Local Food Supply Chain in the SPC Region

Introduction to the SPC Region

The Southwestern Pennsylvania region contains 10 counties – Allegheny, Armstrong, Beaver, Butler, Fayette, Greene, Indiana, Lawrence, Washington and Westmoreland surrounding the Pittsburgh Metropolitan Statistical Area. 2,574,959 people call our region home, including 1,088,482 households. These counties, while making one region, are as distinct as the differing people, groups and industries. Over the next 10 years, our region's population is forecast to grow by nearly 8% to over 2.7 million people. Households are expected to grow by slightly more than 10% to nearly 1.2 million.

Throughout its history, the Southwestern Pennsylvania region has been blessed with abundant natural resources. These rich resources attracted the earliest settlers to areas in our nation's frontier. Over many decades, changes in the use of our resources shaped the lives and economic fortunes of those who lived and worked here. Always underlying this change was the heartbeat of a productive and diverse agricultural economy. Today our region continues to transform itself as these resources are utilized in ever evolving ways.
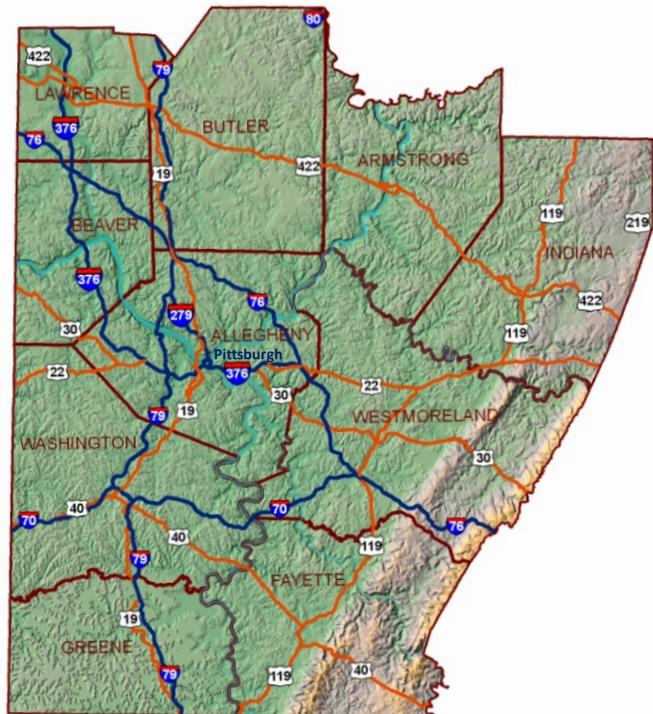
Physical Features

Southwestern Pennsylvania Region

The Allegheny Plateau defined the region's terrain and strongly influenced its development. The geography is rugged and heavily dissected by surface waters producing deep valleys and steep hillsides. These abundant natural assets contributed the region's historic and existing land use patterns.

Beneath the rolling surface of western Pennsylvania lie vast energy resources, including coal, natural gas and shale oils. Extractive industries have long been vital elements of the regional economy. With recent discoveries of shale gas in the Marcellus and Utica shale deposits, new centers of economic activity emerged in the region.

Due in large measure to steep slopes and rolling topography, the majority of the region's population is concentrated along the river valley communities. The high concentration of population stemming outward from the highly urbanized county of Allegheny has contributed to relatively high population density levels found

in Beaver County. In contrast, the population density levels of the remaining eight counties are lower relative to the region.

Farms and related services are already adapting to the changing environment. In recent years, Southwestern Pennsylvania farms are smaller and earn more per acre. However, smaller family farms that defined rural life in our region for generations now compete with large operations from across the nation and across the globe.

In addition to smaller farms, changing consumer preferences are driving changes in the way food is sold and marketed. With more family members in the workforce, convenience foods have become a larger part of the diet for more families. The major consumer of food both nationally and locally is still households; 78% of all food is purchased by households nationally.

> In terms of land area, the SPC region is larger than the states of Connecticut, Delaware, and Rhode Island.

Regional Forecast

SPC prepares new projections of regional population, employment and households. The recent predicts slow growth in employment and population through 2040. This continues the current trend that shows a slowing, and gradual reversal, of the population and employment decline that has been experienced regionally for over 30 years.

The overall regional population growth is estimated at approximately 482,000 by 2040, under 1% per year. Each county's population is projected to grow somewhat in that period. The rate of growth in households is determined by both the change in population and the change in household size. With a projected decline in household size and growth in population, the number of households in the region is projected to grow faster than population.

Over 258,000 new households are projected by 2040. Regional employment is projected to grow by over 450,000 jobs, or by about 1% per year. Job growth in services and other sectors will offset anticipated declines in the retail and manufacturing sectors.