

Food Desert Statistics

Obesity is a big problem in the United States. Studies show that certain racial groups are more affected by obesity than others. These problems may be worse in certain communities because access to affordable and nutritious food is difficult. This is especially true for those living in low-income communities of color and rural areas with limited access to grocery stores. These areas are often called “food deserts.”

Residents of food deserts may rely more on convenience stores and fast food restaurants since access to grocery stores is limited. These convenience stores and fast food restaurants don’t typically sell the variety of foods needed for a healthy diet such as fresh fruits and vegetables, whole grains, fresh dairy and lean meat products. If they do sell them, they often cost more than they cost at grocery stores. This puts those who live in food deserts at a financial and nutritional disadvantage.

Studies show that:

- Of all U.S. households, 2.3 million (2.2 percent) live more than a mile from a supermarket and do not have access to a vehicle. An additional 3.2 percent live between a half-mile to a mile from a supermarket with no vehicle access.
- 23.5 million people live in low-income areas more than one mile from a supermarket.
- Low-income census tracts have half as many supermarkets as wealthy tracts.
- 8 percent of African Americans live in a census tract with a supermarket, compared to 31 percent of whites.
- Low-income zip codes have 30 percent more convenience stores, which tend to lack healthy items, than middle-income zip codes.
- Residents in 20 percent of rural counties live more than 10 miles from a supermarket.
- For every additional supermarket in a census tract, produce consumption increases for 32 percent of African Americans and 11 percent of whites.

Sources:

“Access to Affordable and Nutritious Food: Measuring and Understanding Food Deserts and their Consequences.” Report (2009) to Congress from the United States Department of Agriculture.

“The Grocery Gap: Who Has Access to Healthy Food and Why It Matters.” Report from Policy Link and the Food Trust.