

Our Hungry Planet

Supplementary Materials



Eliminating Food Deserts

A food desert is a residential area without easy access to fresh and healthy foods such as fruits and vegetables. The United States Department of Agriculture defines food deserts differently depending on where people are living. In cities and rural towns, a food desert is defined as lack of healthy food access within a mile of a person's home. In rural areas, where people are more likely to own a car, food deserts are defined as lack of healthy food access within 10 miles of a person's residence.¹

In the United States it is estimated that 23 million people live in food deserts. Lack of access to healthy, affordable fruits, vegetables and whole grains can lead to poor diets. Eating too much fast food that is high in fat, salt, and sugar can contribute to obesity and diet-related diseases such as cardiovascular disease and some cancers. Having access to fresh fruits and vegetables has the potential to improve people's diets and health.

Although a neighborhood's lack of healthy food does play a role in unhealthy diets, it's not the only thing that determines a person's eating habits. As it turns out, a family's income plays a major role in their diets, even more so than proximity to grocery stores with healthy food. Recent research suggests that introducing a supermarket doesn't necessarily improve nearby residents' diets.² This suggests some families may not always have the time to plan and prepare home-cooked meals.

Introducing a supermarket into low-income neighborhoods may also have secondary impacts. Grocery stores make neighborhoods more attractive to live in, and in several instances in the U.S., introducing new stores into neighborhoods has increased housing costs, potentially making it more expensive to live in those places.³

To learn about other solutions to global food issues, read more at [Our Hungry Planet](#).

¹ [USDA \(November, 2015\)](#)

² [Guminski, Sarah \(October, 2015\)](#)

³ [Sullivan, Daniel Monroe \(2014\)](#)





Weighing the Benefits and Drawbacks of Strategies to Eliminate Food Deserts

For a complex problem, we need to evaluate how a solution fares across multiple dimensions:	Benefits	Drawbacks
Environmental Factors		
Social & Cultural Factors		
Economic Factors		



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Weighing the Benefits and Drawbacks of Strategies to Eliminate Food Deserts



For a complex problem, we need to evaluate how a solution fares across multiple dimensions:	Benefits	Drawbacks
Environmental Factors	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Living close to fresh and healthy food may lead to less miles driven in a car.• More access to fruits and vegetables may lead to less meat consumption.	
Social & Cultural Factors	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Having access to more fruits and vegetables may lead to a healthier diet.• Access to a grocery store within walking distance may promote more exercise.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Not everyone has the time to cook vegetables or prepare salads.
Economic Factors	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Improved diets could reduce healthcare costs.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Grocery stores make neighborhoods more attractive to live in, potentially making housing costs more expensive.

Additional Resources

Atlantic: [Are Food Deserts to Blame for America's Poor Eating Habits?](#)

New York Times: [Giving the Poor Easy Access to Healthy Food Doesn't Mean They'll Buy It](#)

NPR: [How To Find A Food Desert Near You](#)

