



Just Deserts

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Though for many of us they are a mundane part of life, grocery stores are actually quite a luxury, and one that often gets taken for granted. According to the Food Empowerment Project, a food desert is any residential area that is not within a convenient distance to a grocery store. Shoppers get easy access to a wide variety of foods, most importantly fresh fruits and vegetables. When a parent looking to feed their children cannot easily procure these foods, they and their children are often forced into unhealthy eating patterns. Gas stations and convenience stores are much easier to come by in any part of the country and they might even be walking distance from where people live. Here, they can easily buy tasty snacks and treats to take care of the midday munchies.

But what if grabbing a quick bite at a gas station was your only resort? Or what if you had to weigh the cost of transportation when going to the grocery store? I once watched a documentary where one of the subjects was a single mother living in Philadelphia. In order to get to the grocery store she had to take the bus to the train station and switch trains at least once when there was a bodega not far from her apartment. She was simply making the healthy choice for her family but had to take money out of her shopping budget in order to just get to the grocery store.

Many major cities in the US have taken steps to lessen the burden of food deserts in their jurisdiction:

Chicago, with almost 1,000,000 people living outside a reasonable radius of a grocery store, aims to open co-ops in such neighborhoods. These markets will offer a wide range of healthy foods as well as cooking and nutrition classes to help people make healthier decisions.

Los Angeles passed a temporary prohibition in one of their food desert neighborhoods on fast food eateries in 2008 which actually increased the local demand for better choices. City Council passed economic incentives for grocery stores and sit down eating establishments.

New York City started a Green Carts program to address the rapid closure of metropolitan grocery stores. Green Carts is a system of vendors who sell fresh fruits and vegetables on the street at affordable prices. This not only helps address the food desert issues but creates more jobs in lower socio-economic neighborhoods.

References

Eldreth, Ethan. "Food Deserts." *Food Empowerment Project*. 2011.
<https://foodispower.org/access-health/food-deserts/>. 14 May 2020.