

Eliminating food deserts may not achieve improved dietary quality in the US

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Initiatives to eliminate food deserts, low-income geographic areas that lack access to a supermarket or large grocery store, may not have an effect on improving dietary quality or reducing disparities in diet quality according to Jason Block and S V Subramanian from Harvard University, United States, in a Policy Forum article published this week in *PLOS Medicine*.

Reducing food deserts has been a priority of federal and state governments, often through public-private partnerships, as well as international groups, such as the World Health Organization. However, in their article the authors argue that the evidence supporting the elimination of food deserts as a strategy to reduce disparities in [diet quality](#) is weak. They discuss several other strategies that have the potential to lower disparities in diet quality more than eliminating food deserts. These strategies include education initiatives, changes in food assistance programs and taxing unhealthy food.

The authors conclude, "[a]ddressing disparities in dietary quality may have important payoffs for the health of the population: we should promote policies and programs to support these changes while studying their effectiveness. These strategies do not preclude the elimination of food deserts but rather build a necessary infrastructure to promote healthy food consumption, in any neighborhood. Many reasons, such as economic and social justice, exist to support such initiatives and to remedy the lack of healthy food availability in low-income communities. We just should not expect the reduction of food deserts to have much

impact on the prevailing health crisis of our time. We need to focus our efforts on initiatives more likely to improve [dietary quality](#) and decrease [disparities](#)."

More information: Block JP, Subramanian SV (2015) Moving Beyond 'Food Deserts': Reorienting United States Policies to Reduce Disparities in Diet Quality. *PLoS Med* 12(12): e1001914. [DOI: 10.1371/journal.pmed.1001914](#)

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