The Need for More Grocery Stores

Foods in Your Neighborhood Matter
A healthy diet – one that includes daily fresh fruit and vegetables – helps prevent obesity and costly chronic diseases like diabetes and heart disease. But in low-income, minority and rural communities in Louisiana, most people don’t live near grocery stores that sell a variety of healthful foods like fresh fruits and vegetables. Many of these neighborhoods are also overwhelmed by fast-food restaurants and convenience stores, selling mostly low-nutritional quality foods and snacks.

Making fresh produce more convenient by supporting stores that sell fruits and vegetables is one way government can create a healthier population, as well as encourage economic development and community resiliency.

Individuals have to decide for themselves whether to eat healthy or feed their families healthy meals. But in order to do that, healthy foods - especially fresh fruits and vegetables - must be convenient.

Grocery Stores are Community Anchors
- New grocery stores, and other food retailers can generate new jobs and act as a significant economic stimulus for communities.
- Supermarkets typically offer the greatest variety of healthy, high-quality products at the lowest cost, and shoppers generally prefer these stores to smaller grocery stores and convenience stores.
- Many studies have found that neighborhoods that have better access to supermarkets tend to have residents with healthier diets. Research has also found that having greater access to supermarkets and limited access to convenience stores and fast-food restaurants may reduce risk for obesity.

Economic Impact of Unhealthy Eating
- Obesity-related illness is estimated to carry a cost of $190 billion annually in the United States. This includes direct health care costs (physician visits, medication and nursing home care) and indirect costs (wages lost, future earnings lost by premature death).
- Louisiana ranks 2nd for obesity in the United States - one in three people are obese.

- A Call to Action -
  1. Encourage retailers to sell fresh fruits and vegetables and other healthy foods in all neighborhoods.
  2. Restrict the location and/or number of new fast-food restaurants.

What We Know:
Research across the country has shown strong connections between the neighborhood food environment and the health of residents. Local information is also available:
- A 2012 study from the Tulane Prevention Research Center (PRC) found that higher quality food environments decrease the risk of obesity and overweight for people living in southeast Louisiana.
- Another study found that each additional linear meter of store shelf space devoted to vegetables linked to an additional daily intake of 0.35 servings of vegetables.
- The Tulane PRC found that African-American neighborhoods have significantly fewer supermarkets and less fresh fruits and vegetables available than other neighborhoods.
- In New Orleans, there is roughly 1 supermarket for every 14,000 residents. The national ratio is 1 supermarket to 8,500 residents.
The Louisiana Senate passed a resolution to create the Healthy Food Retail Study Group, a committee of state senators, agency representatives, and nongovernmental stakeholders to investigate food access issues and report back in 2009. The Tulane PRC served on this committee and provided technical assistance including writing the group's report.

The Louisiana Healthy Food Retail Act was passed in 2009 to stimulate investment in healthy food retail outlets in underserved areas. The program was created in the Department of Agriculture and Forestry and is currently not funded.

Established in 2008 by the City of New Orleans, the Food Policy Advisory Committee (FPAC) studied food access issues in New Orleans. The Tulane PRC provided research for the FPAC when making its recommendations. One encouraged the use of grants and loans to support fresh-food retail projects located in underserved areas, as a priority for comprehensive neighborhood development.

In March 2011, the City of New Orleans began the Fresh Food Retailer Initiative, to provide low-interest and forgivable loans for food retailers that locate in underserved neighborhoods and commit to selling fresh fruits and vegetables. The $14 million program has awarded three loans so far, totaling roughly $2 million. The Tulane PRC has and is continuing to document the impact of this program by interviewing those who helped create it and surveying neighborhoods that will see new stores as a result of the financing.

Baton Rouge formed its own Food Access Policy Commission in February 2013, thanks in part to information from the New Orleans FPAC on how to develop a structure, create a role within city government, and bring together member organizations, government agencies and community partners.

Sterling Farms, a grocery store chain based in southeast Louisiana, opened its flagship store in Marrero, La., in March 2013. The company, owned by business partners Troy Henry, Jim Hatchett and actor Wendell Pierce, was founded on the principle of providing food access to underserved areas.

References

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