



HEALTHY FOOD RETAILERS

Opening doors to healthy food in every New Jersey community

- ❖ **340,000 New Jersey residents live in 134 federally-recognized “food deserts,”** or areas that lack access to healthy food retailers that provide affordable fruits, vegetables, whole grains, low-fat milk, and other foods that make up the full range of a healthy diet.
- ❖ New Jersey has **25% fewer supermarkets** per capita than the national average and needs **269** new supermarkets in order to meet that average.
- ❖ **Low-income residents** are particularly burdened by food deserts and may be forced to **decrease their consumption of fresh fruits and vegetables** because of the added cost of travelling to and from the store, and may forgo purchasing fresh fruits and vegetables in favor of shopping at local convenience stores.

What is the state of healthy food retailers in New Jersey?

Many communities across New Jersey lack access to healthy food retailers and have been classified as “food deserts.” The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) defines food deserts as low-income census tracts (with a poverty rate of 20% or higher or median family income below 80% of the area's medium income) where a substantial number of people (500 people or 33% of the census tract) are located more than one mile from a grocery store in urban areas or more than ten miles in rural areas as food deserts. The USDA has identified 134 food deserts in New Jersey affecting 340,000 residents. The Reinvestment Fund, a non-profit organization, has identified 924,000 residents—10% of New Jersey's population—as food insecure (even if not in a federally-recognized “food desert”).

*Check out programs to improve geographic access to healthy food retailers in the **New Jersey PATHS Report:** pp. 29–31, 71–73*

What are the benefits of improved geographic access?

Lack of geographic access to healthy foods can reduce the quantity of fresh fruits and vegetables in residents' diets. In turn, these unhealthy diets impact the rate of obesity and type 2 diabetes. Improved geographic access can reverse these trends and is especially necessary in rural and urban areas, as the majority of supermarkets in New Jersey are located in suburban areas.

What should New Jersey do?

1. The Legislature can support the New Jersey Food Access Initiative and other programs aimed at **offering grants and loans for retail food operations** that open in low-access areas, as proposed by Senator Norcross's bill to redistribute sales tax revenue.
2. New Jersey can also **offer grants or tax incentives to corner stores** to offer healthy foods.
3. The Legislature can join non-profits and national programs to **expand farmers markets** and encourage their development in new areas.

FOR MORE INFORMATION, CONTACT:

The Center for Health Law and Policy Innovation | Email: chlpi@law.harvard.edu