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Storyboard #9 of 10

Think globally.
Shop locally.



Why it matters: MG finds that the regular study and monitoring of food access by type of venue (mainstream and fringe) is extremely important. Perhaps even more than housing, food is the most basic and necessary consumer good. Everyone consumes food multiple times each day as part of the daily necessity of eating to live. Because we find that there are positive public health benefits that correlate with the location patterns of mainstream grocery stores, increased mainstream grocery store options are generally beneficial to most types of communities. Said another way, many types of consumers rely on the food stores to which they have the most access, even if, for health reasons, they prefer or require other types of food options. **The Convenience Food Factor** (meaning the influence of geographic access on food purchasing decisions – Gallagher, 2008) can impact many different types of households, including higher income households with cars, although it likely has the greatest impact on poorer households without cars.

What are your food shopping patterns and how much are they influenced by the types of food options that are closest to your home?

Improving Corner Stores

What communities can do: Support those grocery stores that are providing high quality healthy foods. Grocers operate on very tight and small margins. This makes it financially hard for the grocer to keep up product diversification if those products are not moving from shelves. Shoppers expect certain types of fresh vegetables, meats, and other perishable items, which, unlike retail products such as clothes and tires, do not have a long shelf life that allows retailers to weather seasonal and cyclical ups and downs in sales. For example, shoppers might expect to be able to buy fresh and attractive organic tomatoes, but if the tomatoes sit on the grocer's shelves for too long, they go bad, and the grocer interprets this as a signal that there is not a local market for that product and might cease to offer it. When shoppers realize that they cannot count on the store to offer organic tomatoes, they increase their trend of sending their food dollars elsewhere if they can. This is tempered by the Convenience Food Factor, as most of us will still primarily rely on the food options closest to us. Still, even a small drop in sales can hurt both the store and the consumer. When profit margins decrease, but operational costs such as rent, taxes, security, personnel, insurance, maintenance, etc. are fixed, the unit cost of goods will have to rise to cover the store's expenses. Corners will have to be cut, and stores that undergo this type of cost-cutting and deferred maintenance begin to have shabbier shopping environments. This means the selection and quality of goods and the overall shopping experience will go down while prices go up. **Talk to your local store owners about the types of fresh and healthy foods, as well as the shopping environment, that you expect as consumers.** Once they start making improvements, see what you can do to reward and encourage them to do more.