



Food Purchasing Patterns of Rural WIC Participants do not vary by Food Desert Status

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Introduction

- Limited food desert research has involved residents in the characterization of food access. The purpose of this qualitative study, framed by the Social Cognitive Theory, was to compare food purchases of participants living in a food desert (food desert residents or FDR) to purchases made by non-food desert residents (NFDR).

Methods

- In one rural Alabama county, 30 women enrolled in the Special Supplemental Food and Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (14 FDR) participated in one-on-one interviews utilizing free listing to describe food purchases from frequently visited stores. Stores were grouped by type, while foods were collapsed into groups (meats; fruits; vegetables; dairy; grains; eggs; fats; miscellaneous) then further categorized by processing method (fresh, frozen, canned). Fisher's Exact Tests were used to compare proportions of FDR and NFDR purchasing each food subcategory at different store types.

Results

- There were no significant differences between FDR and NFDR purchasing patterns based on residence, therefore results are presented for the collective sample. A range of stores was identified; however, 80% of participants identified grocery stores as their primary food outlet. Grocery stores and supercenters were sources of the majority of food groups. However, specialty stores were frequent sources of frozen meats and vegetables, while participants often purchased shelf-stable items (canned produce, beverages, snacks, and seasonings) from dollar stores.

Discussion

- Purchasing patterns indicated access to all food groups and demonstrated preference for traditional stores. Results highlighted the importance of varying store types, thereby identifying several outlets through which food desert interventions may be explored.

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