Availability and Accessibility of Healthy Food in Ypsilanti, Michigan





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The Washtenaw County Public Health Department is solely responsible for the content of this publication.

Photo credit: Bottom right cover photo by Ben Brown of Growing Hope.

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Background

The Nutrition Environment and its Impact on Food Choices

Recent public health research suggests a person's "nutrition environment" – the food stores, restaurants, and agriculture located nearby – has a compelling influence on his or her individual food choices (see Figure 1). For example, Morland and colleagues (2002) found that fruit and vegetable intake increases significantly with each additional supermarket in a census tract. The availability and affordability of healthy food is essential for healthy eating, but in lower-income communities this availability may be limited or absent.

Two central elements of a community's nutrition environment – type and location of food outlets – have undergone tremendous change in our country over the past several decades.² Neighborhood grocery stores which used to sell a range of grocery products now often focus on alcohol, cigarettes, and snack foods. The limited healthy food sold in these smaller stores tends to be higher priced.³ Full-service

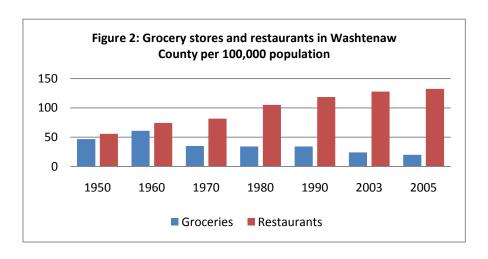
groceries stores are often located far from urban centers with car travel being the most convenient means to get to the store. At the same time that grocery opportunities have decreased, fast food outlets have moved into many urban centers, offering large portions of cheap, unhealthy food. Urban centers also frequently lack healthy food assets such as farmers markets, community gardens, and local agriculture. Thus, vulnerable populations such as the elderly, youth, disabled, and lower income populations without cars often lack access to healthy food stores but have unhealthy convenience store food and fast food available close by.

Like the rest of the country, over the past 50 years Washtenaw County has experienced an increase in fast food restaurants and a simultaneous decrease in grocery stores (see Figure 2 below). Between 1950 and 2005, the number of grocery stores per capita decreased by 56%, the number of restaurants per capita increased by 140%, and the number of fast food restaurants per capita increased by a staggering 6,100%. Food eaten away from home tends to be higher in fat and lower in fiber and other nutrients compared to foods prepared at home. In addition, people tend to eat larger amounts when they eat out, eat higher calorie foods, or both.

Figure 1: Findings from research linking neighborhood food environments and dietary behavior

- African-American residents increased their fruit and vegetable intake by an average of 32% for each supermarket in their census tract.
- Low fruit and vegetable consumption are linked to the poor selection of these items in the nearest neighborhood supermarkets.
- The relative availability of produce is tied to consumption patterns – even when the taste preference for these items is low.
- Higher food prices, particularly higher fruit and vegetable prices, were significantly related to greater increases in BMI in elementary school children.

Source: Prevention Institute Report: Healthy Eating and Physical Activity: Addressing Inequities in Urban Environments, 2007. www.preventioninstitute.org



Impact on Nutrition and Health

Diet is critical to human development, health, and well-being across the lifespan. Dietary factors are associated with four of the ten leading causes of death: heart disease, some types of cancer, stroke, and Type 2 diabetes. ⁹ It is estimated that these health conditions cost over \$200 billion annually in medical expenses and lost productivity. ¹⁰

Nationally, it is well-established that people who lack access to healthy food are more likely to be obese and suffer from a variety of chronic diseases. Race, ethnicity, and income are critical risk factors for both obesity and undernutrition, with African American, Hispanic, and Native American populations experiencing higher rates of these conditions and related chronic diseases. Babies and children without consistent nutrition suffer physical and cognitive problems which are sometimes irreversible.

Focus on Ypsilanti

Ypsilanti is a small urban community of about four square miles and 22,000 residents located in southeast Michigan, just a few miles from Ann Arbor. Ypsilanti is a racially diverse city; about 60% of the population is white, 30% is African American, 3% Asian, and 3% Hispanic. The south side of Ypsilanti, also called the Gateway Community, is predominantly African American and low income. The disability status rate for this area is over twice the city-wide rate and approximately half the population is not in the labor force. For the past several years, Ypsilanti has faced a serious financial crisis. Lack of funds caused the city to cut its recreation department a few years ago, along with cuts to police, fire, and the planning department.

According to Health Improvement Plan of Washtenaw County 2005 survey data (http://hip.ewashtenaw.org), Ypsilanti residents are more overweight than County residents overall (see Table 1). Between 1995 and 2005, the percent of overweight and obese adults in Washtenaw County increased from 44% to 50%. Residents of Ypsilanti are heavier than County residents overall with 53% overweight or obese in 2005.

Ypsilanti residents also eat fewer fruit and vegetable servings and more fast food than their county counterparts. In 2005, only 25% of Washtenaw County adults ate five or more servings of fruits and vegetables each day. Rates were even lower for adult residents of Ypsilanti (12%). And while 18% of adults in the county report eating fast food two or more times per week, in Ypsilanti the rate is 23%.

Table 1: Selected adult health behaviors/chronic disease risk factors

Selected Health Behaviors/ Chronic Disease Risk Factors	Ypsilanti	Washtenaw County
Eats fast food 2 or more times per week	23%	18%
Eats fewer than 5 or more fruits or vegetables per day	88%	75%
Overweight or obese	53%	50%
Ever been told has diabetes	10.4%	8.6%

Source: Health Improvement Plan of Washtenaw County's 2005 Survey Data. http://hip.ewashtenaw.org

With growing awareness of the health issues outlined above and a strong desire to positively impact Ypsilanti residents' opportunities for healthy eating, the Ypsilanti Health Coalition and Washtenaw County Public Health Department worked together to assess the city's nutrition environment and then plan and implement prioritized changes.

Assessing Ypsilanti's Nutrition Environment

Using the Nutrition Environment Assessment Tool

During the summer of 2005, the Ypsilanti Health Coalition completed the Nutrition Environment Assessment Tool (NEAT), a web-based community assessment tool available through the Michigan Department of Community Health (MDCH) (www.mihealthtools.org/neat). The NEAT allows communities to identify environmental factors and policies that support or discourage healthy eating by sampling restaurants, convenience and grocery stores, worksites, and schools. The Ypsilanti Health Coalitions' Healthy Eating Subcommittee completed the tool as part of their work with Washtenaw Steps Up, a grant-funded project coordinated by the Washtenaw County Public Health Department and funded by the MDCH's Cardiovascular Health, Nutrition, and Physical Activity Section.

Overall, Ypsilanti earned 58% of possible points on the NEAT. The results revealed that convenience stores were "not at all supportive" and grocery stores were only "partially supportive" of healthy eating, while local media and medical practices were "fully supportive."

A Closer Look at Food Stores in Ypsilanti

With a strong desire to learn more about the food sold at convenience and grocery stores in the community, the Healthy Eating Subcommittee decided to complete a more comprehensive examination of these stores. To accomplish this, the coalition set out to both assess and map food stores in Ypsilanti city limits to learn more about the type and availability of foods. Food stores were defined as any stores that sell food (except restaurants) such as grocery stores, ethnic markets, specialty and convenience stores, corner stores, as well as gas stations and pharmacies that also sell food.

This in-depth assessment sought to answer the following questions:

- How much healthy food is available at food stores located within the city of Ypsilanti boundaries?
- Are these stores located throughout the city, providing equal access to residents?
- What community assets related to healthy eating are available in Ypsilanti?

This assessment included analyses of:

- Types of food stocked at food stores.
- Presence of in-store promotions of healthy foods (such as "5-A-Day" posters).
- Accessibility for pedestrians, bicyclists, and transit riders.
- Prices for three standard food items.
- Mapping of all stores assessed and community assets such as community gardens and farmers' markets using GIS (Geographical Information System) software.

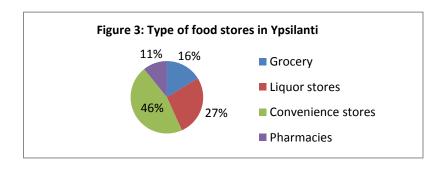
Data Collection Methods

The Healthy Eating subcommittee and Washtenaw County Public Health Department staff developed a data collection instrument to use in each store (see Appendix, page 14). This instrument was developed using key questions from the NEAT grocery and convenience store section and additional questions regarding food item pricing were added by the coalition.

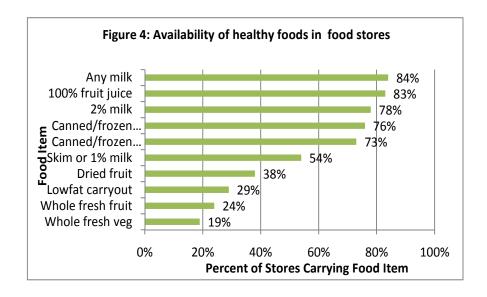
All food stores in Ypsilanti were visited in-person and assessed using the data collection sheet by a class of health education students from Eastern Michigan University (EMU) or the Washtenaw County Public Health Department staff. The city was divided into sections and groups of EMU students walked each section to locate food stores. At each store, the student groups presented a letter explaining the assessment project and obtained verbal permission to examine the food and beverages stocked at the store. The students were granted permission in all cases. The student groups visited 30 stores. After these data were collected, Washtenaw County Public Health (WCPH) Department staff completed data entry and analysis. WCPH staff verified that all food stores were assessed by asking community experts within the coalition to review the list of stores. Accordingly, WCPH and the subcommittee discovered and assessed an additional seven stores.

Results

A total of 37 food stores were assessed. These stores included six grocery stores (stores judged as selling a wide variety of foods), 17 convenience stores (stores selling primarily snack foods such as candy, cookies, chips, and soda), as well as 10 liquor stores (stores judged as selling predominantly alcoholic beverages) and four pharmacies that also sell food items (see Figure 3). Results are first summarized for all stores combined and then key results by type of store are presented.



Overall, a majority of stores offered healthier milk products and canned or frozen fruits and vegetables, but lacked fresh produce, healthier carryout choices, and quality of produce was poor (see Figure 4). Few stores sold fresh vegetables (19%) or fruit (24%) while many sold canned or frozen vegetables (76%) and fruit (73%). Less than half (38%) sold dried fruits, while 83% offered 100% fruit juice.



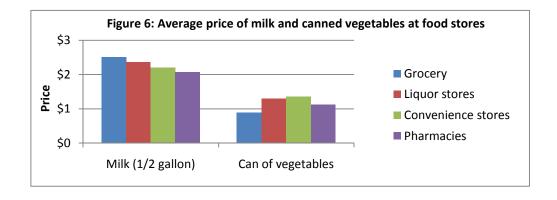
The fresh produce sold was evaluated for quality, defined as "perceived freshness and attractiveness." Of the 12 stores that offered fresh produce, only 8% of the produce received "Excellent" and 8% received "Very Good" ratings for quality. 59% of stores received "Good" and 25% received "Poor" ratings for quality (see Figure 5 below).



Stores fared better with their milk products. Most (84%) stocked milk in quart or larger servings. Most stores stocked 2% milk (78%) while about half (54%) stocked skim or 1% milk. Only about one-third of stores offered skim milk or 1% milk in single-serving containers.

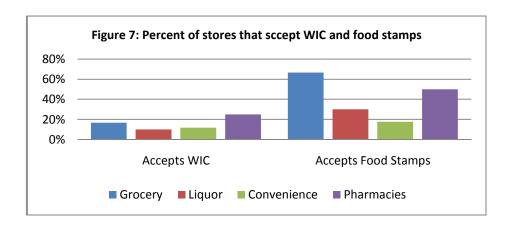
Stores scored very low in survey sections assessing nutrition education, in-store promotion of healthy choices, and availability of coupons or in-store specials for healthy foods. None of the 37 food stores in Ypsilanti offered a healthy grocery tour, healthy cooking demos, or healthy eating posters. Only one of 37 the stores provided healthy choices shopping guides, healthy recipe cards, healthy food choices labels or 5-A-Day information, or tip cards and brochures.

The price of three staple food items—half gallon of milk, fresh apple, and can of vegetables—were also assessed at each store. Because so few stores carried fresh apples (a fruit the coalition had assumed would be most prevalent at food stores), only the price of milk and the can of vegetables are included in this report. A can of vegetables ranged in price from \$.89 at grocery stores to \$1.33 at convenience stores (see Figure 6 below). Surprisingly, a half gallon of milk, which ranged from \$2.06 to \$2.50, was least expensive at pharmacies.



The assessment tool also attempted to gain information about accessibility of the stores by foot, bike, and public transportation. The majority of stores (89%) had a sidewalk on the same side of the street as the store. Many (79%) also had a bus stop in the same block. However, very few (8%) had a bike rack available for customer use.

The assessment tool also evaluated acceptance of food stamps and WIC by all stores. About one-third of stores (12 stores or 32%) accept food stamps (also known as the Bridge Card or EBT), while only five stores (14%) accept WIC. Of the stores that accept food stamps, four of 12 (33%) are grocery stores. Of those that accept WIC, one of five stores is a grocery store.



Results by Type of Store

Grocery Stores – A total of six stores were identified as "grocery stores." These grocery stores included three markets that sell African or Asian foods that we termed "specialty groceries." Also in the grocery store category was a local food cooperative and a discount supermarket. All grocery stores sold fresh fruits and vegetables. The quality of this produce ranged from excellent (n=1), very good (n=1), good (n=2) to poor (n=2). Only one grocery store accepted WIC while two-thirds accepted food stamps.

Liquor Stores – A total of ten stores were identified as selling primarily alcohol with some food items. Of these stores, only one sold fresh fruit and no liquor stores sold fresh vegetables. One store accepted WIC and three stores accepted food stamps.

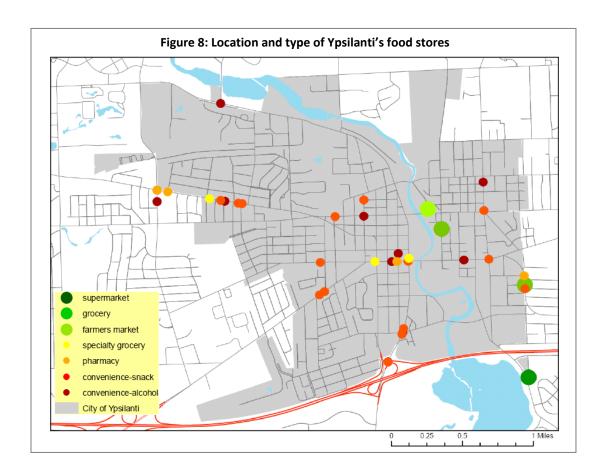
Convenience Stores – There were a total of 17 convenience stores (stores where snack foods are primarily sold) within Ypsilanti city limits. Of these, 11 (65%) were located at gas stations. Of these stores, only two sold fresh fruit and one sold fresh vegetables. Additionally, two (12%) accepted WIC and three (18%) accepted food stamps.

Pharmacies – Four pharmacies were identified in Ypsilanti as also selling food products. Of these, none sold fresh fruits or vegetables. One pharmacy accepted WIC and two pharmacies accepted food stamps. *Healthy Food Assets*

In 2005, Ypsilanti had one farmers' market located in the northeastern portion of the city. The market was open Wednesdays and Saturdays from May through September. In addition, there were 15 community gardens in Ypsilanti located at schools, in neighborhoods, or community organizations.

Mapping Results

Using the geographic data collected (street addresses of all stores assessed), the distribution throughout the city of groceries and other stores with healthier food options was assessed (see Figure 8). The grocery stores, supermarkets, and farmers markets are located in the eastern area of the city. The southwest and west areas of the city lack these types of food stores.



Assessment Conclusions

The nutrition environment assessment showed that healthy food is not widely available in Ypsilanti food stores. Of the six "grocery" stores, only one is a full-service supermarket. It is located on the other side of I-94, away from the rest of the city. Three specialty markets are available for those seeking Arab, Asian, and African foods. A small amount of fresh produce was available at these locations. Another small grocery stocks a variety of healthy foods and is convenient for walking and biking for the nearby neighborhoods on the northeast side of town.

The remaining 31 food stores, including party/convenience stores, gas stations that sell food, and pharmacies selling food, did not stock enough fresh produce, low-fat dairy, and other healthy foods to

make healthy meals. Some store owners appeared to be making an effort by offering a bowl of fresh fruit for sale at the checkout counter, or stocking several different kinds of canned vegetables. However, these foods were not usually promoted within stores as healthier options, or offered at sale prices. Thus, several neighborhoods within Ypsilanti do not have a healthy food store within the half mile distance that is convenient for walking or biking to a store. Areas with more vulnerable populations, i.e., people who do not own cars or cannot drive, may be challenged to find healthy foods available locally. For those lacking reliable transportation, a close food store may be one of their few food sources.

Taking Action

Ypsilanti Healthy Food Access Initiative

The Ypsilanti Healthy Food Access Initiative (YHFAI) was formed in 2006 in response to these results. Using focus groups and a market analysis, YHFAI sought to understand the existing supply of and demand for healthy foods, including residents' food preferences and the financial viability of various options for increasing access to healthy foods. The project focused on the needs and desires of residents of the south side, or Gateway, area of Ypsilanti, but has implications for all area residents. As a result, YHFAI partners have supported a new grocer located in the downtown business district.

Downtown Ypsilanti Farmers' Market

Also in 2006, Ypsilanti Health Coalition partners launched a new farmers' market in the downtown area to serve low-income neighborhoods as well as the broader community. Organizers researched best practices used at other markets around the country and selected several methods to make the farmers' market accessible to low-income populations. Strong partnerships were critical to the success of these efforts, which included:

- Wireless Electronic Benefits Transfer (EBT) machine: Processes Food Stamp "Bridge" cards. This market is only one of five in the state to pilot the wireless EBT machine.
- Project FRESH (<u>Farm Resources Expanding and Supporting Health</u>): The Michigan version of the federal farmers' market nutrition program that provides coupons to low-income families to purchase Michigan-grown, fresh fruits and vegetables. Project FRESH coupons were distributed at the downtown market.
- **Senior Project FRESH:** The federal farmers' market nutrition program for low-income seniors to purchase Michigan-grown, fresh fruits and vegetables. Coalition partners brought this program to Washtenaw County for the first time in 2007, specifically serving low-income seniors living in close proximity to the market.

Next Steps

In 2008, the Ypsilanti Health Coalition and Washtenaw County Public Health Department will continue working to support and promote the Downtown Ypsilanti Farmers' Market as a community asset and important source of healthy food. To do so, these organizations are funded by the Michigan Department of Community Health's Cardiovascular Health, Nutrition, and Physical Activity Section, the Food Stamp Nutrition Education program, and several local organizations including St. Joseph Mercy Health System, University of Michigan Health System, and Ypsilanti Area Beyer Memorial Health Foundation. Projects will include:

- Increase food stamp redemption at Downtown Ypsilanti Farmers' Market: Marketing strategies will be implemented to educate and encourage Food Stamp program participants to redeem Food Stamps on fruits and vegetables at the farmers' market.
- **Prescription for Health:** Staff at several clinics and an emergency food program serving uninsured and underinsured residents will "prescribe" Ypsilanti Farmers' Market fruits and vegetables to high-need patients. The prescription will be in the form of a \$5 coupon redeemable at Ypsilanti Farmers' Markets.
- Cooking demonstrations and food sampling: Coalition partners will offer cooking demonstrations, food sampling, recipe cards, and nutrition information to Food Stamp program participants in conjunction with Project FRESH coupon distribution at the Ypsilanti Farmers' Market.

For More Information

For more information about healthy eating initiatives in Washtenaw County, please contact Jenna Bacolor at bacolorj@ewashtenaw.org or 734-544-2969. For more information about the Ypsilanti Health Coalition, please contact Debbie Young at youngdd@trinity-health.org or 734-544-6904.

Appendix: Ypsilanti Nutrition Environment Project-Data Collection Instrument

	Date:		_
	Ypsilanti Nutrition Environment Project Data Collection Instrument		
1.	Name of Store:		
2.	Street Address:		
	City:Phone:		
3.	Is there a sidewalk on the same side of the street as this store? Yes / N	No	
4.	Is there a bike rack located within approximately 100 ft. of the store? Yes / N	No	
5.	Is there a bus stop on this block (on either side of the street)? Yes / N	No	
6.	Does the store accept WIC? Yes / N	No	
7.	Does the store accept food stamps? Yes / N	No	
8.	Is this store located at a gas station? Yes / N	No	
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	Data Collector: Date:			
12 Nutritia	n Education (check all offered over the last 30 days):			
	a. Healthy grocery tour	ΤΥ	1	
	o. Healthy grocery tour	Y	1	
	Healthy cooking demos Healthy choices shopping guide available in prominent location	Y		
	f. Healthy crioices shopping guide available in prominent location f. Healthy recipe cards available	Y	1	
	e. Healthy recipe cards available	Y	-	
	promotion of healthy choices:	<u> </u>	<u> </u>	
	a. Healthy food choices identification program, for example, MFit Labels or	ΤΥ		
,	5-A-Day information	'	'	
	Tip cards or brochures	Y	<u> </u>	
	is or in-store specials for:			
	a. Fresh, canned, or frozen fruit	ΤΥ		
	o. Fresh, canned or frozen vegetables	Y		
	Skim or 10/ milk	Y		
	1. 2% milk	Y	-	
	a. Reduced fat cheeses	Y	1	
		Y	1	
	. 100% fruit or vegetable juice	Y		
16. Please	comment on the appearance of food/quality of fresh produce (if applicable):			
6	enter the expiration date of the following items: a. Half-gallon of milk (choose milk at front of case): / (month/day/year) (Check here if no expiration) b. Deli meat (choose meet at front of case): / (month/day/year) (Check here if no expiration)			
40 DI				
	enter the <u>price</u> of the following items: a. Half-gallon of milk*: \$. (Check here if not sold at this	etere:	_,	
	a. Half-gallon of milk*: \$ (Check here if not sold at this one fresh apple*: \$ (Check here if not sold at this			
(c. One can of vegetables*: \$ (Check here if not sold at this	Store.	□)	
* Please ass	ess cost of non-organic items unless only organic products are available.			
	appear this store is making an effort to offer healthy food choices? a. Why or why not?	Yes /	No	
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Notes

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⁸ Healthy People 2010, Chapter 19, Nutrition and Overweight. www.healthypeople.gov

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¹⁰ Healthy People 2010, Focus Area 19: Nutrition and Overweight Progress Review, January 21, 2004. Available at http://www.healthypeople.gov/Data/2010prog/focus19/Nutrition Overweight.pdf

¹¹ Healthy People 2010, Focus Area 19: Nutrition and Overweight Progress Review, January 21, 2004. Available at http://www.healthypeople.gov/Data/2010prog/focus19/Nutrition Overweight.pdf