



New study examines why corner stores aren't stocking more healthful foods

May 30, 2013

Keith Brannon

Phone: 504-862-8789

kbrannon@tulane.edu

Programs that aim to encourage corner store owners to stock more healthful foods face steep — but not insurmountable — challenges, according to a new Tulane University study.

The Tulane Prevention Research Center (PRC) looked at how feasible it is for corner retailers located in so-called “food deserts” to stock more fresh fruits and vegetables. Researchers interviewed local produce wholesalers and corner store owners and surveyed customers and residents in three low-income neighborhoods without full-service grocery stores — the 7th Ward, Upper 9th Ward and 17th Ward — to gauge food buying and consumption patterns.

The study, which was published in the *Journal of Community Health*, was prompted by local and national efforts to fight obesity through incentive programs that encourage small retailers to stock more healthful foods.

PRC researchers found that selling fresh produce in neighborhood corner stores is difficult because of perceived low consumer demand, high delivery costs and inadequate equipment and shelving space. However, corner stores may be able to leverage their convenient locations to improve customer diets.

“Of corner store shoppers, 71 percent said they visited because the store was close to home, while another 20 percent said it was close to work,” said Keelia O’Malley, PRC program manager and the study’s lead author.

Though corner store owners said customers don’t buy fresh produce, more than 90 percent of those surveyed said they would buy fruits and vegetables, if they were available.

To overcome market barriers, the authors suggest:

- Business and government incentives to support stores that increase their stock of fresh produce;
- Coordination of produce orders by store operators as a group to create higher-volume deliveries that are more attractive and profitable for wholesalers.

Other research suggests that promotional campaigns, like signs inside and outside stores, can help draw attention to stocked produce.