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Task 2: Research & Data Gathering

Topic: Food Deserts & Food Access in New York City

What is a Food Desert?

- A food desert is an area where individuals unfortunately have limited access to affordable and nutritious food.
- These areas may often lack full-service grocery stores, supermarkets, or fresh meat markets.
- They typically reside most commonly in low-income neighborhoods, where transportation and affordability also play a major role.

Summary:

In New York City, food deserts are concentrated in certain neighborhoods where people struggle to access fresh, healthy food. The residents of these neighborhoods tend to depend on corner

stores such as deli's, bodegas, or fast-food restaurants that have limited healthy options.

Nonetheless, this leads to food insecurity and higher rates of health problems such as obesity, diabetes, high blood pressure, etc.

Causes of Food Deserts in NYC :

- Low-income communities attract fewer supermarkets, as big grocery chains avoid areas like this due to these neighborhoods being seen as less profitable.
- High rent and real estate costs can make it harder for new grocery stores to open.
- Transportation limitations force some residents to travel long distances or take multiple buses/trains to reach a supermarket, which can be very demeaning, stressful, and a burden to all those affected by this.
- Many neighborhoods in boroughs such as the Bronx and Brooklyn that were once historically disinvested are now gentrifying. Some new stores, restaurants, and grocery options may turn up, but the long term residents who have been there for decades find it hard to live an affordable lifestyle.

What are the Effects of Food Deserts in NYC ?

- Higher rates of diet-related illnesses (obesity, diabetes, hypertension).

- Greater food insecurity, with families unsure if everyone will have enough to eat, or worse; will go unfed.
- Reliance on corner stores and fast food, which mostly sell processed, unhealthy options.
- Worsening inequality, since food deserts deepen existing health and economic disparities.
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Data: Grocery Stores, Population, Income

- NYC Department of Health estimates that around 1.3 million New Yorkers live in areas with limited supermarket access.
- **The Bronx:**
 - Some of the highest obesity and diabetes rates in NYC.
 - Many neighborhoods are officially classified as food deserts.
- **Central Brooklyn** (e.g., Brownsville, East New York):
 - Few large supermarkets, despite high population density.
- **Upper Manhattan** (Harlem, Washington Heights):

Lower-income residents have fewer fresh food options compared to wealthier Manhattan neighborhoods.

Population & Income Factors:

- Lower-income households spend a larger share of their income on food, making being able to live an affordable life challenging.
 - NYC's poorest neighborhoods often have the least access to fresh produce and supermarkets.
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Examples of NYC Food Access Programs (Solutions)

- **FRESH Program** (Food Retail Expansion to Support Health):
 - This provides zoning and tax incentives for supermarkets in many gentrified neighborhoods.
- **Green Carts:**
 - Mobile street vendors selling fruits and vegetables in high-need areas allow the vendors to make a living while the consumers have affordable and healthy food intake.
- **Farmers Markets & Urban Agriculture:**
 - Community gardens and farmers markets, which are especially in the Bronx and Brooklyn, can expand more access to fresh produce.

Final Summary:

Furthermore, food deserts in New York City remain a serious issue, particularly in the Bronx, Central Brooklyn, and Upper Manhattan. These neighborhoods face poverty, limited transportation options, and a shortage of food resources. As a result, residents depend heavily on corner stores and fast food, which harms public health. Programs like FRESH and Green Carts are working to expand food access, but challenges continue, especially for longtime residents in neighborhoods that are now gentrified and facing rising costs. While these programs provide much-needed assistance, it is also important to recognize the resource most have; technology. The role technology can play is how many apps and online tools can help people locate affordable grocery stores nearby, plan easier transit routes, and discover resources in their communities. As more attention is drawn to these areas, businesses can grow and compete, potentially lowering prices and improving access to healthy food, which ultimately allows more affordable food resources for long term residents in these neighborhoods. By combining targeted programs with the power of technology, NYC can better support residents and work toward more equitable, accessible, and sustainable food options for everyone.

Websites used to conduct research:

1. Food Access Research Atlas — U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA)
2. NYC “Food by the Numbers 2024” — NYC Mayor’s Office of Food Policy

3. NYC Food Policy – Food Metrics Reports Page
4. “NYC: Over 1M New Yorkers face food insecurity in 2024” — AMNY
5. NYHealth “Hunger on the Rise: New York’s Food Insufficiency Rates Hit New Highs”
(2024 Update)