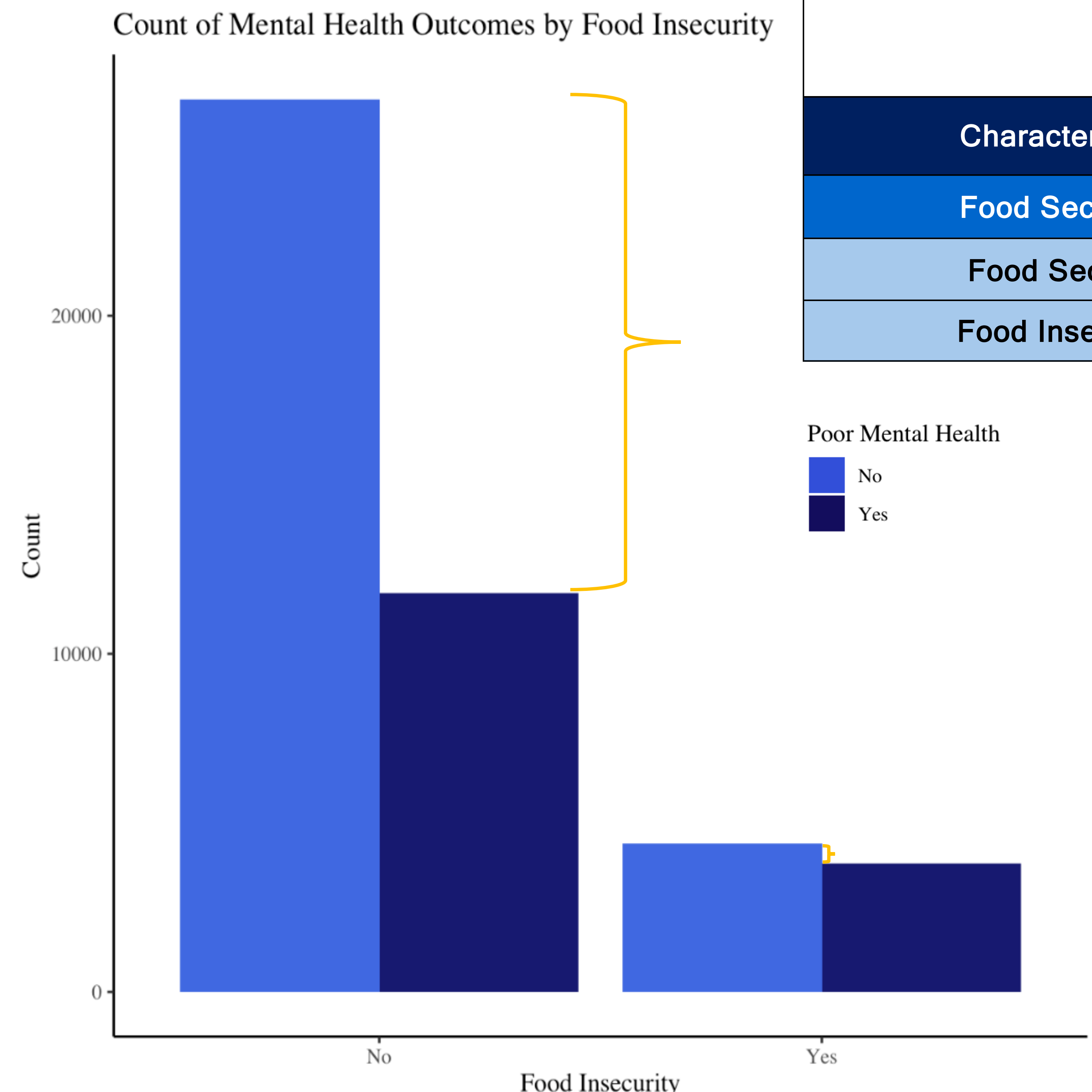




Issue Identified

- The Southeast neighborhood of Newport News is classified by the USDA as a food desert in which residents have limited access to affordable and nutritious food, particularly fresh produce, due to the absence of grocery stores or other food vendors within an appropriate traveling distance.
- The population of Newport News has higher rates of suicide and poor mental health but fewer mental health professionals relative to the population compared to both the state and national averages.
- The Sarfan Food Forest is an ongoing project in Southeast NN headed by the Newport News Green Foundation. We intend to collaborate with them to bring a community garden, educational programming, and other resources directly to the community.



Adjusted Odds Ratios for Poor Mental Health			
Characteristic	Odds Ratio (OR)	95% Confidence Interval (CI)	p-value
Food Security			
Food Secure	—	—	<0.001
Food Insecure	2.08	1.97, 2.19	

In Newport News, those who are food insecure are more than twice as likely to experience poor mental health than those who are food secure.

Outputs

- Completed a written project proposal for the GROW Program to be used in an application for a Sentara grant in the fall
- Gathered literature and data on the interaction between food security and mental health as well as the benefits of gardening and green space
- Performed a cross-sectional analysis on food insecurity and mental health using patient data from Riverside Regional Medical Center with RStudio
- Created a logistic regression analysis written report on our findings
- Gave presentations on the GROW Program
- Surveyed residents of Southeast Newport News on their interest in the food forest and community garden
- Met with many influential community leaders and organizations to discuss the GROW Program
- Created informational flyers on summer safety distributed by PHC

Challenges

- Finding local-level data that included both food security and mental health variables
- Struggled to get engagement and participation with the community survey
- Working with differing schedules among important project leaders
- Using programs and data analysis methods I was not previously familiar with in RStudio
- Promoting interest within the community
- Writing a research article for the first time
- Adjusting to the corporate schedule and routine

Outcomes

- Finalized the project proposal for the GROW Program: Gardening for Resilience, Opportunity, and Well-being
- Performed a logistic regression analysis on food security and mental health and completed an accompanying written report
- Contributed to the HPHD's application for the fall 2025 Sentara grant
- Gained experience and developed skills in program planning and evaluation, data analysis, and RStudio
- Formed relationships within and outside of VDH with my colleagues and various community partners
- Explored different passions and interests within public health
- Grew in my personal life and in the professional world



The Sarfan Food Forest, home to the GROW Program



The Garden at THRIVE Peninsula

Other Experiences

- Volunteered for three hours every week at THRIVE Peninsula
- Went on a ride-along with the Newport News CARE team
- Received mental health first aid training
- Gained experience in public health by shadowing departments such as WIC, clinical services, and environmental health



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