

Bakkah Al Nurridin, 16, held up signs decorated with hearts and smiley faces, reading "Welcome grocers" and "Fresh grapes!!!" Al Nurridin joined her family and other residents of the Roseland neighborhood at a rally Sunday at St. John Missionary Baptist Church, calling on government and grocery store chains to end "food deserts" and bring healthy food choices to lower-income neighborhoods.

"Food deserts" are large, often urban residential areas with no grocery stores and where food-buying options are limited to fast food and convenience stores. Activists say people living in food deserts, which are almost always in lower-income neighborhoods, are more likely to suffer serious health problems linked to poor nutrition, such as diabetes, obesity and heart disease.

Roseland, on the city's Far South Side, is one of those neighborhoods, which is partly why the **National Center for Public Research** picked the community to launch September's **National Food Desert Awareness Month**.

A Tribune review of the neighborhood found that in a 15-block area, the food options were a Wendy's restaurant, a few small convenience and liquor stores, a Chinese restaurant and a fried chicken restaurant.

Al Nurridin, who lives in Roseland, said her family shops at a Jewel-Osco about a 10-minute drive from her house.

"If I were hungry, I wouldn't be able to go to the grocery store or anything. The only nearby choice is fried food," she said. "Most people here have a bad diet. And with gas this high, they're not going to drive farther [for healthier food.]"

Many at the meeting, including Mayme Buckley, 47, said they remember when the last grocery store closed in Roseland more than a decade ago because of an infestation of mice. Buckley lived in Roseland as a child and young adult and now lives in Matteson and works for the Healthcare Consortium of Illinois.

"Back then, there were all kinds of stores, an A&P, corner fruit stands. Now, you go into a convenience store, and all they have is a banana, and it's bruised," Buckley said.

Buckley said the changes happened as the community, once more prosperous and bustling, began to decline. "The next thing I knew, every other house was abandoned," she said. "They need innovation, and a plan. People want [healthy food]," she said.

At Sunday's rally was Goodness Greeness, an organic food distribution company based in the Englewood neighborhood.

"We're also in a food desert," said company co-founder Rodney Scaman.

Scaman gave away Pink Pearl organic apples, and the unusual apples—hot pink on the inside, with a strong, tart taste—went quickly. But if you want to buy a Pink Pearl apple in Chicago, you have to head to the city's North Side or beyond to the North Shore suburbs, he said.

"We're trying to get the Jewels and Dominick's to see there's a market for this on the South Side," Scaman said.



Tribune photo of the **National Center for Public (NCP) research rally** features Salim Al-Nurridin (right) introducing Goodness Greeness co-founder Rodney Scaman. Other speakers included NCPR President Mari Gallagher, City of Chicago Public Health Commissioner Dr. Terry Mason, and church leaders.

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The National Center for Public Research is a nonprofit entity dedicated to providing meaningful and unbiased data and information to improve quality of life, quality of health, and financial wellbeing for all people and communities. Mari Gallagher, president of NCPR, founded this new group to ensure that research on food deserts and other types of social phenomena continue for the public good. For more information, visit: [www.marigallagher.com/projects](http://www.marigallagher.com/projects) while our new website [www.NCforPR.org](http://www.NCforPR.org) is under construction. To learn how you can support this type of work, please contact us through the information below.



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