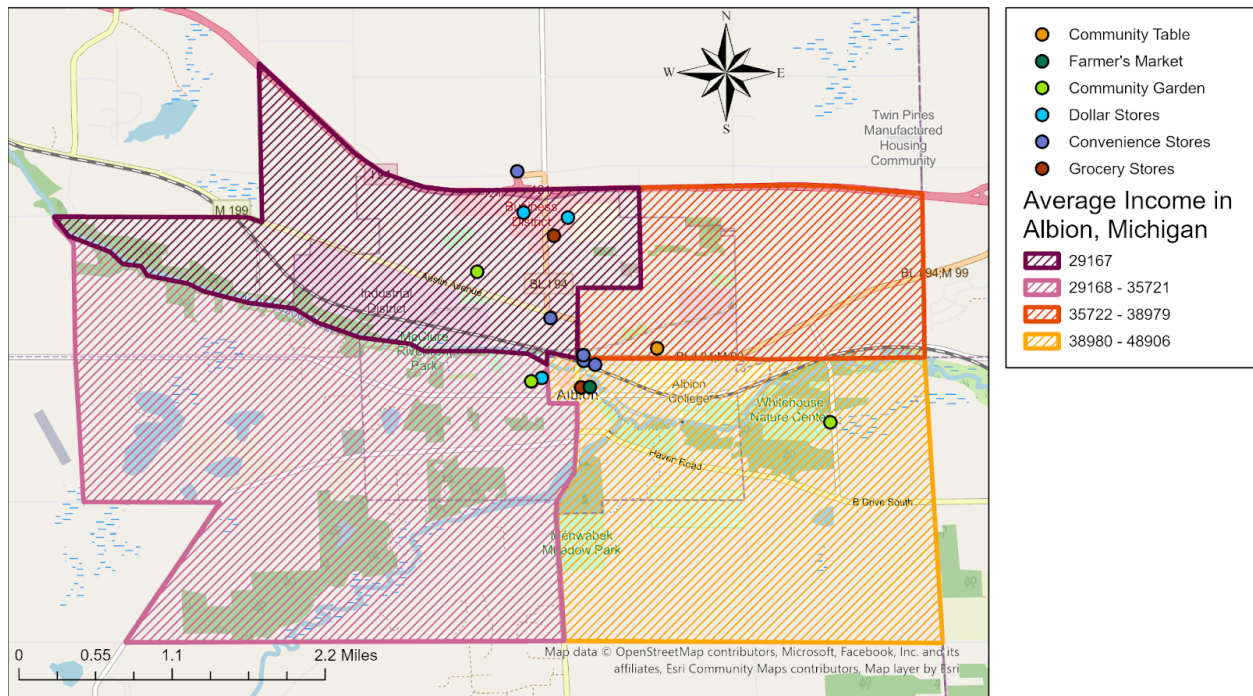


For my summer FURSCA research, I wanted to take some time to analyze and address food insecurity and accessibility in Albion. This research project aimed to investigate how diet and social experiences create a sense of community and belonging in Albion, a diverse community with a rich history of gardening and food. With this research, I hope to document the ways in which environmental injustice and food insecurity has affected residents, while also sharing the recipes that are part of the cultural heritage of residents. The goal of this project was to interview community members and learn about their experiences with food insecurity in Albion, but also gather recipes and assemble a draft of the Albion Community Cookbook through the Albion Community Gardens.

Food insecurity is the limited or uncertain availability of nutritionally adequate and safe foods, or limited or uncertain ability to acquire acceptable foods in socially acceptable ways” (Anderson, 1990). Albion historically has been underserved in areas of food security. Industry in Albion brought many jobs but also created many dangerous environmental hazards. That being said, particularly the west side of the city has a high level of vulnerability according to the CDC/ATSDR social vulnerability index. Before my summer research project, I took some time to map this social vulnerability with the addition of food access. In the map below, represented by the different colored dots, only two locations have year-long produce. Both of these locations are arguably unaffordable and inaccessible to many Albion residents. The different blocks are representative of the four census tracts in Albion and the average income in these tracts.

Average Income and Grocery Stores in Albion, Michigan 2020

Map By: Ashlynn Reed



Map 1: Average Income and Grocery Stores in Albion, Michigan 2020. Courtesy of US Census Bureau.

To address my previous study, I decided to talk to the people of Albion and hear what they have to say about this injustice and the imbalance of resources. For the past 8 weeks, I have conducted 18 interviews with community members. I have spoken to people from a wide variety of ethnic backgrounds

and ages. Everyone had stories and experiences regarding food. Not everyone I spoke to grew up in Albion, and a few community members had only known Albion as a home for a couple of years, even a couple of months in one instance. Nonetheless, the results of these interviews showed drastic differences in food accessibility based on ethnicity but also the presence of shared community among residents and the lack thereof. Memories shared with me about food history and the traditions behind family meals were not only nostalgic and important alongside their family recipes but also created this sense of community. Several interviewees I spoke to, reminisced about church potlucks and community events such as the Albion's Big Read Celebration and Festival of the Forks. These events not only brought people together but also allowed people to share food with people that they called neighbors, friends, and family.

In these interviews, I also took a moment to allow the interviewee to express their thoughts on the state of food access in Albion and their experiences with food insecurity. Every interviewee had a different answer. More than half of my participants expressed that they never struggled with food insecurity personally but almost all felt strongly about the state of food access in Albion. A participant who works with children in Albion said, "I personally have not struggled with food insecurity in Albion, but I think that is clearly a product of my socioeconomic class. I see food insecurity whenever I visit the schools, and I see the way that it is difficult to get food, and food that is yummy" (White female, has lived in Albion for 18 years). This participant along with many others I interviewed had witnessed this injustice through people they know and love. Another participant expressed that "Albion has tons of food. There is no shortage of food in Albion. It's just that there is such high poverty" (White male, who has lived in Albion for 37 years). This idea of inadequate food accessibility was repeated by many participants, one of which said "I have a very poor opinion about food in Albion. The produce options here are awful. They can easily be sustainably sourced locally, but it's not and that bothers me. (White female, has lived in Albion for 4 years).

At the conclusion of my summer grant, I collected 70 recipes. This is not exactly the goal I had in mind, and I did struggle with gaining participants at the beginning of my research. I have decided to continue collecting recipes until the end of this upcoming semester. I believe that at that point I will be able to contact even more community members, and thus create a more diverse array of recipes. This project has been on my mind for several months now, and if it wasn't for FURSCA's support and Charles J. Strosacker Foundation, this project could not have been what it has become. At the beginning of this project, I still was struggling to decide where I wanted to be at the end of my time at Albion. I have discovered that I have a passion for this type of work. I love collaborating with community members and more importantly, the advocacy work that can make a difference in the lives of the people that I have grown to appreciate and admire.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank the Charles J. Strosacker Foundation for their generous donation and support. This project means a lot to the community. It has allowed participants the chance to reflect on their family traditions and community, but also give them the space to share their creativity and in some instances, remember those they have lost. The opportunity to pursue this research has not only allowed me to create relationships with some amazing people but also gave me the chance to address something I am passionate about in a community that I have learned to call home. I plan to present this research at the National Women's Studies Association's 2023 Conference in Baltimore, Maryland this October and at the 2024 Elkin R. Isaac Student Research Symposium this upcoming spring. This research is also acting on my senior honors thesis which I will be completing this upcoming spring.

