Inclusive Food Retail: Why Should Neighborhood Demographics Play a Role in Goods Carried by Local Food Markets?
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Abstract
Food and culture are closely related and play an important role in everyday life. This research seeks to answer the question: “Why should neighborhood demographics play a role in goods carried by local food markets?” To answer this question a mobile produce market was used as a case study. Created to provide healthy affordable produce to food insecure areas, the market travels to six locations throughout the city of Buffalo, NY. Market customer interviews revealed that they wanted to see more culturally preferred produce for sale. Analysis of existing literature, interview data, U.S. census data, and population distribution maps led to the conclusion that neighborhood demographics should play a role in goods carried by local food markets to provide culturally preferred products and ultimately increase fruit and vegetable consumption among minorities. Despite a growing body of research on food insecure minority neighborhoods, the role of cultural food preference is rarely studied and needs further examination.

Importance of Access to Culturally Preferred Foods: Findings From the Literature
- Minorities are disproportionately affected by chronic health conditions and most of their diets fall short of recommended fruit and vegetable intake.
- One study found that inadequate access to commonly consumed and culturally preferred food products might be a barrier to healthy eating among minorities.
- Another study found that perceptions and cultural significance of food play a role in minority food shopping behavior.
  - Individuals with access to transportation were willing to travel out of their neighborhoods to ethnic and specialty food stores in order to purchase familiar products.
- Culturally preferred produce is important as it is familiar and plays a role in maintaining traditions and group identity.
- Research regarding the relation between access to culturally preferred food products and the health of minorities is lacking.

Case Study: Mobile Market Project
- Buffalo is a segregated city with African Americans and other minorities primarily residing in underserved neighborhoods.
- Large supermarkets have redlined minority neighborhoods leaving residents with limited food retail options.
- Corner stores and small grocers have limited quantities of produce.
- Few ethnic food stores sprinkled throughout the city are the exception.
- The Mobile Market Project (MM) is operated by The Massachusetts Avenue Project (MAP) to promote food security.
  - Mobile food stand travels to six locations in underserved neighborhoods throughout Buffalo.
  - Sells fresh produce from local farmers from June – November.
  - Accepts a variety of payments including cash, Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), Women, Infants and Children (WIC), Senior Farmers’ Market Coupon Program, and Double Up Bucks.

Research Methods and Data
- Reviewed existing literature.
- Created Maps: GIS software and census data to display distributions of race/ethnicity in relation to MM locations.
- Identified Recommendations: Based on existing literature and evidence from GIS maps.

Findings
- Mobile Markets serve Black, Asian, and Puerto Rican neighborhoods.
- Populations heavily affected by chronic health conditions.
- Diet lacking necessary amount of fruits and vegetables as a result of limited access to both commonly consumed American produce and culturally preferred produce.
- A significant number (46%) of Mobile Market interview participants requested more and a larger variety of fruit for sale.
- Others (15%) wanted to see a larger variety of produce overall, requesting collard greens and kale.
- People with unique identities have their own culture and traditions, much of which involves food.
- Increased presence of familiar and culturally preferred produce in minority neighborhoods would benefit neighborhood residents by providing them with the healthy food they prefer to consume.
- At each of the Mobile Market locations there is a demand for culturally specific food like pineapples, melons, and collard greens—an increased supply of these items would likely attract more customers and increase sales at the markets.

Recommendations and Future Research
- To improve food access mobile markets should carry culturally preferred produce.
- Account for neighborhood demographics and racial/ethnic trends at each location.
- Mobile market operators should engage with customers to learn about their culture and preferences.

Research on food insecurity should take into account food preference. In depth studies needed:
- How does access to culturally preferred food impact long-term mental and physical health of minorities?
- How do familiarity with and perceptions of accessible food affect minority heath?

References