



A FOOD SYSTEM VISION FOR THE RIO GRANDE VALLEY



Center for Sustainable
Agriculture &
Rural Advancement
UTRGV™



INSTITUTE
FOR ECOLOGY
SCHOLARSHIP
AND HEALTH



W.K.
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AGRICULTURAL DATA

Rio Grande Valley



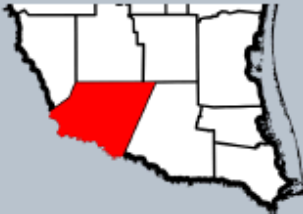
CAMERON

- Total Farms: 1,248
- Land In Farms: 208,702 acres
- Estimated Market Value of All Machinery and Equipment (average per farm): \$86,643
- Total Cropland: 856 farms encompassing 168,839 acres
- Livestock and poultry: 9,645



STARR

- Total Farms: 1126
- Land In Farms: 468,257 acres
- Estimated Market Value of All Machinery and Equipment (average per farm): \$63,279
- Total Cropland: 333 farms encompassing 855,536 acres
- Livestock and poultry: 50,623



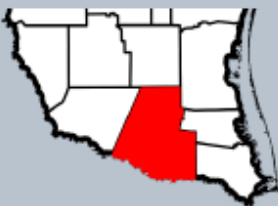
WILLACY

- Total Farms: 345
- Land In Farms: 536,318 acres
- Estimated Market Value of All Machinery and Equipment (average per farm): \$177,534
- Total Cropland: 266 farms encompassing 170,402 acres
- Livestock and poultry: 29,948



HIDALGO

- Total Farms: 2,045
- Land In Farms: 535,588 acres
- Estimated Market Value of All Machinery and Equipment (average per farm): \$188,774
- Total Cropland: 1059 farms encompassing 310,143 acres
- Livestock and poultry: 86,393



The lower Rio Grande Valley (RGV), which consists of the four southernmost counties in Texas along the US-Mexico Border is a region considered one of the great agricultural hubs of the United States. In the early part of the 20th century, technological advancements transformed the RGV from a primarily ranching-dominated landscape to a haven for crops, especially fruits and vegetables—a result of a year round growing season, fertile alluvial soils, and plenty of water from the Rio Grande River. Today, the RGV continues to thrive agriculturally, home of the finest grapefruit in the United States and an impressive diversity of crops that feeds our country year round. The RGV is a dependable producer of vegetables including kale, carrots, and cabbage for salads and slaws, cilantro, onions, and peppers for pico de gallo, watermelons for Fourth of July picnics, and aloe for cosmetics. We are a major source of seafood thanks to fisherfolk of Texas gulf shrimp, grass-fed beef from Starr county, and of grain sorghum for animal feed. Hidalgo County and Cameron County, for example, ranks #1 and #10 in the state for crop production and the regions is considered and the national leader in the production of grain sorghum.

HEALTH DATA

Rio Grande Valley

DIABETES PREVALENCE

- Adults with Diabetes (CCHC): 24.9% (2016-2018)
- Adults with Prediabetes (CCHC): 34.0% (2016-2018)



The RGV is considered one of the state's organic agriculture hotspots, and is home to 4 of the largest landports in the U.S. For example, the Pharr International Bridge is the #1 produce gateway in the country, with more than \$33 billion in trade in 2020, and as such is considered a produce powerhouse that feeds much of North America. Yet despite this bounty and economic prosperity, this region remains the paradoxical home to one of the unhealthiest populations in the country, with some of the highest rates of food related diseases, food insecurity, and poverty in the country. With these polarizing characteristics of food and agriculture in the RGV, the region is considered by many to be the most disconnected food system in the country, where discussions in terms of access to capital, farmworker rights, health and nutrition, and economy are as relevant and paramount here as any other place in the country.

ADULT OBESITY PREVALENCE

Adults who are Obese (CCHC): 48.3% (2016-2018)
Adults who are Sedentary: 33.5% (2020)



ADULTS WITHOUT HEALTH INSURANCE

61.00% (2018)



ECONOMY/POVERTY

- Households living below the poverty level (29.1%, 2016)
- Children living below the poverty level (37.6%, 2018-2022)
- Child food insecurity rate (28.6%, 2017)



ASSET MAP

Equitable Food Systems Working Group

INSTITUTIONS REPRESENTED

Edible - Rio Grande Valley
 Brownsville Wellness Coalition
 Mission Consolidated School District
 UTRGV
 NCAT
 International Valley Health Institute, current; formerly TAMU Public Health
 Sentli Center for Regenerative Agriculture
 EFUMC
 The University of Texas Rio Grande Valley School of Social Work
 PSJA-ISD
 Institute for Ecology Scholarship and Health
 Pharr-San Juan-Alamo ISD
 UTRGV
 IDEA Public Schools
 Region One Education Service Center

STRENGTHS OF THE WORKING GROUP

Asset management
 Nutrition expertise
 Agriculture management
 Education expertise

RESOURCES OF THE WORKING GROUP

Education resources (K-12 and higher education)
 Land management
 Journalism
 Local resources like the Sentli Center and LUPE
 State resources like NCAT

Through a grant from the W.K. Kellogg Foundation, a working group of local area agriculture specialists, government officials, scholars, teachers, students, farmers, food workers, community based organizations, private enterprises, and health professionals have met monthly over 18 months to jumpstart conversations about how to connect seemingly disparate aspects of the regional food system, in ways that address some of these challenges in the light of extreme heat and drought, declining health of soils, biodiversity loss, and rapid urban expansion and population growth. For example, we discussed the need to de-emphasize the focus on maximizing food production in a region that produces enough food for double its population, and instead focus on food access so that we can better feed ourselves and our neighbors. We have explored ways to improve outcomes for farmers while improving outcomes for farm workers and maximizing the benefits of healthy ecosystems. We have explored strategies to connect our farmers and the food they grow with our residents through school food procurement and direct to consumer sales. We agree on the need for more education and outreach to youth and other consumers about the importance of sustainable and fair food systems, where prosperity and opportunity for economic mobility and thriving natural resources are accessible to all.

..... RIO GRANDE VALLEY (RGV) WORKING GROUP

Over the past year and a half, this group has organized and participated in various events, panels, negotiations, conferences, and initiatives focused on improving outcomes of our regional food system for all (see photos below). In the process, we have composed and put forth a collective vision, which even in its draft form, aims to inform the development of more specific solutions relevant to both the challenges and the cultural wealth of the region. We now invite others to see it, to contribute to it, to draw hope from it, and be compelled to move towards it in their own capacities, whether as a student, a consumer, an organization, a business, an elected official, or as a municipality or county. We invite all voices to help inform and update this vision which we will continue to refine and improve. If you want to get involved, email info@ecohealthinstitute.com or visit the website ecohealthinstitute.com to learn more about how you can participate in the development of this vision for a stronger and more resilient food system in the Rio Grande Valley.




UTRGV
FOOD SUMMIT
EARTH FEST

TASTE TRADITION, BUILD RESILIENCE.

SAVE THE DATE
 APRIL 19 - 21





MUSEUM OF SOUTH TEXAS HISTORY
 APRIL 19



UTRGV COLLEGE OF EDUCATION
 BORDERLAND'S ROOM
 E-EDUC 3.204A
 APRIL 20 - 21


Free curated, interactive, and lively event with luminary speakers, food films, local food from renowned chefs, and live music.





FOR MORE INFORMATION & SPECIAL ACCOMMODATIONS,
 CONTACT: alexis.racelis@utrgv.edu | (956) 645 - 3656


RIO GRANDE VALLEY FOOD RESOLUTION


We envision a sustainable food system- from its production and distribution, to consumption and education- that increases well-being for all. This includes producers*, farm and food workers, local businesses like grocers & restaurants, students and their families, and consumers to benefit from the opportunities of a prosperous, resilient, and equitable food system.


 We seek to empower our youth to become leaders in creating sustainable food systems; where our youth know how and where food is grown, and how it gets to our table; where they know and respect the importance and value of biodiversity and healthy soils as an extension of our healthy bodies. We do this by creating shared learning experiences, stimulating joyful participatory action through leadership, and creating opportunities for youth to variously engage in the region's food system.

 We testify our support for food and farm workers, essential to a safe and sustainable food system. We do this by collaborating on a resolution that upholds workforce upward mobility, promotes solidarity between producers and consumers, and ensures safe and accessible food for all.

 We envision a food system where small & mid-sized agricultural producers* have thriving businesses that meet the needs of their community while conserving natural resources and promoting biodiversity. We do this by advocating for policies and economic environments that sustain family farms through mindful land, water, labor, and infrastructure investments.

 We envision a food system where the middle-of-the-supply chain infrastructure & market channels are available so that food grown in the RGV can stay in the RGV. We do this by investing resources, stakeholders, and capital to incentivize the development and growth of a resilient regional food system that benefits local producers and local consumers.

 We aim to foster and strengthen relationships among people, organizations, and governments involved in the food system to help sustainable food be accessible, affordable, and of benefit to all. We do this by elevating the rich culinary traditions of the region, taking ownership of our narrative, and nurturing the respect for, and connections to our land.

 We envision a food system that sustains and supports our regional economies and our community well being. This "community" includes not only humans, but all of the other parts of our natural environment including soils, waters, plants, and animals (the land). We recognize that relationships between people and our land are intertwined and that caring for the land means caring for our community.

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Veronica Dimas (previously Brownsville Wellness Coalition)
Ann Millard (International Valley Health Institute)
Jacqueline Folacci (Edible RGV)
Michelle Vernone (United Methodist Church)
Omar Rodriguez (Rio Grande Valley Food Bank)
Rocio Hernandez (IDEA Public Schools)
Elizabeth Garcia (previously La Union del Pueblo Entero)
JD Hogan (McAllen Farmers Market)
Jose Escamilla (Mission CISD)
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Luz Ballesteros (National Center for Appropriate Technology)
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Aisha Cruz-Reyes (UTRGV Center for Sustainable Agriculture and Rural Advancement)
Jose Aguirre (One Up Mushrooms)
Letty Fernandez (Edible RGV)
Victor Vasquez (Retired)
Bella Wood (Institute for Ecology, Scholarship, and Health)
Ricardo Gomez (Institute for Ecology, Scholarship, and Health)
Hernán Colmenero (Institute for Ecology, Scholarship, and Health)
Dr. Alex Racelis (UTRGV)

