

## Thrive Laurens County

Community Listening Session Report – Mountville

**Date:** April 27, 2026

**Location:** Mountville Baptist Church, Mountville, SC

**Focus:** Healthy Eating and Active Living

**Overview:** Thrive Laurens County Coalition hosted a community listening session to collect input from residents on improving access to healthy foods, promoting healthier eating habits, and increasing opportunities for physical activity and active living to improve health outcomes. The shared insights from community members will directly inform the coalition's action plan as part of the Healthy People, Healthy Carolinas five-year initiative to improve health across Laurens County.

### Discussion Objectives

1. **Objective 1:** Understand what resources are available to community members for healthy foods and physical activity, identify gaps, and determine how the coalition can support or expand programs, services, and locations to promote healthy foods and physical activity.
2. **Objective 2:** Understand the barriers and other general factors that influence or impact healthy behaviors, such as healthy eating and physical activity/active living.
3. **Objective 3:** Collect ideas and suggestions from participants on creating new opportunities and improving access to healthy foods and physical activity within their community.

### Discussion Questions

1. **Access & Availability** – Where do you and your family usually get healthy foods and find places to be active?
2. **Helpful Resources** – What programs, places, or resources have helped your family eat healthier or be more active?
3. **Barriers & Challenges** – What makes it difficult to eat healthy foods or be physically active?
4. **Ideas for the Future** – Imagine a healthier community. What changes or partnerships would make healthy eating and active living easier for everyone?

## Access, Availability and Helpful Resources

### *Healthy Eating/Healthy Food Access*

Mountville has no grocery store within the town. Residents travel out of town to neighboring areas to access healthy foods and groceries. Specific areas mentioned include Clinton (8 miles), Laurens (14 miles), and Greenwood (next county over, 15–20 miles). Session participants typically choose between which store or town based on what they need that day, where stores are concentrated for multiple errands, and what is on sale.

#### **Grocery Stores**

- Food Lion (Clinton)
- Ingles (Clinton)
- Walmart (Laurens)
- Aldi (Laurens)
- Save A Lot (Laurens)
- KJ's (Greenwood County)
- Dollar General (Cross Hill, 3 miles) – carries some fresh produce but is **not** a Dollar General Market.

**Facilitator's Note:** Participants noted that Greenwood has the widest selection of stores and often travel there when they need more than groceries. The Cross Hill Dollar General keeps sporadic/unreliable hours due to staffing shortages, so residents call ahead to confirm it is open.

#### **Farmers' Markets/Roadside Markets**

- **Laurens County Farmers' Market** (Laurens, on the square): open most Saturdays, seasonal operation and not year-round
- **Greenwood Farmers' Market** (old Civic Center): open Saturdays and Wednesdays, 8:00 AM–12:00 PM
- **Lush Acres / Lush Acre Farms**
- **Roadside Markets**
  - Roadside stand located on the main road in Mountville (in season now; advertises eggs on Facebook)
  - Produce stand run by a resident in Cross Hill
  - Garrett Farms sells corn, squash, cabbage, on Hwy 39
  - Mark Taylor Farms, located right before the Dollar General
  - Alexander's sells produce, plus sausage and pork chops sold direct (advertises on Facebook)

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|                                               | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Local farmers:</b> The community has several chicken and turkey farmers and produce growers, many of whom sell directly from their property in addition to at markets.</li> </ul> <p><i>Facilitator's Note:</i> When asked, only about a third of participants were aware of all the local stands and farms. Most stands are seasonal and require transportation.</p> <p><b>Programs and Services</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Laurens County Crisis Center Food Bank:</b> Visits are limited to twice per month per family.</li> <li>• <b>Open Door Chirstian Center/Ministry:</b> Open Door is a food pantry located in Clinton. Participants state eligibility requirements based on income and household size with visits limited to once per month per family.</li> <li>• <b>Meals on Wheels</b> is administered out of Greenwood (not Laurens County). One participant expressed difficulty accessing it for a homebound family member.</li> <li>• <b>Blessing Box/Mobile distribution:</b> A bus-based distribution by First Baptist Church in Cross Hill.</li> <li>• <b>Christ Central Ministries (Joanna)</b></li> </ul> <p><i>Facilitator's Note:</i> Several participants emphasized that homebound residents and those without transportation must rely on neighbors or family to access these resources, since few offer delivery.</p> <p><b>Gardens (Community/Personal)</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No community gardens or known school gardens in Mountville.</li> <li>• Some residents maintain personal gardens and will share or give produce to neighbors.</li> </ul> |
| <p><i>Physical Activity/Active Living</i></p> | <p>Session participants state few recreation options exist within Mountville and most facilities are concentrated in Clinton, Laurens, or Greenwood (next county).</p> <p><b>Gyms &amp; Fitness Facilities</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>YMCA (Clinton)</b> is the closest YMCA facility. The Clinton Y hosts a youth baseball league. Membership runs about \$32 per month. Scholarships and reduced rates are available based on financial need.</li> <li>• <b>Anytime Fitness (Laurens):</b> Monthly Gym membership.</li> <li>• <b>Planet Fitness:</b> Nearest location noted is on the far side of Greenwood (Greenwood County); none in Clinton or Laurens.</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |

### Parks & Outdoor Spaces

- **Cross Hill parks:** Cross Hill (3- 4 miles away) has two parks; one located behind the fire department (with a small walking trail) and one near Bethel Church. The fire-department park was described as poorly maintained and not safe (trash and wild animals near the playground).
- **Joanna Park:** The park in Joana is described as adequate and well maintained with a paved walking track, playground, splash pad, and three picnic shelters however it requires transportation to access from Mountville.
- **Greenwood Civic Center:** Located in Greenwood, the Civic Center has a paved walking track and playgrounds.

### Walking Trails

- **Presbyterian College (Clinton):** Walking track located on the campus that is open to the public, but unpaved.
- Walking up and down neighborhood roads was stated as the most common activity for Mountville session participants.

### Indoor & Community Spaces (Mountville)

- **Mountville Community Shelter/picnic area (beside the fire department):** Owned by the Mountville community (not the fire department); an underused asset used mainly for the annual July 4th barbecue.
- **The Grange building** (former Mountville bank, brick building near the railroad): The Mountville community is in the process of obtaining and restoring it to serve as an indoor space for community meetings, classes, and activities.
- Churches and the fire department are the primary gathering places in town.

## Barriers and Challenges

### *Healthy Eating/Healthy Foods Access*

Mountville participants noted that nearly all services and stores are concentrated outside town, requiring reliable transportation. Specific barriers included:

- **Distance and transportation.** No grocery store in Mountville. Residents travel to Clinton, Laurens, or Greenwood. Transportation was repeatedly named the single largest barrier.
- **Cost.** In a rural area, the cost of food includes the food itself plus gas and time. It was noted that a \$20 grocery run can effectively become \$40, especially for those who must pay someone else to drive.
- **Affordability.** Many shop based on sales and buy "whatever the money allows."
- **Cooking knowledge and tools.** Limited knowledge of healthy meal prep, plus a lack of tools (quality knives, functioning stoves, pots and pans) needed to prepare fresh produce.

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|                                        | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Behavior and Mindset Shift.</b> Session participants described the need for "unlearning" traditional cooking practices and noted that vegetables are often disliked when not seasoned or cooked well.</li> <li>• <b>Health education.</b> Participants noted that some residents may not have the ability to access and <i>apply</i> health information, underscoring the need to meet people where they are rather than simply distributing information.</li> <li>• <b>Digital divide.</b> Inconsistent or limited internet access restricts how information reaches residents especially if the primary sharing is on social media (Facebook).</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |
| <i>Physical Activity/Active Living</i> | <p>Session participants identified several challenges that make it difficult for community members to stay active or use existing activity and recreation spaces.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Transportation.</b> Nearly all gyms, parks, and organized recreation are located outside Mountville.</li> <li>• <b>Cost and insurance.</b> Gym fees are a barrier for some community members. Further, session participants mention insurance coverage (specifically referring to the Silver Sneakers program) is inconsistent across locations.</li> <li>• <b>Safety and maintenance.</b> The nearest local park (Cross Hill) was described as unsafe and poorly maintained.</li> <li>• <b>Community engagement.</b> Declining turnout at community and fire-department meetings was noted; existing assets are underused largely because residents are unaware of them or out of habit.</li> <li>• <b>Time:</b> Busy and demanding schedules and competing priorities often overshadow physical activity participation.</li> </ul> |

## Ideas for the Future

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| <i>Imagine a healthier community. What changes or partnerships would make healthy eating</i> | <p><b>Locations &amp; Food Access</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Advocate for closer healthy-food access like a consistent popup market option for Mountville.</li> <li>• Encourage and stabilize the Cross Hill Dollar General's produce availability and hours.</li> </ul> <p><b>Local Food &amp; Farmer Connection</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Create a <b>list/calendar of farmers' markets, roadside stands, and local farmers</b> (including chicken, turkey, and produce growers and local protein) with locations, days, and operating hours.</li> <li>• Host a <b>monthly or recurring local farmers' market</b> at the Mountville community shelter area or the future Grange building so residents can buy directly from local growers.</li> <li>• Promote that many local farms sell directly to the public, not only at markets.</li> </ul> |
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*and active  
living easier for  
everyone?*

#### **Education & Resources**

- Provide healthy meal-preparation classes, including how to make traditional/country recipes flavorful with healthier alternatives, and how to use unfamiliar foods (e.g., flax seed).

#### **Organized Activities & Programs**

- Use the Mountville community shelter/picnic area (an untapped asset) for fitness classes, gatherings, and community events.
- Promote free options like the Faithful Workouts app and raise awareness of YMCA scholarships and reduced rates.
- Explore community walking groups, given that road-walking is already the most common activity.

#### **Improve & Activate Existing Facilities**

- Support restoration of the **Grange building** as an indoor community space for meetings, classes, and activities.
- Improve safety and maintenance of the Cross Hill park and explore a paved/accessible walking option.

#### **Community Engagement & Support**

- Host more frequent community conversations like this session (a direct request).
- Tap churches, the post office, the fire department, and the library to share information and recruit volunteers.
- Examine **cross-county reciprocity / shared services** (Greenwood vs. Laurens), given how often residents rely on Greenwood County, including gym/insurance coverage inconsistencies and Greenwood-resident-only vouchers.

#### **Communication & Outreach Strategy**

Participants identified the most effective channels for reaching Mountville residents:

- **Word of mouth** described as "king."
- **Churches** recommended as the first distribution point.
- **Utilize** the Mountville post office and the Cross Hill central location for flyer distribution. Residents regularly check the post office.
- **Flyers** at high traffic spots such as the Mayberry Diner.
- **Newspaper (Clinton Chronicle)** can be used for some information, though several participants felt few residents read it.
- **Facebook** is used by some, but not universal. It was noted that internet issues and access make paper formats important.

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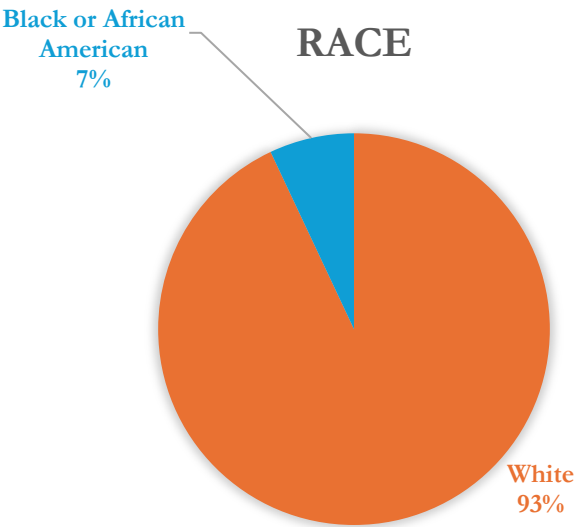
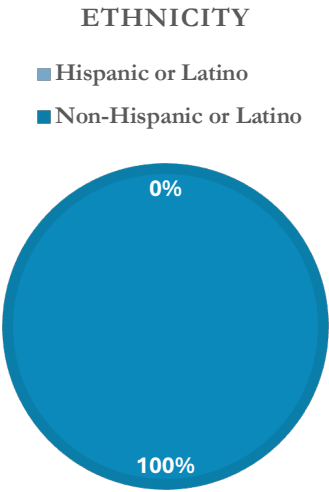
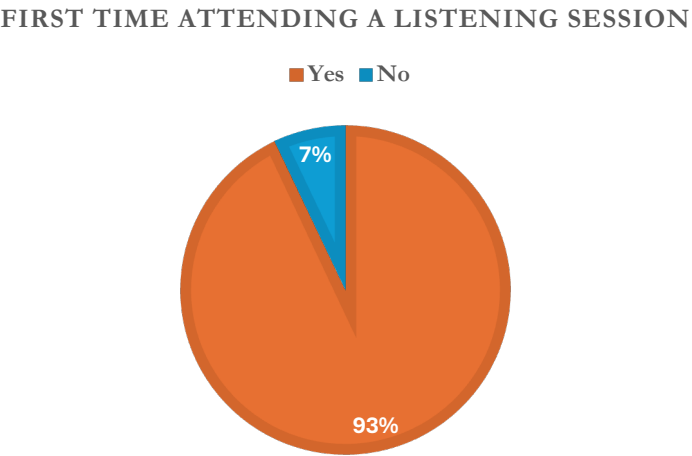
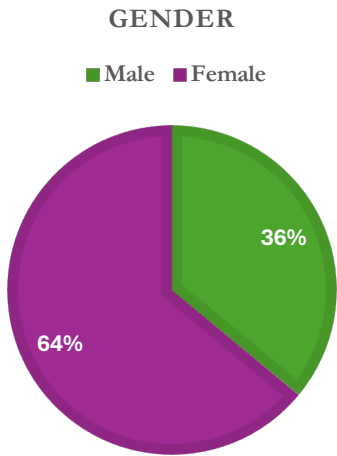
## Participant Profile

Upon arrival at the listening session, community members were asked to complete a demographic survey. Below are the results.

**Total Responses:** 15  
**Age Range:** 14–78 years  
**Median Age:** 53 years

Participants were from a range of cities and ZIP codes across Laurens County and nearby areas, including 29351, 29355, 29325, and 29108.

\*\*The number of responses is lower than the actual number of session participants. \*\*



- Multi-racial 0%
- Asian 0%
- Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander 0%
- American Indian or Alaskan Native 0%