

Law Puts Healthy Food on the Menu

July 20, 2009 1:00 PM Lisa Hoffman
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Louisianans who lack access to fresh produce will be one step closer to having the option to purchase healthy foods in their communities thanks to the enactment of a new law that was informed by analysis from the Prevention Research Center at Tulane University.



A report by the Prevention Research Center at Tulane was the foundation for the new Healthy Food Retail Act, says Vanessa Ulmer, policy and advocacy coordinator for the center. (Photo by Paula Burch-Celentano)

The Healthy Food Retail Act, signed into law by Gov. Bobby Jindal on July 1, goes into effect on Aug. 15. It creates the structure for a financing program that will provide grants and loans to supermarkets, farmers' markets and food retail providers to improve access to fresh fruits and vegetables in underserved communities in Louisiana.

Part of the Tulane School of Public Health and Tropical Medicine, the [Prevention Research Center](#) provided technical assistance to the Healthy Food Retail Study Group as it investigated the challenges faced by Louisianans who have limited

access to healthy food. The study group's recommendations, in a report prepared by the center, led to the legislation.

"It helped bring to light the significance of healthy food access and to develop a practical policy response that will improve the health of Louisianans statewide while supporting food retail and community development," says Vanessa Ulmer, policy and advocacy coordinator for the Prevention Research Center.

Reversing the epidemic of obesity among adults and children is a major health priority for Louisiana, which has the eighth-highest rate of obesity in the nation. Studies show that people with better access to supermarkets and [fresh produce](#) have healthier diets and a lower risk of obesity. Implementation of the program is contingent upon allocation of funding by the state.

Enactment of the legislation is an important step toward ensuring that citizens have good and affordable food choices, Ulmer says. "Now it's equally important to secure financing for this program in order to make this commitment to expanding access to healthy food a reality."

Lisa Hoffman is the communications and training coordinator for the Prevention Research Center at Tulane.