

FOOD IN THE PATH OF DEVELOPMENT

BACKGROUND

- This analysis shows the proportion of food production and direct marketing activity generated by farms in the most urban counties. Proximity to people and markets provides opportunities for farmers but also increases the threat of non-farm development and costs of farming.
- For our analyses we combined information from the 2012 Census of Agriculture with 2013 Economic Research Service Urban Influence Codes (UICs). USDA Economic Research Service (ERS) classifies counties into 12 groups to indicate relative economic opportunity. The codes are based on the Office of Management and Budget's (OMB) metropolitan and micropolitan classifications but add further refinement based on population and proximity to population centers. The ERS developed UICs in 1993 and updates them every 10 years. The new codes were posted in July 2013.
- We use UICs 1 through 5 to identify the "most urban" counties—our proxy for places experiencing more intense development pressure. Fifty-four percent of all counties (1,652) fall into UICs 1 through 5; 69 percent of these counties (1,135) are considered metropolitan. The remainder (521) are either micropolitan areas (i.e., small cities with less than 50,000 people) or outlying areas without a population center but adjacent to large metropolitan areas.
- We added up selected data for counties with UICs 1 through 5. We then compared these figures to national totals and calculated the percentage occurring in the most urban counties.

FOOD PRODUCTION

- Farms in the most urban counties produce large proportions of the food we eat: 91 percent of fruits, nuts and berries; 77 percent of vegetables, 68 percent of dairy and 55 percent of poultry and eggs (based on market value).

LOCAL FOOD ACTIVITY

- Farmers located in the most urban counties account for most of the direct marketing activity tracked in the 2012 Census of Agriculture: 81 percent of food sold directly to consumers (based on market value), 76 percent of farms operating CSAs and 74 percent of farms selling directly to retail outlets.

(Sources: 2012 Census of Agriculture, Volume 1, Chapter 2: State Level Data, Tables 2 and 43 and ERS Urban Influence Codes available at: <http://www.ers.usda.gov/data-products/urban-influence-codes.aspx>)