

Transforming the Foodscape: Rebuilding South Los Angeles

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Abstract

Oftentimes, underprivileged individuals are disproportionately affected by the strain that comes with living amidst food deserts. I am researching the issue of and analyzing proposed solutions to food insecurity and its effects on underserved communities in South Los Angeles. In order to provide background context, I compare data reports on the number of supermarkets, grocers, and fast food restaurants in low income areas to expose the limited nutrition choices available.

Afterward, I examine the measures enacted thus far to improve the quality of food in disadvantaged neighborhoods including corner store conversions, urban gardening, legislation, and proper diet instruction. As a result of evaluating statistical data and these initiatives, I will create both an updated map overviewing the current foodscape in South Los Angeles and a proposition to the City of Los Angeles asking for support in further developing approaches known to benefit the health of those living in food deserts.

Introduction

As areas with scarce amounts of nutritious substances, ‘food deserts’ dominate underserved communities, depriving residents of healthy eats, in South Los Angeles. A multitude of liquor stores and fast food joints outweigh the limited number of grocers carrying fruits and vegetables on the verge of spoiling; ergo, with a lack of options that facilitate individuals to meet dietary recommendations, citizens must travel great lengths outside their neighborhoods for organic and local ingredients which incurs additional fees of transportation and extended travel time (Hassberg, 2020). At the community level, the development of new change models attempts to confront root causes of health disparities embedded in the interconnectedness of “racism, culture, and the historical, economic, and political structures that define the experience of African Americans and other racial and ethnic groups in the United States” (Lewis, 2011). It sounds beneficial in theory, based upon its scholarly examination of social determinants, though an absence of evidence implies substandard execution of the policies put forth through these models and a need for additional support of city planning processes (Lewis, 2011). A city ordinance banning the emergence of new fast-food restaurants in low-income regions in L.A. aimed to reduce unhealthy eating habits and decrease obesity rates, yet adversely increased them (Sturm, 2015). Again and again, efforts to ameliorate the diet and health of those in disadvantaged areas fall short or make insufficient progress, but why? Assessing the current food environment in South L.A., where are food stores located and what grassroots approaches can be implemented, given government initiatives aren’t serving intended purposes, to successfully tackle and offset the hardships of sustenance insecurity in and beyond Los Angeles?

Background

A substantial amount of studies draw correlations between food insecurity, income, and race. According to a county-wide, population-based, telephone survey held in 1999 in compliance with the US Department of Agriculture's Household Food Security Scale, 24.4% of L.A. households felt food insecure. In addition, 32.8% of those who felt the effects were African-Americans (Furness et. al, 2004). After the verdict of Rodney King (1992), Rebuild L.A., an organization that created both hope and disappointment, made hollow promises to forge 32 new supermarkets in the riot-torn areas that would create thousands of new jobs and bring fresh, affordable food to South Los Angeles. In reality, a handful of stores were made before plans fell through as the food retail industry experienced consolidation and market concentration, leading to the further elimination of stores that had once served low-income neighborhoods because supermarkets relocated to regions of "higher-end clientele" (Gottlieb & Joshi, 2010). As a result of the proposition's insufficiency to redevelop the area, Project CAFE (Community Action on Food Environments) ran a survey in 2007 and found that, within three of the neighborhoods where Rebuild L.A. promised relief and of the 1,273 food-related establishments that were mapped, fast food restaurants were the most prevalent of all food sources identified (29.6%) and convenience or liquor stores weren't far behind (21.6%) (Gottlieb & Joshi, 2010). After liquor stores, full-service restaurants (16.7%), specialty food stores (13.7%), mobile food trucks (11.2%), gas station convenience stores (3.8%), and bars or taverns (1.7%) all came before full-service supermarkets (1.5%) (Azuma, 2007).

An additional factor aggravating the problem is gentrification. It isn't until white bodies appear in marginalized spaces that a Trader Joe's or Whole Foods pops up because investors now deem it valuable due to the shift in demographics. As a result of white migration to these areas,

long-standing minority residents are kicked to the curb, living costs rise, and those who need the amenities most aren't there or able to enjoy them (Hassberg, 2020).

Methods

Addressing the multi-step question, I will split research into two phases: the first pertaining to the production of a map and the second regarding previously employed enterprises aimed at improving the foodscape in South Los Angeles. In order to complete phase one, I will pinpoint all grocer, liquor, convenience, and corner stores as well as fast-food and full-service restaurants in South L.A. using Google Maps Street View. Afterward, I will transfer that data to create an interactive, comprehensive plotted map on Google's My Maps. I will shade each region a color depending on the median household income to make sections easily comparable. As a means of validating the information found on Google Maps Street Views, I will drive to each store and restaurant location to ensure all are open for business given the increase in local food service bankruptcies due to the onset of COVID-19.

I will enact phase two at the conclusion of phase one to complement the newly made chart set to bring attention to the inaccessibility of fresh and organic products in South Los Angeles. As primarily literature review and data collection, the second phase examines which measures were a failure and which were a success in improving the health of those living in food deserts in South Los Angeles. I will determine which organizations, programs, and local movements should receive government funding, which should be replicated in different neighborhoods, and which should be expanded upon for greater outreach. Anterior to this, I'll present quantitative statistics found in studies that conclude the nutritional resource environment in target areas (less affluent) made it challenging for residents to eat healthily outside of their

own homes: leading to higher risks of medical conditions (Lewis, 2005). A brief set of data enumerating the inequality rationalizes the need for financially backing or developing projects to a greater extent.

I will divide this phase into four sections: legislation, urban agriculture, diet education, and store remodels. I will address the first, legislation, through an analysis of proposed measures, adopted measures, and implemented measures: comparing data on each's achievements or lack thereof. Afterward, I will discuss gardening in metropolitan spaces through case studies on influential figures in the field: listening to and reading their primary narratives posted on TED Talk (Geni, 2013) and featured blogs (Agritecture. n.d.). Next, this paper will shine light on the importance of diet education through the lens of school health classes and nutritional programs offered outside the classroom in which older generations can partake. Lastly, this research will review corner store conversion programs or pop-ups that bring produce and healthy meal options to spaces once full of junky snacks and alcohol. It will track precedent cases that saw an increase in healthy food sales after participating in these mentorship programs through the expansion of existing products and the addition of new ones (Los Angeles Food Policy Council, 2017).

Expected Results

After investigating a plethora of sources discussing the stratagem used to turn food deserts into oases, this paper will present a proposition to the City of Los Angeles Food and Agriculture Department. An inclusion of specific target regions, schools, methods, and budgets helps ensure the allocation of funds and efforts are justly utilized. It will establish itself on the evidence of accomplishable actions taken thus far and go further to help a greater number of underserved communities. Additionally, it will generate a map that illustrates the lack of healthy

food options and large supermarket chains in South Los Angeles. As a call to action, this research will educate people about the state of the issue and urge them to vote for politicians who are committed to bringing healthy resources to South Los Angeles.

Conclusion

A delve into case studies and legislation provides communities the opportunity to pick apart elements worth implementation in urban settings. Any law could be written via federal, state, or local government, yet that doesn't guarantee its execution. If society adopts a three stage strategy (acknowledge, assess, act), there'll be fewer ineffective tactics that put bandaids on systemic complications. As a consequence of engaging those facing the effects of food insecurity in hands-on experience and nutritional education, society can progress towards decreasing health disparities and increasing wholesome diets for everyone.

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Budget

Week	Description of Expense	Cost
1	20 hrs compensation one researcher, 5 days, 4 hrs/day, minimum wage (\$15)	\$300
2	20 hrs compensation one researcher, 5 days, 4 hrs/day, minimum wage (\$15), gas (LMU to South LA; fill tank once)	\$380
3	20 hrs compensation one researcher, 5 days, 4 hrs/day, minimum wage (\$15), gas (LMU to South LA; fill tank once)	\$380
4	20 hrs compensation one researcher, 5 days, 4 hrs/day, minimum wage (\$15), gas (LMU to South LA; fill tank once)	\$380
5	20 hrs compensation one researcher, 5 days, 4 hrs/day, minimum wage (\$15), gas (LMU to South LA; fill tank once)	\$380
6	20 hrs compensation one researcher, 5 days, 4 hrs/day, minimum wage (\$15), gas (LMU to South LA; fill tank once)	\$380
7	20 hrs compensation one researcher, 5 days, 4 hrs/day, minimum wage (\$15)	\$300
8	20 hrs compensation one researcher, 5 days, 4 hrs/day, minimum wage (\$15)	\$300

9	20 hrs compensation one researcher, 5 days, 4 hrs/day, minimum wage (\$15)	\$300
Total:	\$160	\$3,100

Timeline:

Week 1:

- I will pinpoint all grocer, liquor, convenience, and corner stores as well as fast-food and full-service restaurants in South L.A. using Google Maps Street View.
- I will create an itinerary for the next five weeks and split up driving to restaurant and store locations in South LA to ensure all are open for business.

Week 2:

- I will drive to and around the restaurant and store locations in West Adams, Baldwin Hills/Crenshaw, Leimert Park, Jefferson Park, View Park-Windsor Hills, and Hyde Park.
- I will bring a sheet with me and highlight all of the restaurant and store locations that are open for business.
- I will note any restaurant and store locations that aren't open anymore as well as any new ones that weren't accounted for in the preliminary search on Google Maps Street View.

Week 3:

- I will drive to and around the restaurant and store locations in Adam-Normandie, University Park, Exposition Park, Vermont Square, Chesterfield Square, and Harvard Park.

- I will bring a sheet with me and highlight all of the restaurant and store locations that are open for business.
- I will note any restaurant and store locations that aren't open anymore as well as any new ones that weren't accounted for in the preliminary search on Google Maps Street View.

Week 4:

- I will drive to and around the restaurant and store locations in University Park, Vermont-Slauson, Manchester Square, Vermont Knolls, Central Alameda, and South Park.
- I will bring a sheet with me and highlight all of the restaurant and store locations that are open for business.
- I will note any restaurant and store locations that aren't open anymore as well as any new ones that weren't accounted for in the preliminary search on Google Maps Street View.

Week 5:

- I will drive to and around the restaurant and store locations in Historic South Central, Florence, Gramercy Park, Westmont, Vermont Vista, and Broadway-Manchester.
- I will bring a sheet with me and highlight all of the restaurant and store locations that are open for business.
- I will note any restaurant and store locations that aren't open anymore as well as any new ones that weren't accounted for in the preliminary search on Google Maps Street View.

Week 6:

- I will drive to and around the restaurant and store locations in Florence-Firestone, Green Meadows, Athens, Willbrook, and Watts.

- I will bring a sheet with me and highlight all of the restaurant and store locations that are open for business.
- I will note any restaurant and store locations that aren't open anymore as well as any new ones that weren't accounted for in the preliminary search on Google Maps Street View.

Week 7:

- I will assemble a comprehensive map utilizing the newfound data from the six week driving collection period.
- I will add customizable features that allow users to interact with the data based on food store type.

Week 8:

- I will begin the second phase of research.
- I will conduct a review of past and current legislation regarding the food environment of South Los Angeles.
- I will read, watch videos, and listen to urban gardeners discuss the importance of urban agriculture when it comes to uniting communities and increasing the accessibility of locally grown produce.

Week 9:

- I will analyze past and present store conversion programs, selecting specific locations to compare before and after statistics on the number of healthy food options and overall sales.
- I will conduct a literature review of nutrition programs for both children and adults in South L.A. and read organizations' website reviews to see if the mission statement matches attitudes towards the actual courses offered.

- Lastly, I will combine the research of the past two weeks to present a proposition to the City of Los Angeles Food and Agriculture Department requesting funds for the expansion or addition of new programs and measures based on prior successes.