



Food: A Question of Access

Addressing Poor Nutrition, Food Availability, and Policy

Prior to the flood that devastated New Orleans, access to fresh healthy foods was already challenging for many residents. Since Hurricane Katrina, food availability has only worsened, putting the health of residents - especially children - at great risk. No city policies currently exist that encourage or promote efforts to change this situation. Food policy should address the issue and be a catalyst for change.

- » There are only twelve supermarkets in New Orleans, most of which are either Uptown or in Algiers. Based on a population of 230,000, that's an average of more than 19,000 residents per grocery store.
- » The average 6- to 11-year-old eats only 3.5 servings of fruits and vegetables a day, achieving only half the recommended seven servings per day for this age group.
- » Even when children do consume vegetables, fried potatoes (including French fries and potato chips) make up 46% of the vegetable servings consumed by children.

Few Alternatives

Corner stores don't usually pick up the slack. Most neighborhood stores stock an abundance of high-calorie snacks and sodas, with little or no fresh fruits or vegetables available in the store.

- » In 2006, the Chicago Food Desert study showed that the farther a neighborhood is from a grocery store, the higher the rate of obesity in that neighborhood.
- » Both here and locally, grocery stores have fled urban centers under the incorrect assumption that urban grocery stores cannot be as profitable as suburban stores.
- » Many New Orleans residents do their grocery shopping in the suburbs but many more don't have access to transportation, a situation worsened since Katrina.

What can be done?

While the issues of food access and availability are complex, they are not insurmountable. *Everyone* deserves equal access to healthy and nutritious foods. Communities across the country are finding creative ways to increase the availability of fresh produce in low-income, inner-city neighborhoods.

- » The Pennsylvania Fresh Food Financing Initiative, coordinated by The Food Trust, is a public/private partnership that encourages development of supermarkets in underserved communities. The initiative provides much-needed financing to grocers who choose to open stores in low-income neighborhoods. Since 2004, the program has changed the food access landscape of the state and has been recognized nationally.

- » In San Francisco, the “Good Neighbor Program” brought together Literacy for Environmental Justice and the San Francisco Department of Public Health to provide economic incentives for corner stores in Bayview-Hunters Point to stock healthy foods. Several stores have taken advantage of the program and have since cut back on alcohol, cigarettes, and junk food to make way for fresh produce and organic milk.
- » The City of New York’s Healthy Bodega Initiative initially targeted a switch from whole to 1% milk. It was so successful that it continued with a fresh fruit and vegetable program under which participating small groceries received free shipments of ready-to-eat local carrots and apples. The stores then sold the produce under a “buy one, get one free” deal.

What New Orleans needs

New Orleans is experiencing a period of great hope and promise, but thus far the food system seems to have been left behind. It’s time to change that through the creation of a Food Policy Advisory Committee. This group of advocates, retailers, bankers, and planners would come together to study the problem of a lack of access to healthy food among New Orleans children and would make recommendations to alleviate the problem. The Committee’s recommendations would include ways to fund such programs in ways that are beneficial to all parties.

It’s time we addressed the issue of food access in New Orleans and made healthy food available to all of our children.

Supporters of creating a Food Policy Advisory Committee:

