



SFDPH Program on Health, Equity, and Sustainability

Urban Health and Place Team

Retail Food Availability Survey – June 2010



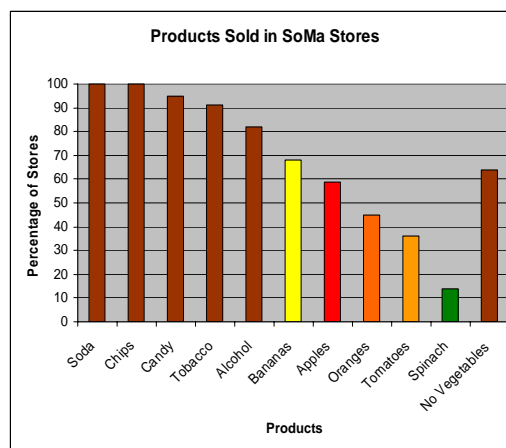
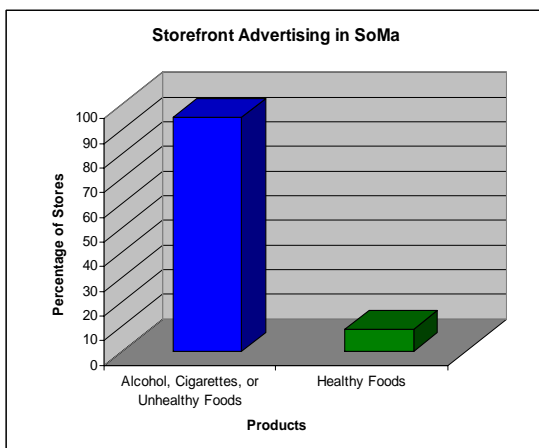
Retail Food Availability Survey

Description

The Retail Food Availability Survey is a survey which assesses the availability of healthy foods within stores, and therefore within neighborhoods, to determine community food security. This survey aims to examine the availability of certain foods, all of which are components of the USDA's Thrifty Food Plan Market Basket, and other factors influencing food purchases within stores in low-income neighborhoods in San Francisco. The Retail Food Availability Survey can help assess food security in neighborhoods. The survey consists of store- and food-related measures such as store type, price, availability and variety, quality, organic produce, store characteristics (e.g., cleanliness), and demographic information. Low-income, minority communities typically have fewer supermarkets and grocery stores than higher socioeconomic status neighborhoods with primarily White residents, and therefore disproportionately suffer from problems of food insecurity.

Background and Development

In the summer of 2007, the survey was piloted in 55 stores within the designated boundaries of San Francisco's South of Market (SoMa) District and continued into 2008. The pilot was conducted by a graduate school public health intern from UC Berkeley. The pilot began with a literature review of market basket and food availability studies to develop a survey to use in SoMa. The survey was pilot tested in the Tenderloin and Hayes Valley. SFDPH staff then spent four months surveying all but one store in SoMa's 2.1 square miles and entered the data into a database for subsequent analysis. The survey results are being used to inform neighborhoods that a variety of healthy, affordable, good quality products are not available in all store types; inform development plans in SoMa; identify incentives to open up small grocery or produce stores; and reaffirm that additional corner/liquor stores are not needed. See the figures below for results of the SoMa pilot survey.



San Francisco has approximately 1,488 food stores, ranging from grocery stores, to supermarkets and convenience stores, to produce markets. Based on Standard Industry Code (SIC) classification data, San Francisco has 616 grocery stores and 80 convenience stores. To determine the accessibility of food, previous studies have measured the number and type of food retailers by industry code, determined where they are located, and calculated their geographic distribution. According to SIC classification, food stores that mainly carry snack items and beverages (both alcoholic and non-alcoholic) are categorized as grocery stores.

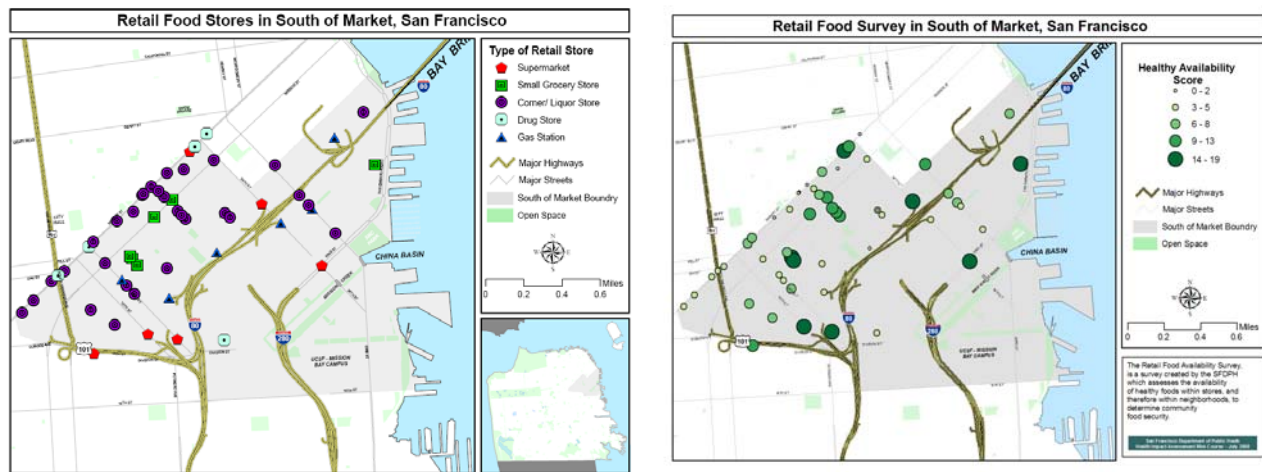


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While many of these stores are technically categorized as grocery stores, they are not necessarily sufficient suppliers of healthy foods and may not adequately contribute to community food security. Additionally, these types of classifications do not reveal qualitative differences between supermarkets, such as price, quality of foods, availability of fresh produce, and cultural preferences, which are other important factors for consideration of food accessibility. While correctly classified grocery stores and corner stores that sell affordable, fresh produce and other healthy food products do exist in low-income San Francisco neighborhoods, like the Mission District, they are still in the minority.



Collaborations/Constituencies Involved

The content of the Retail Food Availability Survey is a result of a collaboration between SFDPH, UC Berkeley - School of Public Health, and San Francisco Food Systems. As the survey is further developed, there will be additional outreach to other retail food experts.

Relevance to Health and Health Equity

The inability to access affordable, nutritious, high-quality foods in many neighborhoods is contributing to problems of food insecurity for many San Franciscans. Food security, defined by the US Department of Agriculture as having access by all people at all times to enough food for an active, healthy life, is vital for the health of all communities. Residents of low-income neighborhoods disproportionately suffer from problems of food insecurity. A primary reason for food insecurity is the lack of access to healthy food retailers and the unavailability of nutritious food choices within stores. Limited access to healthy foods can result in problems of under- and over-nutrition; a deficiency of vital nutrients and calories can lead to underweight and an increased risk of illness, while an excess of poor quality energy sources can result in problems associated with being overweight and obese.

Applications and Policy Targets

SFDPH plans to expand study areas to other neighborhoods in San Francisco and to collect more data, specifically covering all of SoMa. SFDPH will create a Retail Food Availability database to facilitate data entry and analysis; link results to food policy that would improve food security in San Francisco; and develop a system for data analysis. Currently, SFDPH has raw data from the SoMa neighborhood. Developing a method for quantifying the data, perhaps by assigning a score to each indicator on the survey, in order to create an index to get a total score for each store, could be very useful. This would enable easier comparisons across stores, as well as within a neighborhood or city-wide context.

For more information, please visit:

www.sfphe.org