

# News Release



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## ***Food Desert to Food Oasis: Promoting Grocery Store Development in South Los Angeles***

**Los Angeles, CA**—Ready access to healthy food is taken for granted in most neighborhoods. But that is not the case in South Los Angeles, where many residents must travel outside the community to find fresh and nutritious food or accept expired meat and brown bananas. *Food Desert to Food Oasis: Promoting Grocery Store Development in South Los Angeles*, released today by Community Health Councils and available at [www.chc-inc.org/policy-briefs](http://www.chc-inc.org/policy-briefs), examines policy and systems changes the City of Los Angeles and Los Angeles County can adopt to attract full-service grocery stores and improve access to affordable healthy foods in what is now a food desert.

“Quality grocery stores providing nutritious, healthy food options are scarce in South LA,” says Lark Galloway-Gilliam, executive director of CHC. “The lack of full-service grocery stores carrying fresh, quality healthy food has fueled the high rates of death and disability due to diet-related diseases like heart disease and diabetes in communities like South Los Angeles. Research has shown for each additional supermarket, the likelihood of residents meeting nutritional guidelines increases by one third. It’s time for policymakers and grocers alike to breakdown stigma, misperceptions and bureaucratic obstacles and bring quality stores back into our community.”

As in many inner-city communities where lower-income and racial or ethnic minority individuals reside, South LA has suffered from a dearth of private investment and the inequitable distribution of public resources. Home to over 1.3 million people, the area’s 60 full-service grocery stores average 22,156 residents. In West LA, 57 stores average only 11,150 residents. South LA residents are forced to travel to buy the food they need and spend a significant amount of the almost \$1.2 billion spent on food for the home outside of their community. The area possesses untapped market potential and yet the economic opportunity and benefit to the community is diverted elsewhere, creating a “food desert” and significant barriers to healthful eating that are too high for many individuals and families to overcome. Transforming the food desert to a food oasis requires a comprehensive long-term strategy to improve healthy living and spur commercial revitalization.

This brief is the first in a series of reports on transforming South LA’s food desert. *Food Desert to Food Oasis* provides recommendations on policy and system changes the City and County of Los Angeles

can adopt to attract healthy food retail to the South LA community and includes case studies of successful strategies from across the country. The report focuses on the development of new full-service grocery stores in underserved neighborhoods, and documents the current food resource environment in South LA and the area's market potential. The recommendations are based on a year-long analysis by members of CHC's Food Resource Development Workgroup on how to overcome barriers to new development in South LA.

“Communities across the country are creating innovative and effective strategies that transform food deserts,” says Gwendolyn Flynn, policy director at Community Health Councils. “With momentum building in states across the country and at the federal level through the establishment of a national Healthy Food Financing Initiative to fund the development of grocery stores and other healthy food outlets in underserved communities, the opportunity is now to improve South LA's food resource environment.”

Even under a tight budget and difficult economic times, many policy and systems changes are viable for the City and County of Los Angeles and will provide a return on investment in the long term. These include:

1. *Prioritizing Grocery Store Development* and making access to full-service grocery stores a top concern for comprehensive neighborhood development in South LA.
2. *Establishing Fresh and Healthy Food Enterprise Zones* in high-need neighborhoods and including them in South LA Community Plan updates.
3. *Developing a Skilled Workforce* by partnering with job training and placement programs to increase vocational training and promote grocery jobs at stores in Healthy Food Enterprise Zones.
4. *Facilitating the Development of a Food Hub* in South LA that would serve as a central distribution point for fresh foods, provide coordination, and link local and regional farmers to inner-city stores.
5. *Supporting the Creation of New Funding Initiatives*, including Federal and State proposals.

Food access is too important to be left to market forces alone. Policymakers must work with the community and grocery industry to eliminate road blocks and attract new full-service grocery stores to South LA and other underserved areas.

**Read the full report at [www.chc-inc.org/policy-briefs](http://www.chc-inc.org/policy-briefs) .**

*Community Health Councils is a non-profit, community-based health promotion, advocacy and policy organization. Established in 1992, CHC's mission is to improve health and increase access to quality healthcare for uninsured, economically-disadvantaged, and underserved populations.*

*The Food Resource Development Workgroup includes representatives of community-based health and economic development organizations, national policy advocates, local neighborhood advisory councils, the grocery industry, Community Redevelopment Agency of the City of Los Angeles, Los Angeles City Department of Planning, and delegates to the City, County and State legislatures.*