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# The Chicago 2011 Food Desert Drilldown

## 5<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Edition

October 24, 2011



As shown in the detailed tables provided in this report, progress has been made toward shrinking Chicago's Food Desert. Over the last five years, its population was reduced by nearly 40%. Many deserve thanks and congratulations!

But the work is not done yet. Our problem remains significant, as 383,954 Chicagoans still live in a Food Desert, compounding the impact on health outcomes and quality of life over time for those residents. The current Food Desert population could fill U.S. Cellular Field to capacity ten times over.

Many who suffer are children.

In fact, the total number of children in the Food Desert today could fill to capacity 2,484 school buses. That's a lot of children – roughly the population of Naperville, Illinois. And it's a lot of school buses, too! If all of these busses lined up bumper-to-bumper, they would stretch from President Obama's Chicago house in Hyde Park, to City Hall on LaSalle Street, and, from there, to Mayor Rahm Emanuel's house – a total distance of about 17 miles. It is unrealistic to think that busy parents can regularly travel 2 or 3 times out of their neighborhoods each week in order to reach healthful food. By the way – as our new analysis reveals – approximately 40,000 Food Desert households do not own cars. We can preach "eat your vegetables" but let's get real: public transportation and Zip Cars are not always a viable option. Even families with cars often have neither time nor gas money to travel long distances to grocery shop.

The Drilldown provides never-before-released tables detailing the Food Desert population, as well as maps featuring community names, street identifiers, and aldermanic ward numbers.

We hope that this information is useful in helping a wide range of market, government, policy, and community actors to prioritize resources and to continue their fight against Food Desert conditions. Because – unless the Food Desert is eliminated – we predict continued premature death and suffering from diabetes, hypertension, cardiovascular disease, and certain kinds of cancer. Access to mainstream food does not completely solve the nutritional problem, but it is the required first step. Let's keep moving!

## Message from Mari Gallagher

I write this message from a position of deep gratitude. Thank you to everyone who has worked to bring healthful, affordable food to underserved areas of Chicago. Some of you are developing new mainstream stores. Others are helping corner stores to improve their offerings. Just last week, I visited Growing Home's urban farm dedication in Chicago's Englewood community. It is the first urban farm established under the historic passage of the City of Chicago's new urban agriculture ordinance. Many good things are in the works: a city bus converted into a traveling grocery store, and a three-dollar "best of the season" ten-piece fruit offering, sold through local community networks, providing competition with Happy Meals. Wow!

There is no single problem or solution to Food Deserts. This is good news. It means everyone can do something. We're talking about you! And we need you, because the work is not yet done. Many of you have been working on some aspect of good food and community health for decades. It is motivating to see you shine in your areas of talent and accomplishment.

In 2006, our report, *Examining the Impact of Food Deserts on Public Health in Chicago* popularized the term Food Desert nationally and encouraged Congressman Bobby Rush to enter Food Desert language and measures into the Farm Bill. Shortly thereafter, we helped establish September as National Food Desert Awareness Month. In our first campaign, with the participation of former Chicago Health Commissioner Dr. Terry Mason, we distributed 1,000 Pink Pearl Apples in Chicago's Roseland community – compliments of Goodness Greenness. But as we marked the fifth year anniversary of our original report's release, we realized that it was time to retire the Food Desert awareness campaign. We feel the awareness war has been won, as evidenced by this week's arrival of our nation's First Lady who is touring the Chicago Food Desert herself and meeting with community leaders about advancing solutions.

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## Message continued...

We will continue to work on the issue of Food Deserts in Chicago, as well as across the country. We now wish to turn attention to two key steps that will more effectively and readily combat Food Deserts.

### **First, the Food Desert “elimination” date in Chicago should be 2015, not 2020.**

In March of this year, we recommended at a City Council Committee Hearing that a date – 2014 – be targeted to eliminate Chicago’s Food Desert entirely. We received pushback later from top city staff, but not long after taking office, Mayor Rahm Emanuel himself targeted 2015 as the year by which to reduce the Food Desert by 200,000 people and 2020 to eliminate it. We thank the Mayor for these bold targets and for the work he and so many others are doing to improve food access in disadvantaged neighborhoods. However, after developing this recent analysis, we believe it can be done sooner. We suggest that the new target for eliminating Chicago’s Food Desert completely be 2015. We ask that the Mayor embrace this target and that all of you do, too – let’s move! There is a lot of momentum to build on now in addressing the issue, and while some grocers have recently moved out of the Food Desert, many more are moving in or upgrading their offerings. We are in the home stretch. It can be done if we act strategically. If you need motivation, think of 17 miles of bumper-to-bumper school busses packed with children. This is the number of Chicago children – over 124,000 – who are still stranded in the Food Desert.

**In early 2012, we will release an update of the Chicago Food Desert reflecting changes since this analysis.** While our drilldown tables and maps are new, the store data in this report are from June 2011, meaning that by early next year our update will reflect the last six months of changes in Chicago. Additionally, we will draw the updated Food Desert by Census block instead of by tract, which is how we now conduct the analysis in every other location where we do this work. This will help attack the issue with greater precision and allow us to exclude ALL areas without a minimum threshold of residential population. Last, the analysis will include a calculation of the fewest number of new improvements that it would take to eliminate the Food Desert. We hope this blueprint will be helpful and we **pledge to repeat this analysis every 6 months until the Chicago Food Desert is eliminated entirely.** We’re asking everyone to step up their efforts and we’re willing to do the same, too.

### **Second, we must enforce the current rules of SNAP and raise SNAP standards in the next Farm Bill.**

The USDA Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) is a vital program. We wish to be clear that we support SNAP. Some of our closest and most helpful colleagues work for some aspect of the program directly, and others work indirectly out in communities, leveraging SNAP resources in a way that is truly improving the lives of thousands of vulnerable families across our city and many more across our nation. However, over the last several years, we have documented two urgent problems with the current state of (SNAP): 1) standards are too low and 2) many retailers are not in compliance with even those low standards.

It is not just a Chicago problem. It’s a national problem. For example, we conducted a block-level study in five Michigan counties that include the city of Detroit and found that the presence of USDA fringe retailers has a statistically significant link to more diet-related death after controlling for other key factors. The “first line of defense against malnutrition” is actually making people sicker. The study also revealed discrepancies within the official SNAP database. The address and name of the store were usually accurate but the reported store type was often misleading. For example, we found liquor stores coded by the USDA as medium-size grocers or supermarkets. We also found restaurants and specialty shops authorized by SNAP that claim to sell food raw as groceries but then fry it for free or for a surcharge and serve it as prepared food, which has historically been against USDA regulations. We developed two categories for food retailers: mainstream and fringe. A mainstream retailer sells food that would support a healthy diet on a regular basis. A fringe food establishment specializes in “food alternatives” high in salt, fat, and added sugar and in non-food items such as soda, candy, donuts, canned soup, packaged bologna, lottery tickets, tobacco, and alcohol. We found that 92% of Detroit SNAP stores are fringe. Most are liquor stores. While this problem might be most severe in Detroit, we found similar SNAP stores and data coding discrepancies across America. For example, just last week in Chicago, we drew a one mile diameter circle around the new Englewood urban farm site and found that most of the retailers there are fringe.

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**Message continued...**

Unfortunately, now there is a third problem on the horizon: five states – Florida, Arizona, California, Rhode Island, and Michigan – have recently started allowing fast food to petition to enter the SNAP program. This means that – in Detroit and other places – venues such as KFC and Church’s Chicken are part of the “first line of defense against malnutrition.” We wish to be clear that we are not against the fast food industry. Take McDonald’s, for example. These past few months we have been doing fieldwork in Washington, DC. In some of the worst Food Desert communities, McDonald’s is one of the few reliable places to buy a salad or ready-to-eat oatmeal. They also have free and clean public washrooms, a rarity in the Food Desert. They have free Internet access. There are few diners or other safe places to congregate. As a result, I stop in pretty regularly. What I often see are seniors reading the newspaper and chatting with each other, and kids doing their homework. We need to also recognize that fast food venues have been making improvements with their food offerings and that they are an important source of community jobs. As we look ahead to the next five years, we envision working more closely with the fast food industry on ways to help consumers crossover to healthier food choices that are economically viable for everyone. So if you are a fast food executive reading this message and want to explore this path with us, we hope to hear from you. Just don’t expect us to support the entrance of fast food restaurants into SNAP until there is clear-cut empirical evidence that they contribute positively to the “first line of defense” against malnutrition – because right now what we have instead is evidence that fast food restaurants generally correlate with more premature death. Would we have a problem with fast food in SNAP if it met appropriate nutritional standards? No. Would we help you get there? Sure.

The upcoming Farm Bill offers an opportunity to raise and enforce SNAP standards. This will meet with some opposition.

First, retailers have powerful lobbyists that guard against increased regulation. However, industry leaders are warming to this inevitable change.

Second, there are concerns about “big brother” dictating local purchasing. Yet all federal programs – including the SNAP program – come with restrictions. The beverage industry will oppose higher standards and stricter compliance measures, but what is hopeful is that it is now developing or acquiring healthier products in response to public pressure and the threat of losing major vendor contracts with large institutions such as schools and universities. It also recognizes growing market demand for healthful beverages.

Third, some communities have so few food options that there might be concern about eliminating even the worst stores from SNAP. Here, carrots and sticks can encourage compliance and competition for SNAP dollars. This will improve public health and support the revitalization of neighborhood markets.

Last, ensuring that SNAP stores are and remain in compliance can be costly. One solution might be to channel compliance through local health departments that regularly inspect, fine, and license food stores. Perhaps these local authorities can set some compliance parameters, tempering concerns about federal control of local purchasing.

The White House should appoint a task leader to begin working immediately with industry, community, and other leaders on new SNAP standards and compliance measures that support public health and will be accepted by Congress. We think that all of you should be part of this movement, too. Look around in your own neighborhoods. Are the SNAP stores contributing to positive community outcomes? Attention needs to be focused not only nationally but locally, which is why we hope that this important issue is part of the discussion that the First Lady and Mayor Emanuel have during her visit in Chicago this week. We also hope they discuss the compelling fact that – in Chicago alone – about \$880 million SNAP dollars flow through local stores. At a time when budgets are being slashed everywhere, can we afford not ensuring that SNAP promotes 1) access to healthful food and not its opposite 2) community health and not diet-related disease, and 3) local economic development, jobs, viable neighborhood markets, and overall prosperity?

Let’s all move in this direction! Because we can and because we must.



### 2006 Food Desert Conditions in Chicago When Our Original Landmark Study Was Released

Total population	632,974
White population	82,601
African American population	493,919
Latino population	63,568
Age 0 to 18 population	202,054
Disabled adult over 20 years old	129,748
Disabled child under 18 years old	18,245
Grandparents with primary responsibility of grandchildren under 18 years old	15,500
Incomes over \$50,000 per year	63,355
Incomes over \$75,000 per year	29,561
Incomes over \$100,000 per year	14,194
Single women with children under 18 years old	110,555
Households without an automobile	65,304

### Five Years Later: 2011 Food Desert Conditions

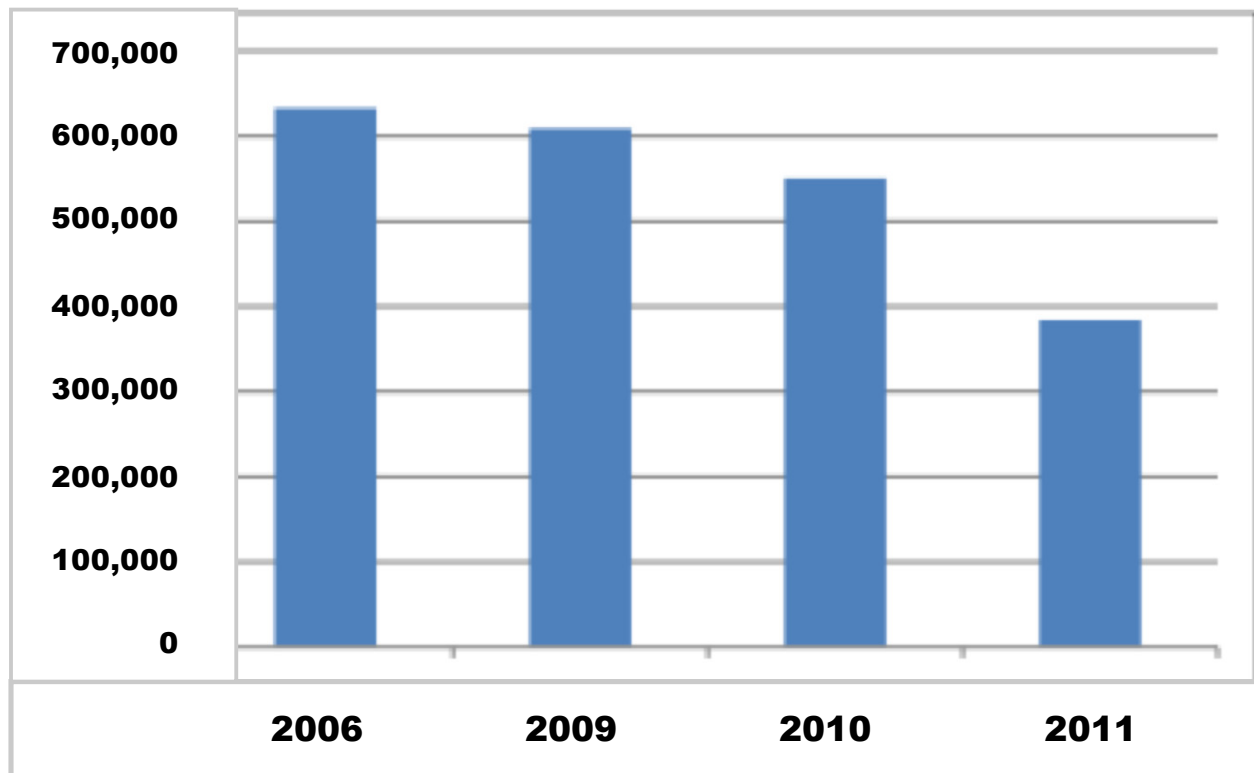
Total population	383,954
White population	53,970
African American population	296,041
Latino population	38,190
Age 0 to 18 population	124,228
Disabled adult over 20 years old	78,154
Disabled child under 18 years old	11,186
Grandparents with primary responsibility of grandchildren under 18 years old	9,308
Incomes over \$100,000 per year	8,757
Incomes over \$75,000 per year	17,926
Incomes over \$50,000 per year	38,279
Single women with children under 18 years old	69,266
Households without an automobile	40,431



### Over The Last Five Years: Food Desert Reduced By:

Total population	249,020
White population	28,631
African American population	197,878
Latino population	25,378
Age 0 to 18 population	77,826
Disabled adult over 20 years old	51,594
Disabled child under 18 years old	7,059
Grandparents with primary responsibility of grandchildren under 18 years old	6,192
Incomes over \$100,000 per year	54,598
Incomes over \$75,000 per year	11,635
Incomes over \$50,000 per year	(24,085)
Single women with children under 18 years old	41,289
Households without an automobile	24,873

### Five-Year Trend: Food Desert Total Population



## Five-Year Trend: Food Desert Children



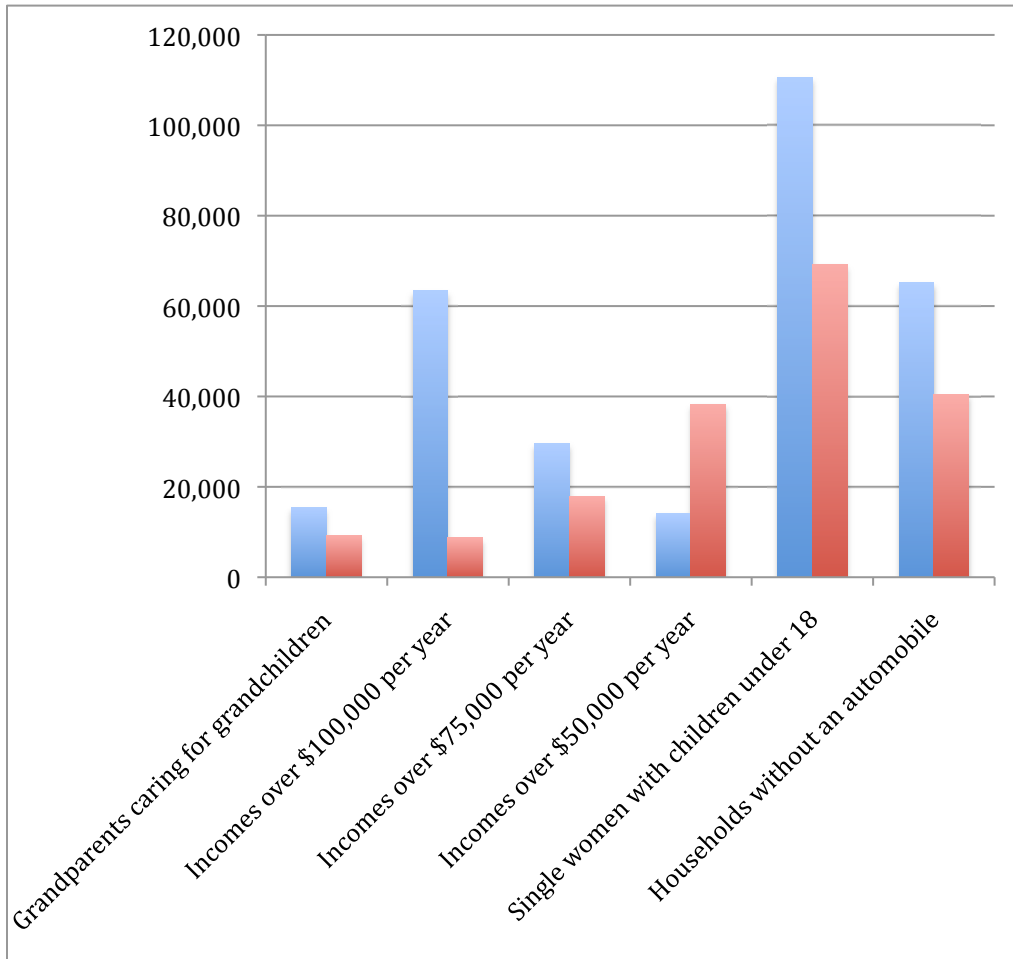
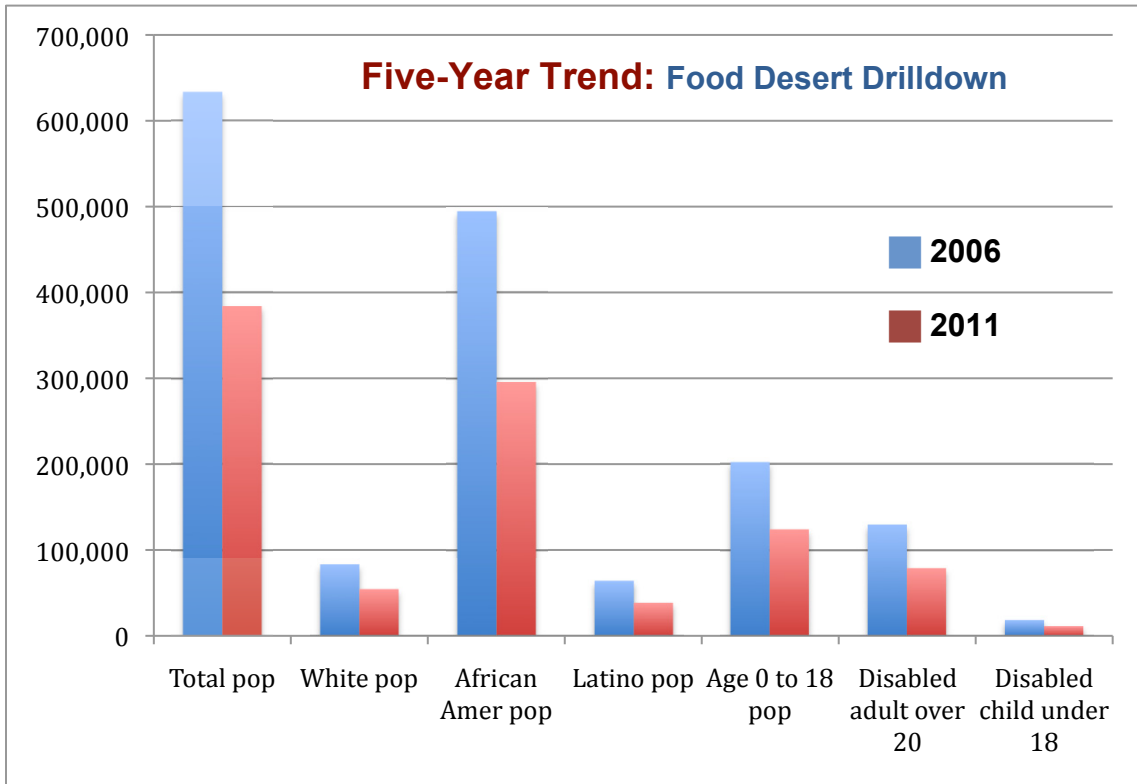
Five years ago, the total number of children in the Food Desert could fill an average school bus 4,042 times.

Over the last five years, the Food Desert was reduced by 1,556 busloads of children. We have made progress!

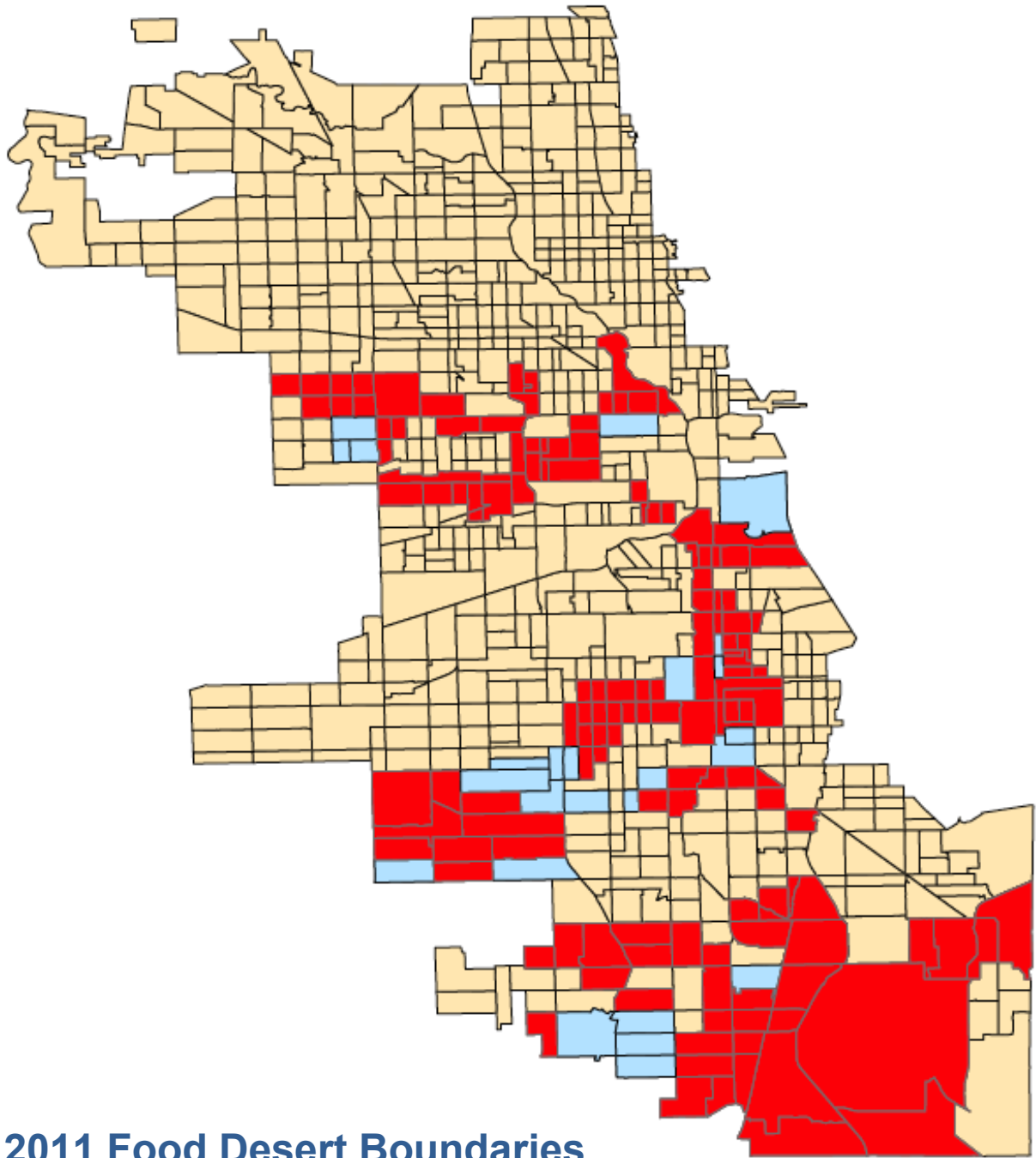
However, 2,484 busloads of children are still stranded in the Chicago Food Desert. The number of children is roughly equivalent to the total population of Naperville, Illinois. If all of these buses lined up bumper-to-bumper, they could stretch from President Obama's house in Hyde Park, to City Hall, and then on to Mayor Rahm Emanuel's house – a total distance of about 17 miles.

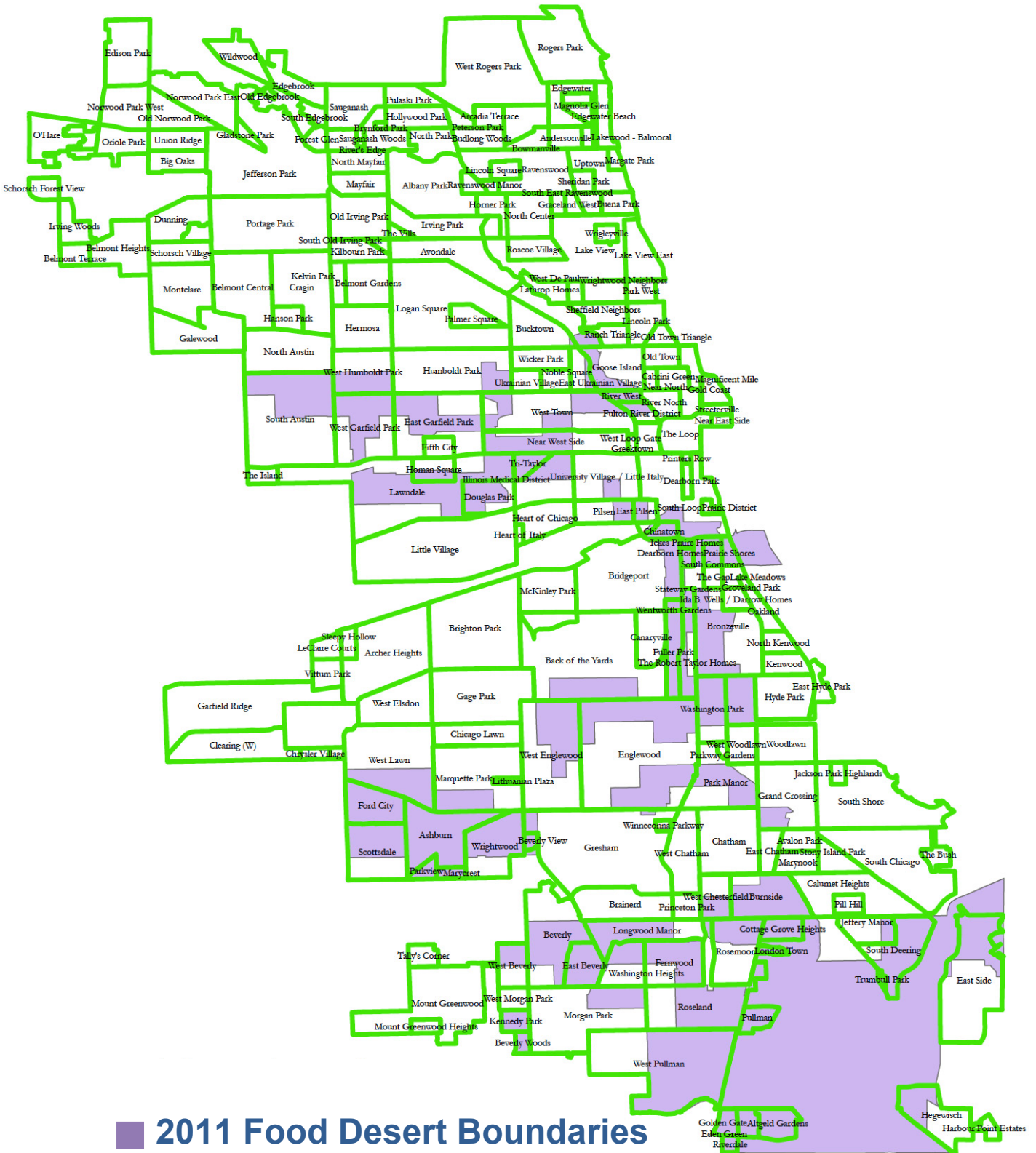
**2006 = 202,054 Children in the Food Desert**

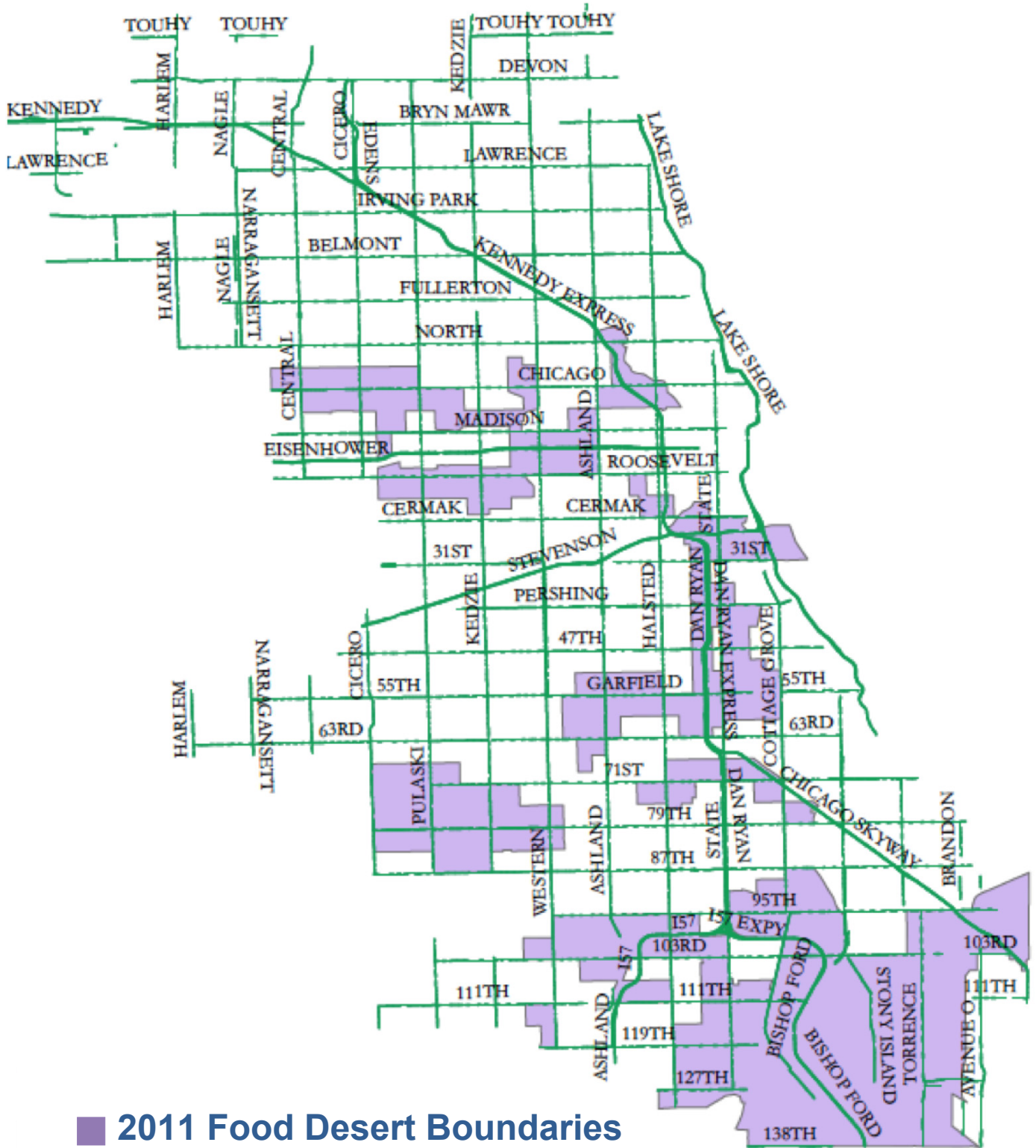
**2011 = 124,228 Children in the Food Desert**





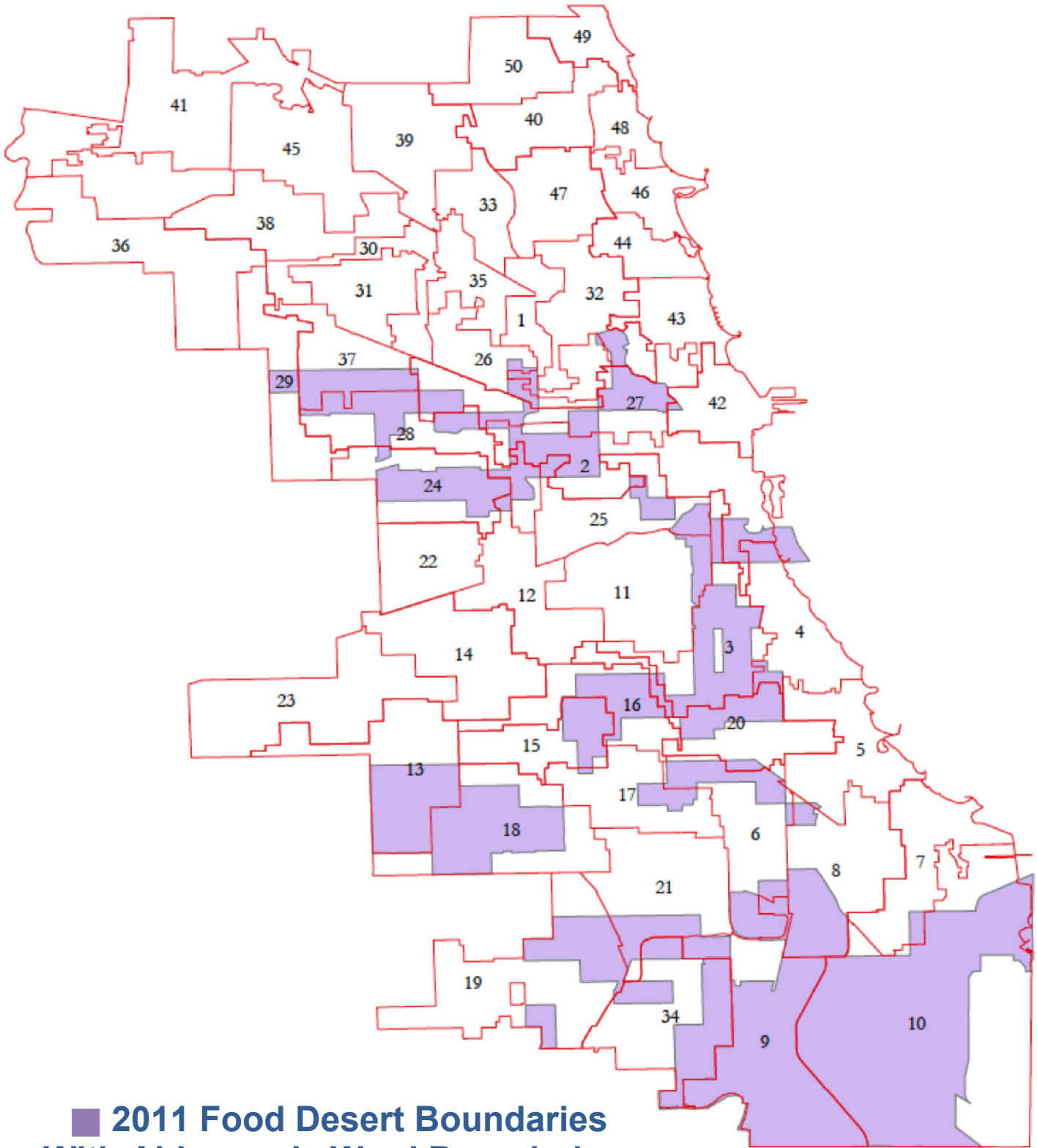






■ **2011 Food Desert Boundaries  
With Major Streets**

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■ **2011 Food Desert Boundaries  
With Aldermanic Ward Boundaries**

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## Chicago SNAP Redemption Patterns

For calendar year 2010, a 12 month period

Store Type	Total Redemptions
Bakery Specialty	\$4,423,592
Non-profit Food Buying Co-op	redacted
Combination Grocery/Other	\$35,507,116
Convenience Store	\$47,170,293
Direct Marketing Farmer	redacted
Farmers' Market	redacted
Fruits/Veg Specialty	redacted
Large Grocery Store	\$28,255,213
Meat/Poultry Specialty	\$3,781,301
Medium Grocery Store	\$57,051,223
Seafood Specialty	\$1,330,924
Small Grocery Store	\$38,886,833
Supermarket	\$291,415,771
Super Store	\$372,634,555
Total	\$880,522,655

Data source: USDA.

Please note:

- 1) The above table reflects USDA codes, not MG recoding. We suspect that the categories are not completely accurate for the store data within the category. For example, USDA SNAP stores include many liquor stores, dollar stores, gas station mini-marts, pharmacies, and other types of stores. These are accounted for in other category names (such as "combination grocery / other"). Additionally, some stores, such as convenience stores and corner stores, are sometimes coded into other categories, such as medium or large grocery store or supermarket instead of convenience store. This is because, in many cases, the store representative self-selects into the category when filling out the application required to participate in SNAP.

Other notes:

- 2) Please see the original 2006 report, *Examining the Impact of Food Deserts on Public Health in Chicago*, for details on the methodology.
- 3) 2011 Food Desert demographic details are calculated by assuming that population in each group shown in the table changed since 2010 proportionally to the total population change in the Food Desert. This was done because, although the U.S. Census has released the tract-level population counts from the 2010 Census, demographic details for tracts based on the 2010 Census will not be released until December 2011.
- 4) Between 2006 and 2011, the total counts for every demographic variable that we tracked decreased, except households earning \$50,000 a year or more. We believe that this is because of changes in Food Desert boundaries, which we have redrawn several times by tract during that period. Subsequently, these changes resulted in the inclusion of more households in that income bracket.
- 5) Income figures that are used throughout the report are family income.
- 6) In the SNAP redemptions figures, some categories are redacted because "N" is small, meaning that the figures would reveal proprietary store information.