



Saskatoon
Community
Clinic

Food deserts in Saskatoon

Information Bulletin for Poverty Awareness Week, October 2008

The Saskatoon Community Clinic is concerned about food deserts as a health issue. We want to raise awareness about the conditions and options that affect access to healthy food in the city. We are initiating this action during Poverty Awareness Week because we know the problem is especially serious for people with lower incomes.

“I see so many people at the Westside Clinic whose health problems are linked to poor diet. Diabetes is an example. We are seeing the rates increase, even in children.”

Dr. Stephen Helliar,
Saskatoon
Community Clinic

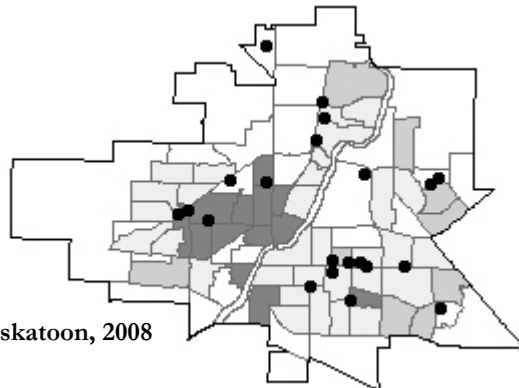
Does Saskatoon have food deserts? What can we do about them?

A food desert is what we call an area of a city where there is little healthy food for sale, especially at affordable prices. Preventing food deserts is an important public health issue because food is so important to health.

Urban food deserts are not uncommon and have occurred in other cities. They develop when grocery stores withdraw from neighbourhoods because there are too few customers with the spending power to generate the desired returns. This is especially the case when wealthier members of the community have moved to the suburbs. Low income residents and senior citizens who remain have a harder time getting healthy foods.

Such a trend may be understandable from a market point of view. However, because food is so important to health, those of us seeking to make our city healthier want to find a solution.

The City of Saskatoon and the Saskatoon Health Region are monitoring this challenge in our city. From the work done so far, we know that the west-side core neighbourhoods and the downtown area definitely have cause for concern. The Saskatoon Health Region map below also shows that the lowest-income neighbourhoods in the city (those in the deepest grey) may have limited access to supermarkets.



Supermarket Locations in Saskatoon, 2008

Source: Saskatoon Health Region



... urban planning and renewal in the 1970s and 1980s resulted in downtown and suburban communities with few or distant general grocery stores, but with multiple fast food outlets.

McGill Health Challenge Think Tank on Childhood Obesity in Canada, 2007

... the built environment can influence access to affordable and nutritious foods. There is evidence that compared to higher-income neighbourhoods, low income neighbourhoods often have limited grocery stores (particularly those selling fresh produce), offer nutritious foods at a higher cost and have a greater concentration of fast food services – all of which may contribute to poorer eating habits among residents.

The Chief Public Health Officer's Report on the State of Public Health in Canada, 2008

Eating healthy foods – such as fresh fruit and vegetables, fibre-rich foods and those with a lower fat content – is related to their accessibility and affordability.... A recent University of Alberta study found that more fast-food restaurants are situated in Edmonton neighbourhoods where residents have lower incomes and education levels and most people are renters rather than home owners compared to other neighbourhoods in the city.

The Chief Public Health Officer's Report on the State of Public Health in Canada, 2008

More ways...

Saskatoon citizens and community groups are already very active to improve food security in the city, in different ways. Examples are:

- School food programs
- Good Food Junction at Station 20 W
- Saskatoon Farmers' Market
- CHEP Good Food Box
- Collective kitchens
- Community gardens
- Westside Clinic food program

The Saskatoon Food Charter

Did you know the City of Saskatoon adopted a Food Charter in 2002, committing the city to food security?

See the whole charter at www.saskatooncommunityclinic.ca

Working toward food security

Food security means three things:

- **Market access:** Residents should be able to purchase groceries relatively close to home. Not all people, especially the poor and elderly, have access to cars for grocery shopping.
- **Reasonable price:** The food needs to be affordable. Saskatoon does have access to healthy food, but it can often be more expensive.
- **Good quality:** Food should be nutritious. Unfortunately, the word food is used for many products that are actually unhealthy. Food security is about healthy food.

.. *Healthy* agri-food policies are needed to shift food supply and demand in a direction that would make healthy eating the natural option for all children, in an economically sustainable manner for the agri-food, food processing, retail and food service sectors. Meanwhile, *economically, socially and culturally sustainable* health policy is equally needed to help move supply and demand towards healthy and pleasurable food. This convergence could facilitate a shift from the present orientation of the food chain, currently favouring low-priced, high-calorie foods toward more variety and diversity in food supply and demand.

McGill Health Challenge Think Tank on Childhood Obesity in Canada, 2007

What should we do?

This publication focuses on eliminating food deserts. The following examples are measures that have been used or debated in other cities. **We do not advocate all of them. Saskatoon should choose urban planning options that fit our city the best.** As citizens, we can assist our City Council to choose the best options by becoming informed and supporting the most effective measures for good access to healthy food everywhere in Saskatoon, by rich or poor.

- Introduce zoning bylaws to promote population density and multi-purpose neighbourhoods, creating a critical mass of wealth to sustain sales in a location.
- Provide support, such as incentive packages, to establish and encourage retail outlets to sell affordable healthy food in "Food Deserted" areas.
- Consider bylaws regulating the sale of junk food.
- Develop guidelines ensuring the availability of healthy foods in public facilities and schools.
- Promote urban community gardens and links with local farmers.

Do you have other ideas????



For more information or to provide feedback:

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