The Need for Grocery Stores

Foods in Your Neighborhood Matter:
A healthy diet 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.

Supporting stores that sell fresh fruits & vegetables can: create a healthier population, encourage economic development, & promote community resiliency.

Grocery Stores Offer Healthier Options:
• 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 and indirect costs.
• Louisiana ranks 1st for obesity in the United States - one in three people are obese.

New Orleans Research:
• 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 PRC 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 11,800 residents. The national ratio is 1 supermarket to 8,440 residents.

Supermarkets & Food Deserts in New Orleans
(Food desert is defined here as a low-income Census tract with the center of the tract being one mile or more from a supermarket.)
References


Success Stories: Louisiana in Action

- The Louisiana Senate created 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 2009.13 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.13 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 five loans so far, totaling more than $3 million. The Tulane PRC has and is continuing to document the impact of this program by interviewing those who helped create it13 and surveying neighborhoods.

- 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. The commission released its recommendations in July 2014.14

---

The Prevention Research Center at Tulane University is a member of the Prevention Research Centers Program, supported by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, under cooperative agreement #U48-DP-005050.