

Fresh Approach to Feeding New Orleans

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How can New Orleans expand its supply of fresh, healthy food? A committee supported by the Prevention Research Center at Tulane thinks the answers are clear ? provide tax incentives to encourage retailers to sell fresh food, launch a grocery shuttle service and promote development of more supermarkets.



Vanessa Ulmer, policy and advocacy coordinator for the Prevention Research Center at Tulane University, thanks the Food Policy Advisory Committee for its work toward a healthier New Orleans. (Photo by Deirdre Boling)

In New Orleans, the current supply of fresh food for residents lags far behind the national average, says the New Orleans Food Policy Advisory Committee.

The committee released 10 recommendations on Tuesday (March 18) for bringing more healthy food to New Orleans neighborhoods.

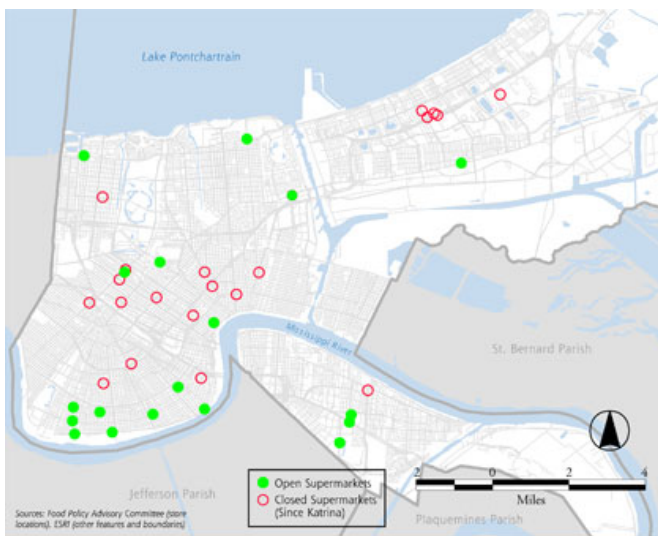
The recommendations were published in a [report](#) entitled “Building Healthy Communities: Expanding Access to Fresh Food Retail,” which explores the problem of food access in New Orleans and Louisiana. Members of the panel think the new ideas are both concrete and achievable.

Prior to Hurricane Katrina, New Orleans had 38 full-service supermarkets, which averaged about 12,000 residents per store. Today, 18 supermarkets service about 18,000 residents per store. The national average is 8,800 residents per supermarket.

“Food Policy Advisory Committee members met a number of times over the past year to determine the main barriers to fresh food access and came up with concrete solutions specific to our region,” said Natalie Jayroe, president and chief executive officer of Second Harvest Food Bank of Greater New Orleans and Acadiana and co-chair of the committee.

“Our recommendations focus on practical actions that can be accomplished and will have a tremendous impact on residents.”

The committee's suggestions already have received the support of the New Orleans City Council. Arnie Fielkow, council president, has convened a task force of committee members and city officials that is developing strategies for implementing the recommendations.



This January 2008 map of Orleans Parish demonstrates the need for additional food retailers. The red circles are supermarkets that have closed since Hurricane Katrina

and the green circles indicate supermarkets that remain open.

Specific recommendations of the report include:

• Providing tax incentives that encourage retailers to sell fresh food;

• Launching a grocery shuttle service to help residents without cars get to full-service grocery stores;

• Expanding federal nutrition programs in the state that enable residents to purchase more locally grown produce; and

• Developing a state financing program to provide grants and loans to encourage development of supermarkets, grocers and farmers' markets in underserved areas.

Tulane's Prevention Research Center, part of the School of Public Health and Tropical Medicine, played a key role in the creation of the Food Policy Advisory Committee and has continued to provide coordination to help the committee develop its recommendations.

Committee members include representatives from grocery retailers, foundations, health organizations and community groups.

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