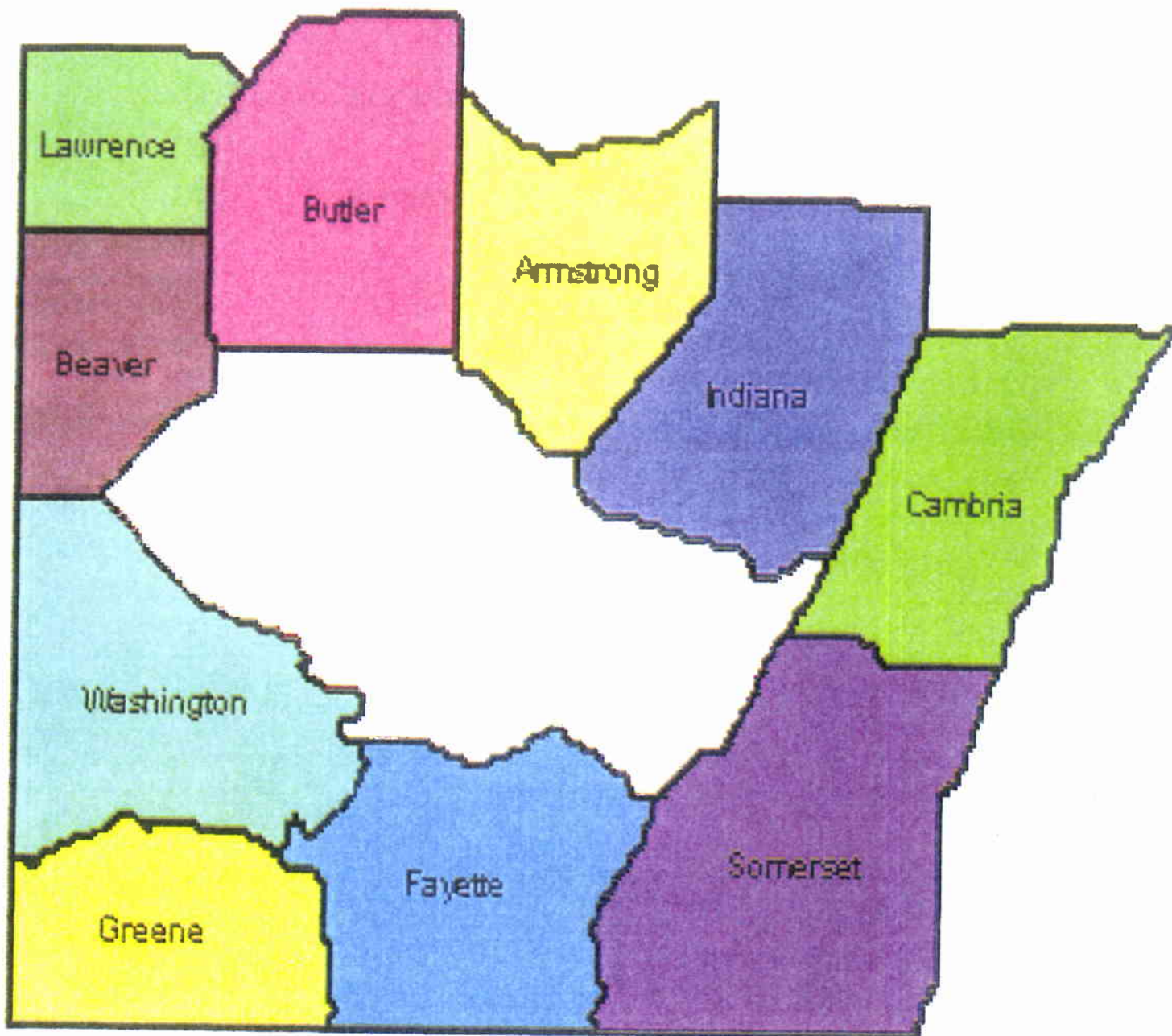


# GAP STUDY OF 10 COUNTIES IN SOUTHWESTERN PENNSYLVANIA 2004



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Responsibility for the principal assertions and statements rests with the author as does the recommendations put forward to the Oversight Committee for their consideration.

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## **GAP STUDY FOR 10 COUNTIES OF SW PENNSYLVANIA**

### **PART 1: BACKGROUND, METHODOLOGY AND NEED IN THE 10 COUNTIES OF SOUTH WESTERN PENNSYLVANIA**

#### **BACKGROUND TO STUDY**

Since 1982, the Greater Pittsburgh Community Food Bank has been the only certified affiliate of America's Second Harvest, the national network of food banks, and has been responsible for the food distribution in the 12-county area of southwestern Pennsylvania. In 2000, Westmoreland County Food Bank became an affiliate of America's Second Harvest and since then has been responsible for all its emergency food needs. The counties, therefore, for which the GPCFB retains a responsibility for food distribution are Allegheny, Armstrong, Beaver, Butler, Cambria, Fayette, Greene, Indiana, Lawrence, Somerset and Washington. A Gap Study for Allegheny County was undertaken and completed in 199.. to address the gaps in service and more particularly the gap between need and service to that County. Then in 2003, the Greater Pittsburgh Community Food Bank undertook a study of the same problem in the outlying 10 counties mentioned above. This was in accord with the GPCFB's strategic plan for 2002-2005 in which the Board of Directors and staff made a commitment to improve the quality of service and to increase the amount of grocery products that is distributed in the most underserved areas that lie outside Allegheny County.

As an affiliate member of America's Second Harvest (A2H), GPCFB receives approximately 20% of its overall grocery product supply via the A2H national donation network and is responsible for the equitable distribution of this product throughout their

designated service area in southwestern Pennsylvania that includes Allegheny, Armstrong, Beaver, Butler, Cambria, Fayette, Greene, Lawrence, Indiana, Somerset, and Washington counties. GPCFB is required by A2H to provide a determined level of service in each of these counties. Distribution is to occur, at least ideally, through a centralized facility in each of the counties, either through a small food bank or a Satellite Distribution Organization (SDO). A major objective of the Gap Study is to explore ways of achieving this more equitable distribution. Thus, the Gap Study of the 10 Counties is not primarily an assessment of how well the different counties are performing in serving the needy in their counties but rather an assessment of how the GPCFB is performing its duty of getting their rightful share of A2H resources to them and how it can do this better. Accordingly, the overall goal of the study is to help the GPCFB to improve the food distribution system that operates within the rural counties of its service area in Southwestern Pennsylvania.

Each County in the service area is responsible for the management and distribution of two Government food programs. These are principally the State Food Purchase Plan (SFPP) and The Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP). A third Government program called the Community Supplemental Food Purchase (CSFP) program is organized by PARF for 7 of the 10 counties. In addition to these resources, however, the Greater Pittsburgh Community Food Bank has a number of other programs that the Counties or member agencies within the Counties can utilize. Some of these are the following: Donated product from A2H and other sources are available at a handling fee of \$.14 per pound from GPCFB. It also runs a wholesale buying program for the

purchase of many essential items that are either not available at all through Government Commodity sources or not available in sufficient supply such as meat, eggs, personal hygiene products and cleaning supplies. In the focus groups held in the different counties as part of the Gap Study, it was repeatedly mentioned that a lack or shortage of many of these resources was one of their main problems encountered. The advantage of access to some of these programs was also frequently alluded to. For instance, Evans City Community Food Cupboard in Butler County recorded that they could purchase chicken at \$.24 a pound from GPCFB. This is particularly beneficial in raising the protein content of their distribution. Another aspect of service from GPCFB to the outlying Counties is the provision of technical and infrastructural requirements for these areas.

## **METHODOLOGY**

The Greater Pittsburgh Community Food Bank set up a Gap Study Oversight Committee to help design and oversee the conduct of the Study. This Committee met on December 15, 2003 (Minutes of Meeting attached in Appendix 1). The purpose of the Project was outlined by the Chair of the Committee and the role of the Committee's oversight was delineated. The researcher detailed some of the principal means to be used in the study. The level of service in the Counties was to be accessed through a survey, which was to be distributed to all the "stakeholders" in the different counties including food pantries, community soup kitchens, shelters, county officials and agencies such as WIC, and administrators of other supplemental food programs. An instrument suggested for assessing the level of need was the use of the software system Geographical Information

Systems (GIS), which has a facility to map poverty concentrations and overlay them with service data. The limitations of GIS, however, as well as the tendency to overrate its capacity was pointed out by the Committee and acknowledged by the researcher.

Accordingly, the Committee recommended, in addition, that an important instrument that could be used to identify stakeholders and understand better the nature of service, need and the gap between both is Focus Groups. The recommendation, that Focus Groups be held in each county, was approved by the Committee.

In accordance with the Committee's stipulations, a questionnaire for use in Focus Groups was designed with the assistance of a Sub-Committee (See Appendix 2 for copy of the Focus Group Questionnaire). Then Focus Groups were organized and convened between February and May 2004 in each of the counties. For several reasons, some difficulties were experienced in scheduling the Focus Groups in the various Counties, but eventually one was held in all counties.

The most important part of the Gap Study was the surveying of all the known – through Focus Groups and other sources – Emergency Food Providers and Central Food Banks in the ten county area. 278 such providers were identified throughout the region. The questionnaire was originally designed by the researcher and sent to the Oversight Committee Members. The final instrument used ( see Appendix 3) was the result of many drafts and feedback by the Committee members. Prior to the mass mailing of the questionnaire, all the coordinators of County Food Banks were asked to exhort their agencies to fill in and return the questionnaires. Its purpose was not academic but was geared to seeing how more resources, not just food but also human and physical resources, could be harnessed in each of the counties..

The final version of the questionnaire was mailed to all stakeholders on June 11, 2004 with the request to be returned on June 25. A follow-up by means of a telephone call was made after that date to recipients who had not returned the questionnaire. Every effort was made to secure a maximum response to the questionnaire. Analysis and tabulation of the results from the questionnaire was done by the Gap Study researcher. Much of the GIS mapping was done with the assistance of Mr. Felix Au Yeung.

### **PRECEDENTS OF THE SOUTH WESTERN PENNSYLVANIA GAP STUDY**

At least three prior Gap Studies have been done on the question of the gap between the food needs of poor people and the level of service provided in the United States. A copy of the Allegheny County Gap Study was unavailable for the purpose of either guiding or serving as a template for this study as copies of this study had been discarded from the archives of the GPCFB and the author of the study could not produce a copy. The two other studies were that of Cook County, Chicago in 1997 and the State of Arkansas in 2003. The latter was a much more extensive study in geographical terms while the former was a more in-depth study of urban poverty. Both studies used very different methodologies. The Chicago study consisted primarily of a phone survey of 420 adults, the recipients of food assistance. From their interview results of clients of food banks and other agencies, they compiled a portrait of the household variables that contributed to increased risk of hunger. They also looked at household resources, the possession or lack of which contributed to households experiencing more hunger problems. Lastly, on the demand side the Chicago study looked at the factors that contribute to ease of access of

clients to supplementary food resources. The client phone survey was complemented by a look at the supply side of food to needy families. Principally they attempted to correlate provider characteristics with the amount of food distributed.

The Gap Study for the State of Arkansas, completed in June 2003, in contrast with the Chicago Study, concentrated on contacting all of the Emergency Food Providers in the State by means of a questionnaire. The location of these Providers was overlaid on a map of the poverty distribution in the State. The conclusions and recommendations that were drawn from the Study were somewhat limited in scope, no doubt due to the wide area that the study covered. Essentially in each of the five regions into which they divided the State, they identified the counties in each region which had a distribution of less than 10 lbs annually to people living below the poverty threshold and those with a distribution of between 10 and 20 lbs to the same category. Out of a total of 75 counties, they identified 10 counties in the former category and 17 in the latter. These counties were labeled the counties in greatest need in the State.

This study attempts to build on the strengths of each of these two studies, incorporating elements of both. The Focus Groups helped to build up a qualitative profile of the situation in each county which went much further than any quantitative figures of pounds distributed could give. Each county has its own specific history and culture in how it addresses the needs of people who are poor/hungry or food insecure. Also each county encounters and has encountered somewhat different economic and political vicissitudes. This particular dimension of the study broadens one's understanding of the nature of the

gap between need and service as will be illustrated later in the report. The qualitative understanding of the gaps was further enhanced by the answers to the "open ended question" that was incorporated in the questionnaire sent to all agencies. The GIS dimension of the study, together with the statistics of people served and poundage distributed in each county, gives a more quantitative understanding of the gaps in the counties under study.

### **NATURE OF PROBLEM OF FOOD INSECURITY AND HUNGER**

The famed Nobel Prize Economist, Amartya Sen in his analysis of famines and hunger has convincingly demonstrated that these phenomena are caused not so much by a shortage of food in a given country or region as by lack of wherewithal to access the food. He thus maintains that hunger is usually a problem of food distribution and poverty rather than an absolute lack of food. Lack of access to food is the basic condition that produces hunger. This understanding of the problem of hunger is eminently applicable to the United States generally and to the situation in Southwestern Pennsylvania more particularly. America's Second Harvest defines food insecurity as the limited or uncertain availability of nutritionally adequate food, including voluntarily cutting back on meals, food portions or not knowing the source of the next meal. Obviously in SW Pennsylvania, there is no lack of supply of food for anyone. The problem is rather that people are unable to procure it, due principally to lack of resources. In other words, poverty is at the root of the problem of hunger, malnutrition and food insecurity. Undoubtedly there are behavioral problems also involved such as addiction, poor money

management, and poor culinary skills. However, even many of these latter characteristics are related to the condition of poverty, in one way or another.

Taking this nexus between poverty and hunger as a fundamental reality, it has to be recognized that the best way to banish hunger is to banish poverty. This further raises the question of gainful employment that provides a living wage. Emergency supply of food through all the different programs such as food stamps, food banks, and commodity food programs, just to name a few, alleviate a fundamental condition rather than solve it. This Gap Study investigates the disparity between the needs of hungry people and the level of service being provided to them by the various governmental and non-governmental organizations. It has to be understood, however, that need here is being used in a very limited sense, namely that of lack of immediate food requirements. The broader and more fundamental needs, as outlined above, are not addressed in this Gap Study, while they should always be kept in mind.

#### **ESTIMATION OF NEED LEVEL IN THE TEN COUNTY REGION**

The most commonly applied criterion for estimating need used by the Federal Government is whether one falls below what is called the poverty threshold. This criterion was originally developed in 1963 by Molly Orshansky of the Social Security Administration. She based her poverty threshold on the so-called economy food plan, which was the cheapest of four plans developed by the U.S. Department of Agriculture. The economy food plan was clearly a bare bones emergency kind of diet. Another

element applied in the determination of the threshold by Orshansky was the U.S. Department of Agriculture finding in its Household Food Consumption Survey(1955) that families of three or more persons spent about one third of their after-tax money income on food. Using this information, Orshansky multiplied the cost of the economy food plan by three to determine the poverty threshold for families of three or more persons. Despite the major changes in the economy since the 1950s, in particular the lowering of the percentage of income that the average family spends on food (approximately 15 percent according to recent calculations), the poverty threshold is still calculated in the same fashion as it was in the 1960s. While recognizing the deficiencies of the present mode of calculation of the poverty threshold , it remains one of the best criterions of determining need at our disposal.

In August, 2004 the Census Bureau released the poverty threshold figures for 2003, stating that in that year 35.9 million people in the U.S. or 12.5 percent of the population fell below the poverty threshold. With this as a national yardstick, we can make some estimate of the comparative level of need in the ten county region that is part of this Gap Study. The map entitled "Southwestern Pennsylvania: Poverty Rate and the Number of People in Poverty" and the accompanying Table 1.1 illustrate the situation. Fayette, Indiana and Greene Counties have a poverty rate significantly higher than the national average and clearly are the most needy counties under study. Beaver, Butler and Washington Counties, however, stand several percentage points below the national average and consequently reflect a lesser level of need. The other four counties, namely

Lawrence, Armstrong, Cambria and Somerset have rates close to the national poverty level.

**Table 1.1: Poverty Rate for 10 Counties of Southwestern Pennsylvania.**  
**Source: Center for Rural Pennsylvania, County Statistics**

COUNTY NAME	Population	NUMBER OF PEOPLE BELOW POVERTY	Poverty Rate (%)	Poorest
Armstrong County	71367	8350	11.7	7
Beaver County	176968	16635	9.4	9
Butler County	167791	15269	9.1	10
Cambria County	144888	18111	12.5	4
Fayette County	146855	26434	18.0	1
Greene County	37402	5947	15.9	3
Indiana County	92459	14701	17.3	2
Lawrence County	91702	11096	12.1	5
Somerset County	76584	9037	11.8	6
Washington County	1991121	19513	9.8	8

Source: Center for Rural Pennsylvania, Statistics on Pennsylvania Counties

From these figures, it is difficult to make a direct correlation between urban and rural counties and the poverty rates. The most urbanized of the Counties, namely Beaver with an urban population of 73.2 percent, has approximately the same level of poverty as the most rural namely Somerset with a rural population of 74.5 percent. On the other hand, the map entitled "Percentage of Population Below 150% of Poverty by Census Tract Quintiles" reveals that some of the highest concentrations of poverty are located in urban pockets. This is especially true for the least poor counties: Beaver, Butler and

# Southwestern Pennsylvania: Poverty Rate and Number of People in Poverty



## Legend

### Poverty Rate

- Below 10%
- 10 - 13%
- 13 - 16%
- Over 16%



Washington. No doubt because of the realization of the inadequacy of the poverty level as a measure of need – at least in part – the Government estimates eligibility for many of their programs at above the poverty threshold. For The Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP) the threshold is set at 150% of poverty; for the Commodity Supplemental Food Program (CSFP) for Seniors, it is set at 130% of poverty and for CSFP for Women, Children and Infants (WIC) it is set at 185% of poverty. The accompanying map entitled “Percentage of Population Below 150% of Poverty by Census Tract Quintiles” gives an idea of levels of need according to the 150% eligibility criterion for the entire 10 county region. One sees from the map that the tracts with the highest concentration of need are in Northern Indiana, Western Greene County, North-Eastern Cambria and a swathe of Fayette in the Center and the West. The other really high concentrations of poverty and need are in the urban areas of the remaining counties.

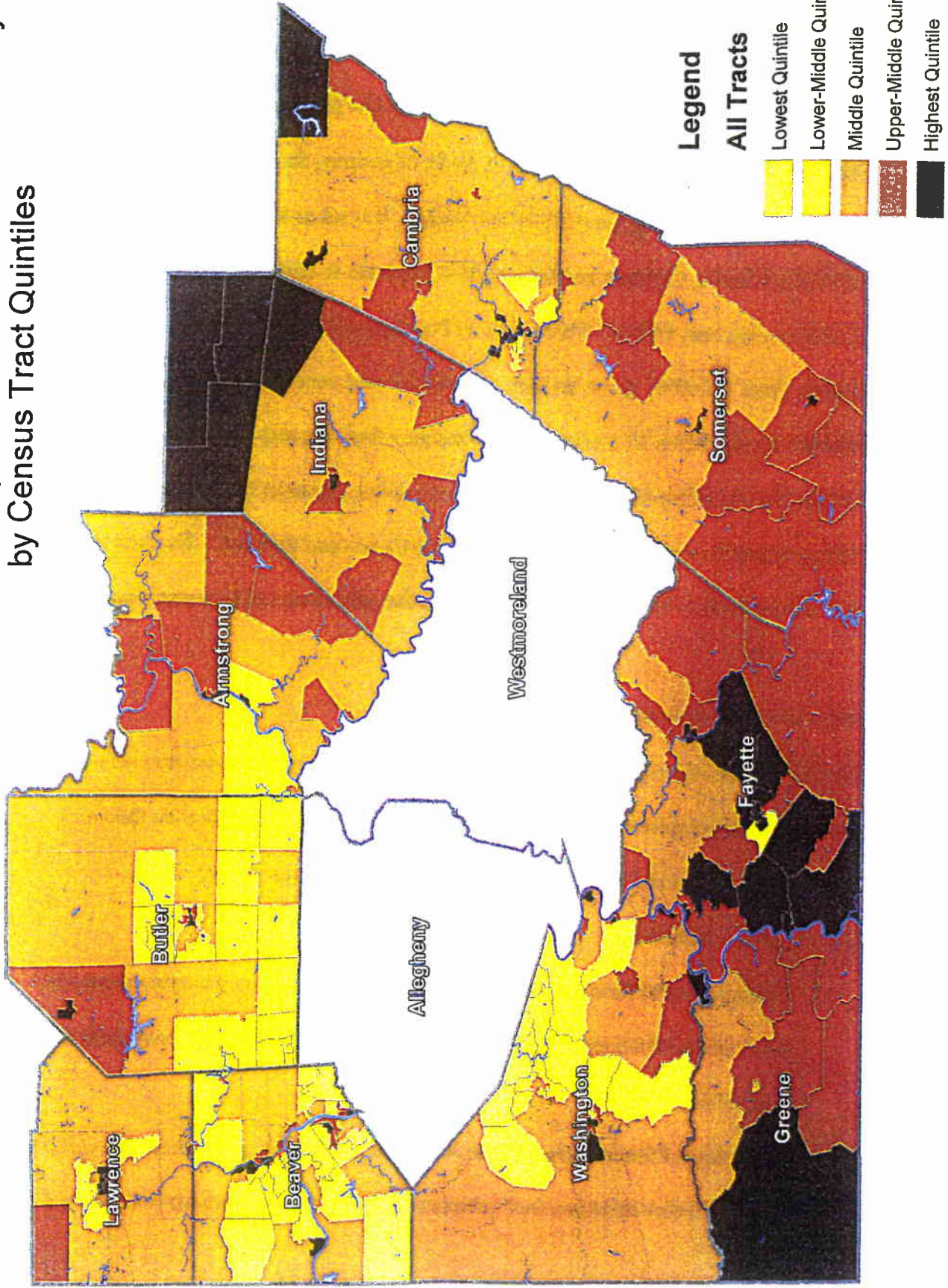
#### Material Deprivation Index

The British Sociologist, Peter Townsend proposed an alternative to poverty levels to estimate potential vulnerability and need. Concretely, he proposed that the following factors be measured and by adding these variables one arrives at what he called a

#### Material Deprivation Index:

1. **Unemployment Rate:** The connections between poverty and unemployment are indisputable since inevitably prolonged unemployment leads to poverty at some level of severity.
2. **Percentage of Population without Access to a Vehicle:** In the Focus Groups held in the different counties, lack of access to a vehicle was frequently mentioned as

# Percentage of Population Below 150% of Poverty: by Census Tract Quintiles



a problem for people to access food in pantries. One story related a needy person who had to travel several miles on a tractor lawnmower to collect his food bag.

3. **Percentage of Households in Rental Properties:** Home ownership is certainly an element in long-term economic stability. It also gives one access to many benefits such as tax deductions and access to loans at favorable interest rates. On the other hand, living in rental property subjects one to many hazards, difficulties and often high expenses.
4. **Percentage of New Residents:** In general new residents tend to have fewer family and friendship contacts. Consequently, in a crisis or times of need, they have fewer people to fall back on. On the other hand, it was revealed in the Focus Groups that a developing phenomenon in southwestern Pennsylvania is that many more affluent people particularly from Pittsburgh are moving out to the outlying counties. They are in search of lower tax rates and less crowding. This phenomenon was mentioned particularly in Greene County, where this trend is driving the price of land and housing upwards. Because of this particular situation in the ten counties under study, in-migration may not have the strong significance it may have in other parts of the country.

The next four maps illustrate the situation in regard to these four variables as derived from the Census 2000 tract survey for the ten counties. The accompanying Table 2.1 further provides the individual county percentages for three of these variables.

(percentage with no access to a vehicle were not available). The concentration of highest in-migration in the Counties of Butler, Armstrong and parts of Indiana, Washington and

Greene Counties seem to confirm the hypothesis of out-migration from the major metropolis to the surrounding counties. The correlation between in-migration and poverty and need seems weak when one relates the poverty distribution maps with the in-migration map. There is a strong overlap, however, between poverty distribution and these variables unemployment rate, population without access to a vehicle, and population living in rental accommodations.

**Table 2.1: Unemployment, Lack of Access to a Vehicle, Rental Property and Immigration to 10 Counties**

County	%Poverty Rate	% Unemployment	% Without Access to a Vehicle	% Rental Housing	% Moved from Different State or County
Armstrong	11.7	6.17	8.51	22.71	11.62
Beaver	9.4	5.35	9.42	25.07	10.32
Butler	9.1	4.41	5.75	22.19	17.53
Cambria	12.5	8.78	12.05	25.26	9.61
Fayette	18.0	8.26	11.53	26.86	8.43
Greene	15.9	9.22	9.53	25.91	13.13
Indiana	17.3	8.15	8.31	28.23	18.44
Lawrence	12.1	6.12	9.63	22.73	11.37
Somerset	11.8	5.71	8.31	21.95	9.43
Washington	9.8	5.25	9.45	22.88	12.31

Source: Census 2000, Census Tract Surveys per County

The poorest counties namely Greene, Fayette and Indiana have most of their tracts accounted for by the upper two quintiles of the unemployment distribution. Rental housing distribution appears to be concentrated in the more urban areas of each of the counties. This leads one to the tentative conclusion that living in rental property is more strongly associated with poverty and need in urban areas. In the rural areas, rental housing is a much lesser phenomenon and not strongly related to poverty and need.

# Percentage of Working Population Unemployed: by Census Tract Quintiles

