

# Study finds Illinois is most critical hub in food distribution network

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Illinois is the most critical hub in the network of U.S. domestic food transfers, according to a new study by Megan Konar, an assistant professor of civil and environmental engineering, and colleagues at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. The study was published in the journal *Environmental Science and Technology*.

Much like the national airport [network](#) in which O'Hare International Airport is a major hub, Illinois plays the most central role in distributing [food](#) across the U.S. According to the report, the U.S. food network moves more than 400 million tons of food annually. Of that total, more than 70 million tons are transported through Illinois, the most of any state in the nation. That's enough food to feed every Illinois citizen a healthy diet for five and a half years.

"The state's geography and infrastructure, coupled with the large volume of commodities produced by Illinois farms each year, means Illinois is a vital player in the network," said Konar, who is also a visiting scholar at the University of Illinois Institute of Government and Public Affairs. Other important hubs include Louisiana (with its ports in New Orleans) and California.

Illinois has a critical food transportation infrastructure, including railway, the Mississippi River and the Great Lakes. The American Society of Civil Engineers grades the country's infrastructure every four years. In 2013 Illinois' infrastructure received a D+ (and the U.S. as a whole also received a D+). Illinois has 2,311 structurally deficient

bridges and 73 percent of major roads are in poor or mediocre quality. Konar's study demonstrates the importance of Illinois' infrastructure to national and global food security, and in turn demonstrates why deteriorating [infrastructure](#) is so problematic.

"With finite resources available for [infrastructure improvements](#), lawmakers can utilize this evidence to make strategic investments in areas that are most critical," Konar said. "Policymakers may want to target Illinois for infrastructural improvements, since it is such a critical node in the nation's food transportation network."

Provided by University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign

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