

## Case Study Brief

# Healthy Food Happens Here

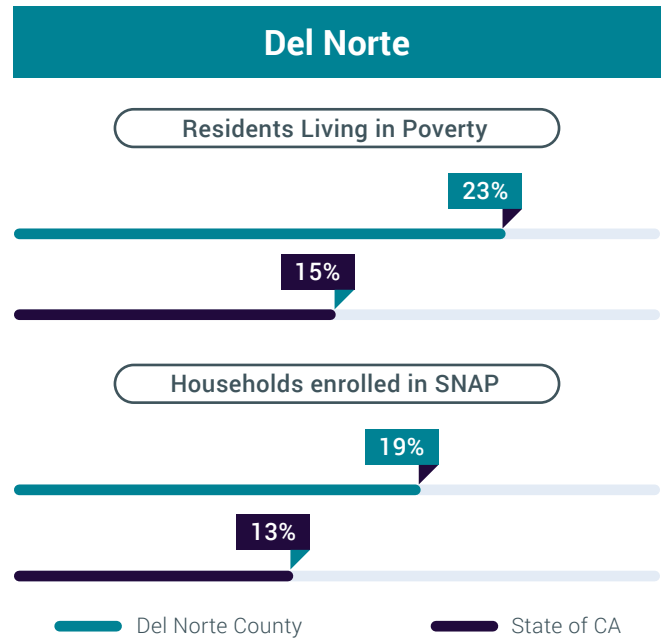
Del Norte and Tribal Lands (DNATL) have some of the highest rates of food insecurity, poverty, and childhood obesity in the state of California. The Healthy Food Happens Here case study investigates a community-driven campaign to address these food systems failures and examines how policy makers and grant funders can better support rural and remote communities to plan and implement changes.

The Building Health Communities (BHC) Food Initiative was a community effort to ensure that all families had access to healthy, culturally appropriate foods by:

- 01 Addressing food insecurity and increasing access to fresh vegetables and fruits.
- 02 Strengthening and supporting the local food economy.
- 03 Training youth to participate in the local food economy.
- 04 Focusing on schools as a central site for children to access nutritious food.
- 05 Shifting eating habits through education and access to nutritious and culturally appropriate foods.
- 06 Building a regional emergency food response network.

Exacerbating DNATL's food desert<sup>1</sup> areas are historical factors which disproportionately impact vulnerable groups in the region. Contributing to lower life expectancy and higher rates of obesity and related diseases on Tribal lands is a history of racist policies, forced relocation, deprivation of ancestral foodways, inequity, exclusion, and genocide. Native American and other communities of color in DNATL are forced to navigate systemic barriers in the food system. Understanding the role of historic injustices

in creating today's inequitable food system has been an important component of supporting the community's food initiatives.



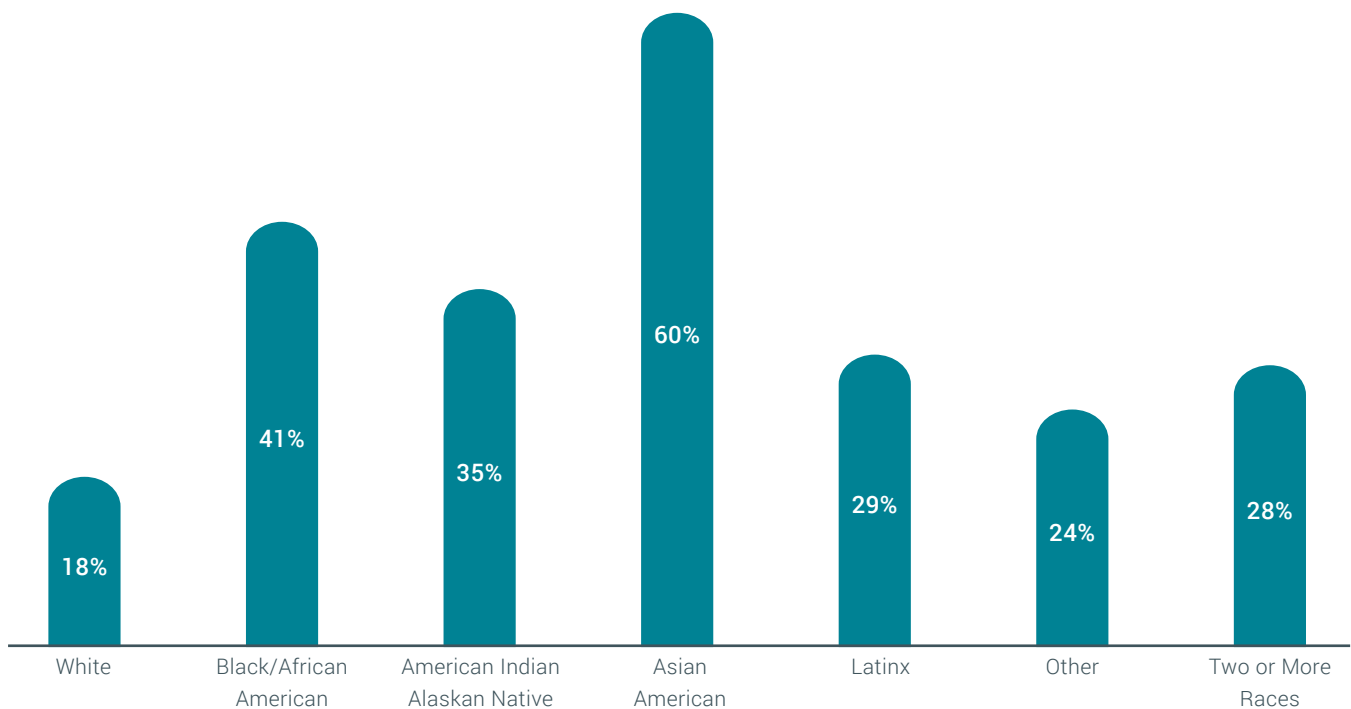
Source: CCRP 2019 & U.S Census 2018 ACS estimates

## People Power

The first step in tackling pervasive problems in the foodscape and building a healthier community was the formation of the DNATL Community Food Council. Stakeholders recognized that relying solely on federal funding for programs serving families under the poverty line would not go far enough towards the community's vision of transformation. The Food Council came together to: 1. Address food insecurity and increase access to fresh fruits and vegetables; 2. Strengthen and support the local food economy; 3. Shift eating habits through education and access to nutritious and culturally appropriate foods. In pursuit of these goals, the food council hosted over 50 cooking/gardening DIY classes and workshops and several conferences including the northern convening of the California Food Policy Council. They also facilitated a farm camp, created the "Rethink Your Drink" campaign, and sustainably funded "Harvest of the Month".

<sup>1</sup> The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) defines a food desert as a region with a census block with at least 20% of residents living in poverty and must be at least a mile away from a large grocery store (defined as a supermarket that profits about 2 million dollars annually).

## Percent of Residents Living Below the Poverty Line by Race/Ethnicity (2018)



Source: CCRP 2019 & U.S Census 2018 ACS estimates

### Leveraging Partnerships & Resources

Leveraging the expertise of community partners increased the capacity and reach of new food programs in the community. For example, the Initiative worked closely with the school district's Nutrition Director to help schools introduce salad bars and healthy meals made onsite. To accomplish this, the Initiative had to overcome school staff's beliefs that students would not use the salad bar and that such an offering would only generate food waste. The salad bar proved popular with teens, and this inspired administrators to invest in other measures to get healthier food in schools, including investing in the equipment, personnel, and training needed so that bulk meals could be cooked from scratch for students. They also worked with professionals in the community, like the chef at Sutter Coast Hospital, to learn how to deliver on the new home-cooked meals program. Another partnership which helped expand this program was with the Center for EcoLiteracy's California Thursday Program, which provides support for meals with ingredients sourced exclusively from the local food system.

Working in partnership helped the Food Council and other food initiatives to replicate success and spread their funding model. In total, the Initiative was involved (through the provision of technical support or funding support) in the creation of 15 school gardens, five community gardens,

and four food forests<sup>2</sup> across DNATL. In 2018 a partnership between the Family Resource Center of the Redwoods and the Community Food Council—made possible through Community Development Block Grant funding from the City of Crescent City—resulted in the opening of Pacific Pantry, which offers organic, healthy, and local food items and non-perishables to families and low-income individuals. Also launched was the DNATL Food Recovery Program, which recovers over 70,000 pounds of food annually from the local foodshed—food which would otherwise have been wasted.

### Youth Leadership, Development, Organizing

Schools are an important intervention point for food systems work to reach youth and prevent nutrition issues (food insecurity, obesity, malnutrition) at a crucial time. Children living in poverty in DNATL have higher rates of childhood obesity. Working with other facets of the BHC Initiative, students became a driving force for healthier and more sustainable food options in DNATL schools. They lobbied for and were ultimately successful in securing salad bars, more hot meals including from local food trucks, and complemented this food work with other sustainability and well-being changes like a gym room at one of the high schools and moving away from styrofoam single use products in the cafeteria.

<sup>2</sup> Project Food forest defines this as "diverse planting of edible plants that attempts to mimic the ecosystems and patterns found in nature." See <https://projectfoodforest.org/what-is-a-food-forest/>

## Enhanced Collaboration and Policy Innovation

Through the incorporation of the Food Council, the interrelated nature of food, nutrition, and well-being in the community became more apparent, galvanizing the right partnerships to seek innovative policy measures supporting the work. Some of these include:

**2014:** The City changes its policy on Farmer's Market fees in order to support vendor participation and ensure their success, leading to better access to healthy food in neighborhoods.

**2015:** The Tolowa Dee-ni' Nation is awarded a \$400,000 USDA grant to create four food forest sites in food deserts across Del Norte and Tribal lands. In 2019, the Food Council held a Grand Opening/Harvest Festival at the Taa-'at'dvn Chee-ne'

Tetlh-tvm' Community Forest in Crescent City with more than 200 people in attendance.

**2018:** The DNATL Community Food Council and the Del Norte Senior Center team up to form a Del Norte Local Board for FEMA Emergency Food and Shelter Program funding. This collaborative project leverages an additional \$12,500 renewable on an annual basis.

**2019:** Del Norte and Tribal Lands Community Food Council receives a \$306,000 CalRecycle grant to initiate the county's first ever food rescue program. In partnership with Del Norte Unified School District, Wild Rivers Market, Alexandre Dairy, and other businesses and nonprofits, the council began to recover and redistribute food that would have otherwise gone to a landfill.