

Chelsea Doig  
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Extended Abstract

Title: Food Deserts in New York State: A Policy Recommendation

The lack of access to healthy foods for people living across New York State is contributing to an increase in the prevalence of diet-related chronic diseases. Areas that lack access to healthy foods are termed “food deserts”. Food deserts, as defined by the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), are “parts of the country void of fresh fruit, vegetables, and other healthful whole foods, usually found in impoverished areas (“USDA Defines Food,” n.d.).” Previous research shows that the 2015 prevalence of type-2 diabetes in New York was as high as 10.3% (DiNapoli, 2015). Cardiovascular disease has also shown to be a growing area of concern as the 2014 Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System (BRFSS) Brief stated that 1 in 5 New Yorkers 65 years and older self-reported having some form of cardiovascular disease. As the prevalence of diet-related chronic diseases increases, it is costing the State 7.6 billion dollars each year (Seserman & Whalen, 2011). The purpose of this research is to analyze how food deserts are contributing to health problems in New York State and to propose a policy recommendation to address the lack of access to healthy food for New York State residents.

In 2011, the USDA identified 32 out of 62 New York counties as food deserts, leaving nearly 650,000 residents lacking grocery stores or farmers markets that sell healthy food in their areas (Seserman & Whalen, 2011). The very few state policies enacted to address these food desert areas are showing some success. However, they have not had a significant enough impact to completely solve the problem. This research not only reviews current legislation regarding food deserts, but also considers the positions of stakeholders and the political context in which

the issue exists. The voting public's autonomy is also considered in the analysis, as ethical concerns are expected when regulating what type of food should be sold and consumed.

The research concludes in a policy recommendation for the New York State Department of Health to address food deserts. This policy recommendation provides a plan to increase the sales of healthy, nutritious foods by establishing and operating grocery stores and farmers markets with funding from State subsidies. In order to receive these subsidies, these businesses must only sell healthy food or result in loss of funding. The aim of this policy recommendation is to achieve the overall goal of increasing access to healthy foods, while considering ethical autonomy issues and stakeholder concerns. This policy recommendation allows for the public to preserve their autonomy by permitting non-subsidized businesses to sell any product it wants and also allowing the public to choose what type of food they want to consume.

Though this policy requires funding from the State, it is important to note that an increased access to healthy foods statistically leads to increased consumption of these healthier foods, promoting an overall healthier lifestyle (Treuhaft & Karpyn, 2010). Improved diets will decrease the prevalence of diet-related chronic diseases that are currently burdening the people of New York. Decreasing the prevalence of these diseases will improve the quality of life for New Yorkers and decrease the healthcare costs spent treating and managing these diseases.

## Works Cited

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