

Independent Grocery Stores Boost Urban Fruit, Veggie Consumption

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(PhysOrg.com) -- A new study from Detroit finds that the food environment of a neighborhood — the presence or absence of grocery stores, food markets and convenience stores and whether they sell fresh produce — influences how many fruits and vegetables are eaten daily.

The study suggests that independent grocery stores can improve access to healthy foods in areas where supermarket chains choose not to venture. Having a large grocery store in the neighborhood boosted the average fruit and vegetable intake by 0.69 servings per day.

The amount of increase did not differ between African-Americans and whites, but Latinos with a large local grocery store ate 2.2 more servings daily than did African-Americans. The study appears in the March-April issue of the *American Journal of Health Promotion*.

Although chain supermarkets were scarce, large independent grocery stores were more common. “The results suggest that large grocery stores may be important nutritional resources in neighborhoods and extends previous research that has demonstrated similar effects of chain supermarkets,” said lead author Shannon Zenk, Ph.D., an assistant professor at the University of Illinois at Chicago College of Nursing.

Many studies have noted that the scarcity of outlets for fresh fruits and vegetables, especially large supermarkets, in low-income urban neighborhoods reduces their consumption. This study looked at three neighborhoods in one city and compared data on fruit and vegetable intake of adults across multiple racial and ethnic groups.

The researcher also took availability, affordability, variety and quality of fresh produce and store location into account.

“The presence of a convenience store in the

neighborhood was associated with lower consumption of fruits and vegetables among Latinos,” Zenk said. “This may suggest that the relatively inexpensive packaged foods typically sold at many convenience stores may replace more healthful food choices, such as fruits and vegetables, in the diet of Latinos.”

“What is interesting about this study is that they compared the effect of these stores in a multiethnic group,” said Sanae Inagami, M.D. Immigrants generally have healthier eating habits compared to U.S.- born Americans, even those of similar ethnicity, she noted. Inagami, an assistant professor of medicine at the University of Pittsburgh, had no affiliation with the new study.

Fruit and vegetable stands and trucks might also play a role in increasing the availability of good affordable produce in underserved neighborhoods, Zenk said.

Provided by Health Behavior News Service

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