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GEOG101

**Introduction:** Around 1.3 million New Yorkers struggle more to find access to affordable, nutritious food than to find a fast-food restaurant or deli. This phenomenon, known as a food desert, occurs when access to inexpensive or quality food in an urban area is limited. Food deserts are usually prevalent in low-income neighbourhoods, where supermarkets and grocery stores are lacking. Food deserts are a detriment to New York City residents, as they lead to numerous issues regarding health, inequalities, and food insecurity. This project showcases food access and food deserts in New York City by highlighting the causes and effects, the most affected areas, and the different factors that come into play. By considering these aspects, solutions to food deserts can be implemented to improve food access for all New Yorkers.

**Background/Context:** There are several causes for food deserts. The first cause is supermarkets avoiding low-income communities. Low-income communities are unable to support supermarkets due to their economic conditions, leading to grocery chains straying away from these neighborhoods, in turn causing decreased food access. On the contrary, the second cause of food deserts is high rent and real estate costs. High rent and real estate costs make it harder for supermarkets to open in the area. The third cause of food deserts is transportation barriers. Lack of transportation in an area forces residents to travel long distances or take excessive amounts of buses or trains to arrive at a supermarket or grocery store. This can be money-consuming, stressful, and extensive. Lastly, the fourth cause of food deserts is gentrification, which brings high-end stores or upscale markets along with investment in them. This causes residents who have lived in that neighborhood for a prolonged period of time to be able to afford these luxuries. The effects of food deserts apply to all of these causes. These effects include numerous health issues, such as diabetes, obesity, and hypertension, by relying on processed food, fast food, and overall unhealthy options. Not only do causes of food deserts cause health complications, but they also lead to economic inequities. The worsening of these food limitations creates a deeper divide between wealthy and low-income neighborhoods. And certainly, food deserts lead to greater food insecurity, leaving families without knowledge of whether they will be able to feed their households sufficiently.

**Map Visualizations:** This map depicts the areas of New York City that suffer from food deserts. The first neighborhood is Harlem. Harlem suffers from food deserts due to the prevalence of cheap, unhealthy food options, while, conversely, fresh produce is scarce. Gentrification plays a role in Harlem's food deserts as well, in which the newer, more expensive supermarkets that contain nutritious groceries are more challenging to afford for long-term Harlem residents. The second neighborhood is Far Rockaway. Far Rockaway suffers from food deserts primarily due to its isolated location. Due to its location, grocery chains and supermarkets tend to avoid it, leading

to a significant amount of fast-food restaurants. The next neighborhood is Brownsville, Brooklyn. Brownsville suffers from high poverty, and because of this, supermarket chains tend to avoid these areas, and like other neighborhoods aforementioned, it contains an abundance of convenience stores and fast-food eateries. Lastly, the general Bronx area suffers from limited food access and food deserts for similar reasons: unhealthy options, and low-income communities unable to afford nutritious, more expensive food.

Solutions: Many reliable NYC food access programs include:

1. FRESH (Food Retail Expansion to Support Health) provides zoning and tax incentives for low-income communities to ensure that the development and retention of supermarkets in those areas is continued.
2. Green Carts are affordable, mobile street vendors that sell fresh produce, such as fruits and vegetables to maintain the health of areas with low-income and slow down the effects of food deserts on residents.
3. Farmer's markets and urban agriculture, similarly to Green Carts, guarantee increased access to fresh food in food deserted neighborhoods, while simultaneously supporting farmers.

Conclusion: In conclusion, food access and food deserts in New York City is an issue that has devastating outcomes on its residents. The overall causes of this issue include low amounts of supermarkets in low-income neighborhoods, high real estate costs, transportation barriers, and gentrification. Moreso, limited food access food deserts lead to health problems, economic disparities, and increased food insecurity. However, these issues can be tackled by the strength of dedicated food access programs, such as FRESH, Green Carts, and many farmer's markets. Together, we can consider and understand the weight of these effects on residents to improve food access for all New Yorkers.

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