BACKGROUND

According to the United States Department of Agriculture, food deserts are defined as urban neighborhoods and rural areas without access to fresh, healthy and affordable food for the population living there. With no supermarkets, grocery stores or farmer’s markets, these communities may have only fast food restaurants or small convenience stores that do not carry fresh produce or other healthy food options. The lack of access to safe and nutritious foods can contribute to a poor diet and lead to higher levels of obesity, heart-disease and other diet-related diseases.

In many urban areas across the United States – from Detroit to Chicago, Los Angeles, New York and elsewhere – food deserts pose a real threat to the health of millions of Americans every day. The White House estimated that in 2010 that over 23.5 million Americans (including 6.5 million children) lived in food deserts. The United States is one of the richest countries in the world, with a wealth of resources and access to food, yet millions of people still lack the access to healthy and nutritious food.

Food deserts are an issue in many communities. This case study includes specific information about food deserts in areas like Detroit, Los Angeles, Dallas, the Bay Area, Navajo Nation, North Minneapolis, Columbus, Washington DC, Baltimore, and Charlotte. The case study will also look at the major causes and effects of food deserts such as socioeconomic inequality and health risks.

POSSIBLE ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS

- Who are the people that live in food deserts and what happens to them?
- What are some strategies people and communities are using to bring healthier food options to food deserts? What have the results been?
- How can food deserts exist right next to communities with plenty of healthy foods?
- Do people with access to good food have a responsibility to those who do not have that same access?
- How does food affect health? What other factors affect people’s health in food deserts?

RESOURCES

Personal Stories

- Place Matters: Food Deserts (Clint Smith)
- No Easy Access: Food Deserts in D.C., Toni’s Story (NPR)
- * Ron Finley: A guerilla gardener in South Central LA (TED Talk)
- Living in a Desert - Los Angeles
- * Food Desert Stories - Challenges and Solutions to Accessing Healthy Foods (Florida Dept. of Health)
- Small Plates: Five Personal Stories of Food Insecurity in Metropolitan Detroit (Fair Food Network)
- The New Face of Hunger: Three Stories (National Geographic)

Art & Images

- * Grow Food (Appetite For Change)
- * Student Artists Tackling Charlotte’s ‘Food Deserts’ Through Art (Spectrum News)
- Baltimore’s Art Deserts (GovEx)
Articles

- As it turns out, having a grocery store nearby doesn’t change eating habits (Newsela)
- Navajos Fight Their Food Desert With Junk Food And Soda Taxes (NPR)
- Food Truck Pioneer Battles Food Deserts With High Cuisine (NPR)
- Eliminating Food Deserts Will Take A Marriage of Private And Public Enterprise (Huffington Post)
- Food in poor neighborhoods often not so fresh (Newsela)
- Homeownership, Wealth Accumulation, and Segregation: Housing Policy and the Creation of Food Deserts in Columbus, OH (ChangeLab Solutions)
- Why it takes more than a grocery store to eliminate a ‘food desert’ (PBS)
- The Socio-Economic Significance of Food Deserts (PBS)
- Black children see more TV ads for junk food than white kids, study shows (Newsela)
- Transforming Food Deserts and Swamps to Fight Obesity (Huffington Post)
- California Food Deserts: Nearly 1 Million Live Far From Supermarkets, Grocery Stores (Huffington Post)
- Food Deserts Aren’t the Problem (Slate)
- Why Are There So Few Black-Owned Grocery Stores? (Civil Eats)

Videos and Audio

- For Native Americans in Minnesota, food is a sign of oppression (Mic)
- Food Forward Pilot: Urban Farming (PBS)
- Detroit Truck Responds To City's Food Desert Crisis” (NPR)
- Supermarkets don’t go to ‘food deserts’ (Bay Area) (Marketplace)
- The House We Live In (PBS)
- What Change Are You Hungry For? (Appetite for Change)
- Where's the Food?: A Food Desert Story in Dallas (Transmedia)
- Can Tech Take on Food Deserts?: Hack for LA (CNN)
- Building an oasis in a Philadelphia food desert (PBS)
- Renaissance Co-op Doc (part 2 of 3): The Cooperative Solution

Data and Maps

- Food Environment Atlas (USDA)
- Food Access Research Atlas (United States Department of Agriculture)
- The Instagrams of Food Deserts (The Atlantic)
- Detroit Food Map
- Food Deserts in America Infographic (Tulane University)
- America’s Food Deserts (The Daily Good)
- Get Informed (Feeding America)
- California Food Guide Hunger and Food Insecurity (Barbara McNelly et al.)