

Carrollton/White Hall, Greene County About To Become ‘A Food Desert’ With Only One Grocery Store

by Dan Brannan, Content Director
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CARROLLTON - It is difficult to believe, but some are coining the name “Food Desert” for Greene County with the announcement that Kroger’s will close two stores in the near future.

The Kroger’s closing in both Carrollton and White Hall, leave both communities without a grocery store. Greene County produces a massive amount of corn, soybeans,

and other vegetable crops. For neither community in the middle of a massive crop production area to not have a grocery store, it seems almost unfathomable, says Greene County Health Department Administrator Molly Peters.

Kroger announced recently in this statement: “After extensive evaluation of the stores’ financial performance in Carrollton and White Hall, the decision has been made to close the stores. Company analysts report the stores have not operated profitably for several years and research indicates neither has realistic prospects for a turnaround.”

Also, 23 associates at each store, 46 total, sadly will lose their jobs.

Peters said the health department phone has been ringing off the hook not only about COVID vaccines but now the lack of a grocery store in either Carrollton or White Hall. Greenfield has the only grocery store in Greene County after the Kroger’s closing - Meehan’s.

Peters’ concern is many of the elderly residents or impoverished will have a very difficult time with transportation for food. Peters agreed the phrase “Food Desert” is now probably a way to describe much of the county.

“Access to healthy food is essential,” she said. “We must maintain local groceries in rural communities. This is happening in many rural communities throughout the country. It is more impactful for economies in rural communities.”

Peters explained that letters have been sent on behalf of the Greene County Board, Greene County Board of Health and the Health Department to all legislators and the Governor’s Office.

“Letters were also sent to Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity and the Kroger Corporate location,” she said. “The Health Department has reached out to Illinois Department of Public Health, Illinois Department of Health and Human Services, the Governor’s Office, and the Chairman of Kroger Corporate.”

A meeting is set for Thursday, May 6, with leaders in Greene County to start a discussion about what to do about the lack of a grocery store crisis. Peters said leaders from Carrollton, Greenfield and White Hall will participate with county board members and other leaders.

“We have done a call to set goals for Greene County and the emerging lack of access to a grocery store,” she said. “It is necessary for all the communities to come together to talk about solutions.

“We also have to consider other deeper concerns with our food pantry,” she said. “The food pantry relied a lot on what Kroger provided.”

"Access to food is essential to the infrastructure of any community," she continued. "The lack of access can have devastating effects on a community. Food deserts are geographic areas where access to affordable, healthy food options (aka fresh fruits and veggies) is limited or nonexistent because grocery stores are too far away.

"In a rural community, the lack of transportation is a huge factor in access to food and resources. In a rural community, the lack of internet and broadband furthers the expansion of resource deficiency. 13.7% of Greene County population is of poverty level, which is higher than the state average at 11.5%. This is a major concern of how we will maintain access to food sources for our community in need. Access to healthy food options is a basic necessity that we must maintain. The impact and expansion of resource gaps will propel in Greene County if we don't take action now."

Peters said Greene County Health Department would like to support any efforts in maintaining local grocery access for its residents.

"We as a community must urgently reach out to look for support or resources that we need to sustain access that can serve those in this community," she said. "Rural communities rock and what we do together will make a great impact.

"Additionally, we would like to ask support from our leaders Governor JB Pritzker, Senator Tammy Duckworth, Senator Dick Durbin, State Rep CD Davidsmeyer, and Rep. Rodney Davis in helping us to identify resources or make calls on our behalf to maintain access, especially during this current COVID-19 crisis.

"We currently know there are many minds creatively thinking right now, but this isn't something to take lightly. Lack of access to food will only further expand deficits. We all must strategically plan for the future of Greene County."