

A food desert is a large geographic area with no or distant grocery stores.

Food balance means having equal access to grocery stores, fast food outlets and other venue choices.

STRANDED IN THE FOOD DESERT

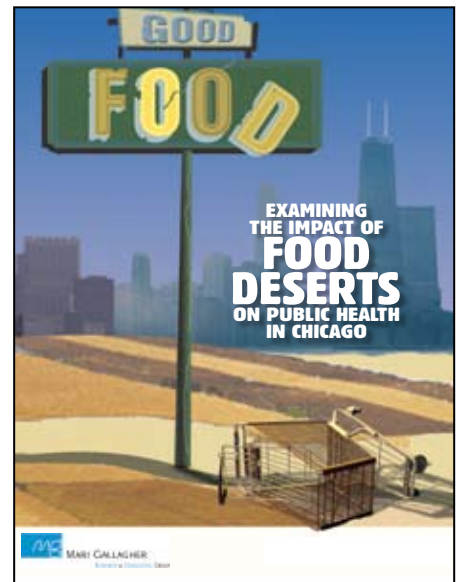
RECONNECTING COMMUNITIES WITH HEALTHY FOOD OPTIONS

LaSalle Bank is committed to building sustainable communities by providing residents, small businesses and nonprofit organizations with the resources and assistance necessary to be healthy and vibrant members of the community.

ISSUE OVERVIEW

Public health officials and community advocates have been alarmed by statistics that reflect the growing prevalence of obesity, diabetes, cancer, cardiovascular disease and hypertension, particularly in disadvantaged neighborhoods.

We know that many factors influence health, but what about the locations of grocery stores and fast food restaurants, and the balance of food choices? To explore this relationship, in 2006 LaSalle Bank commissioned a report titled *Examining the Impact of Food Deserts on Public Health in Chicago*. The report, authored by Mari Gallagher Research & Consulting Group, considered whether residents of “food deserts” – communities with little or no access to grocery stores and quality, nutritious food choices – suffer greater rates of diet-related health consequences holding other influencers constant.



RESEARCH FINDINGS

Racial Imbalance of Food Deserts

Over half a million Chicagoans live in the city’s three food deserts (see Fig. 1), and the vast majority of them are African-American. Of this group, nearly 400,000 live in areas with an imbalance of food choices. In other words, they have ready access to fast food and other fringe retail outlets, but very limited or no access to the fresh, healthy food available at grocery stores. Food desert residents might buy their food at convenience stores, fast food restaurants, liquor stores, gas stations or drug stores.

African-Americans who live on the West and South sides of Chicago are the most disadvantaged when it comes to balanced food choices, although other racial groups do suffer as well (see Fig. 3). African-Americans, on average, travel the farthest distance to reach the closest grocery store (see Fig. 2), which is often twice as far as the closest fast food restaurant.

Balance in food choice is key. For instance, while much of the North side has high concentrations of fast food restaurants, they are often in “destination” entertainment and eating areas that also have a wide variety of grocery stores and non-fast-food restaurants, resulting in more food choices.

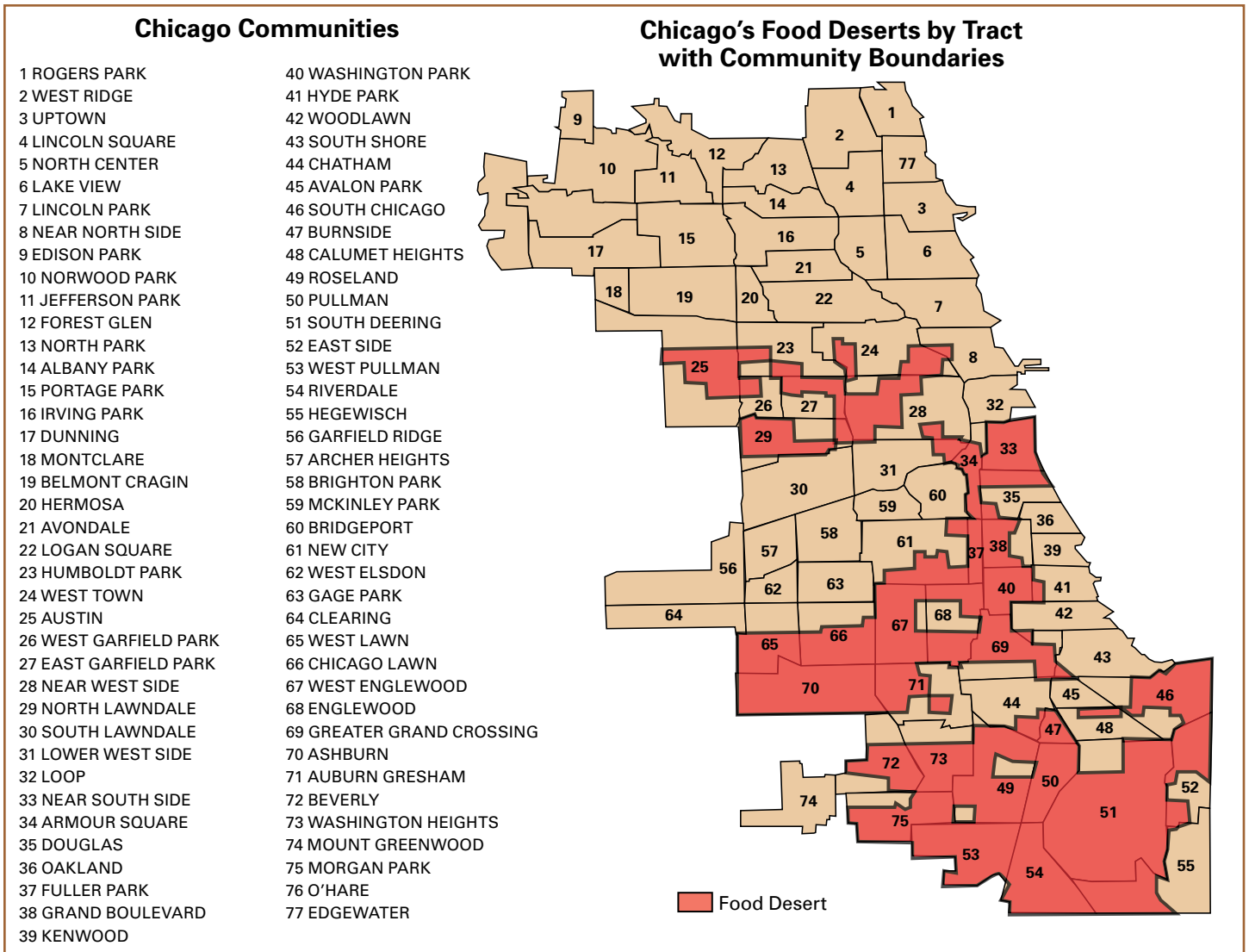


FIG. 1

The correlation between food access and diet-related health outcomes repeats itself in nearly every instance.

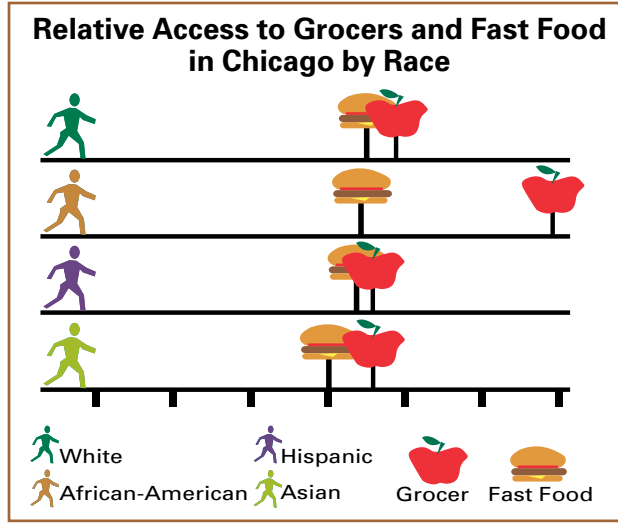


FIG. 2

Do Food Deserts Lead to Health Risks?

The diabetes death rate for the most out-of-balance Chicago communities is more than twice the rate for all other communities. Further, premature death due to cancer and cardiovascular disease is greater for African-American and White communities where there is greater imbalance of food choices, accounting for income, education and race.

Food imbalance is a statistically significant contributor to increased rates of body mass index (BMI), or obesity. In Chicago, high BMI patterns cluster dramatically by race and place (see Fig. 4): the North and Northwest sides have the lowest rates of obesity, while the West and South sides have the highest rates of obesity.

The correlation between food access and diet-related health outcomes repeats itself in nearly every instance of analysis: as communities become more out-of-balance in terms of food choices, residents are more likely to die prematurely and at greater rates from diabetes, cancer, and cardiovascular diseases, as well as suffer from obesity and hypertension.

WHAT CAN BE DONE?

More than 250 attendees from government, healthcare, planning, public health, community development and grocery retail sectors came to learn the findings and respond to the report at a LaSalle Bank forum titled *Stranded in the Food Desert*. Since its release, this research has been the focus of considerable local and national media attention, including feature articles in Chicago Tribune and Chicago Sun-Times and several segments on local TV stations as well as CNN.

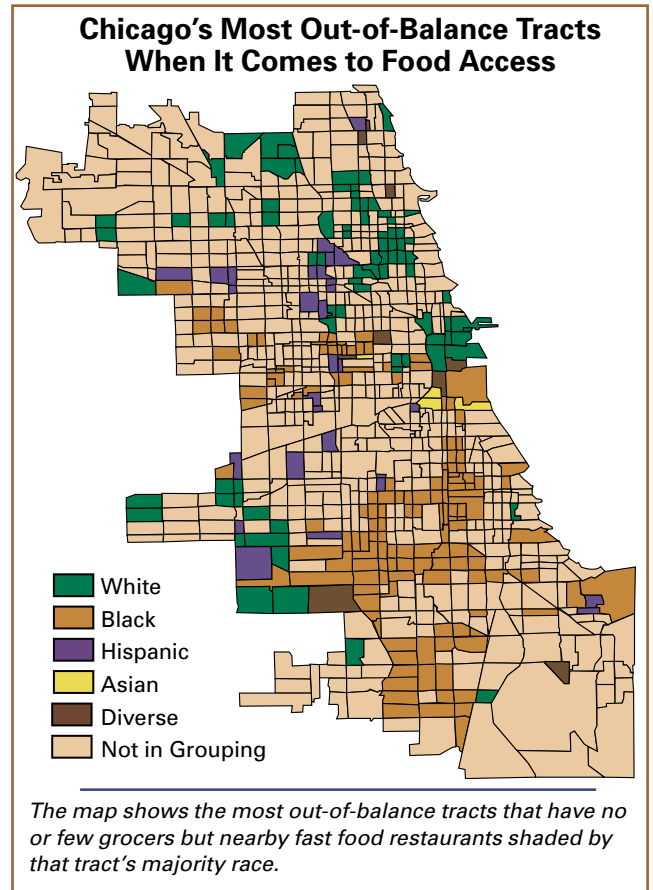


FIG. 3

Food imbalance is a statistically significant contributor to increased rates of body mass index (BMI), or obesity. In Chicago, high BMI patterns cluster dramatically by race and place.

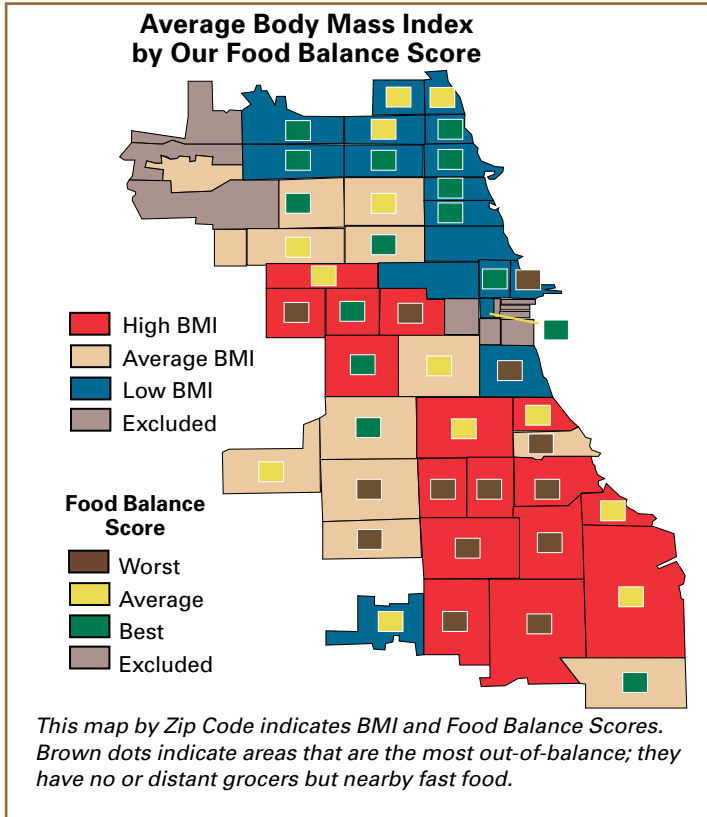


FIG. 4

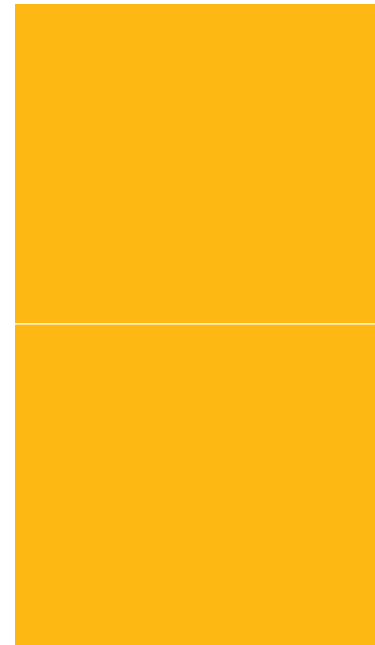
Identifying both market and needs-based solutions that promote access to nutritious food choices will require input and support from the food desert residents themselves, as well as from grocers, banks, brokers, developers, planners, health advocates and government – ultimately everyone – to achieve even a modest level of success.

This study reveals the negative health impacts of food deserts and food imbalance on Chicago communities. We hope that this

new understanding leads to creative and sustainable solutions that bring healthy food options to the Chicagoans who suffer most.

To view the full report and learn more about this work, visit lasallebank.com.

LaSalle Bank Forums are held to foster discussion and debate among community leaders on new ideas and best practices in community and sustainable development.



Examining the Impact of Food Deserts on Public Health in Chicago © 2006 Mari Gallagher Research and Consulting Group

LaSalle Bank
Community and Sustainable Development
135 S. LaSalle St. | Chicago, IL 60603
lasallebank.com

lasalleinthecommunity@abnamro.com



Printed on 100% PC Recycled Paper



Paper Manufactured Using Wind Power