

Food Deserts: Research on the Causes, Implications and Efforts to Combat Them

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Overview

- Food deserts and food access
- The issue from a supply and demand view
- Research findings
- Potential solutions

Food Deserts and Food Access

Food Desert is a geographic concept – an area where healthy food is limited due largely to limited economic opportunities

Food Deserts and Food Access

Food Access is broader concept

Distance still a factor, but not the defining factor

**Can people get healthy food?
If not, poor health outcomes**

Supply and Demand

FOOD (supply)



PEOPLE (demand)

Supply Side Issues – Availability

- Grocery stores
- Convenience stores
- Farmers markets
- Individual gardening
 - School meals
 - Food pantries
 - Soup kitchens

Supply Side Issues - Healthy

- Proteins
 - Dairy
- Fresh Fruits
- Fresh Vegetables
 - Variety

Supply Side Issues – Time and Logistics

- Perishable?
- When the customer can buy it?
 - Quantity they can use?
- Do business, public or non-profit orgs have capacity to offer it?

Demand Side Issues - Customer

Who needs it?

Do they know where to buy it?

Can they afford it?

Do they know how to prepare it?

Will they eat it?

Demand Side Issues - Logistics

Can they get to it? (transportation!)

Can some people use EBT?

Can they get it home?

Can they store it?

Demand Side Issues - Logistics

If a public or non-profit program is available, and if local partners know about it, and if they choose to offer it (a lot of ifs)

- Do citizens know programs exist?
- Do they know if they qualify?
- Do they know how to participate?

Research

What Do We Know?

NC Food Deserts are Real

Dozens of peer-reviewed studies show food access disparities exist

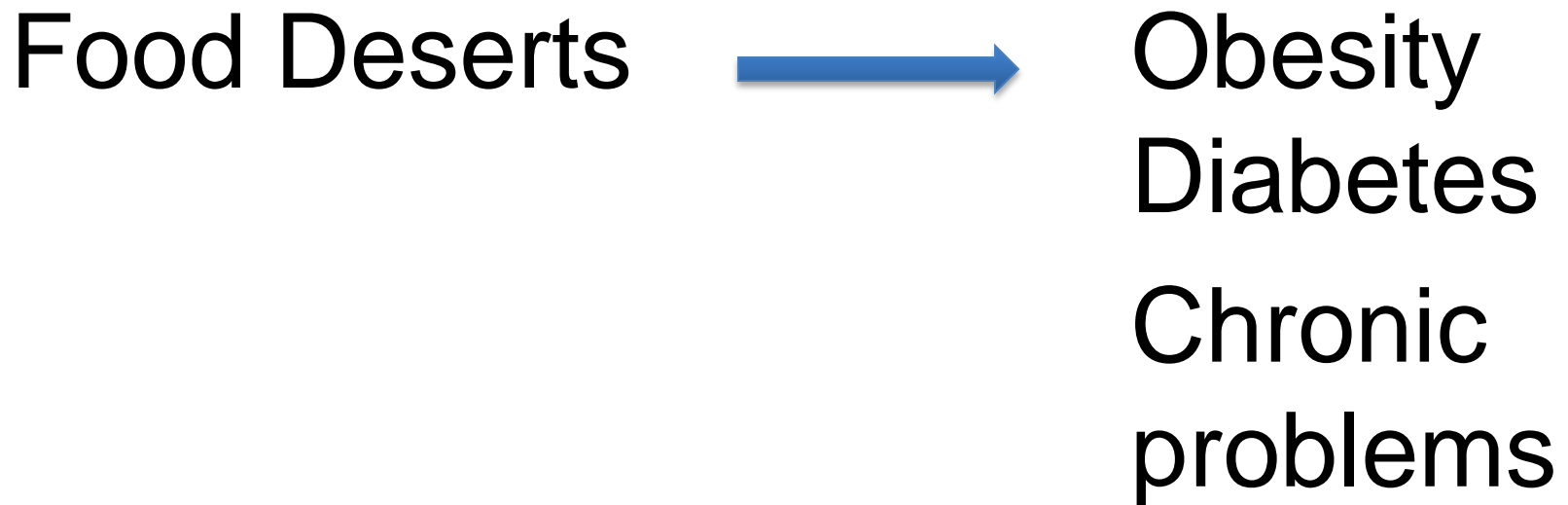
NC Food Deserts

Some urban but mainly rural

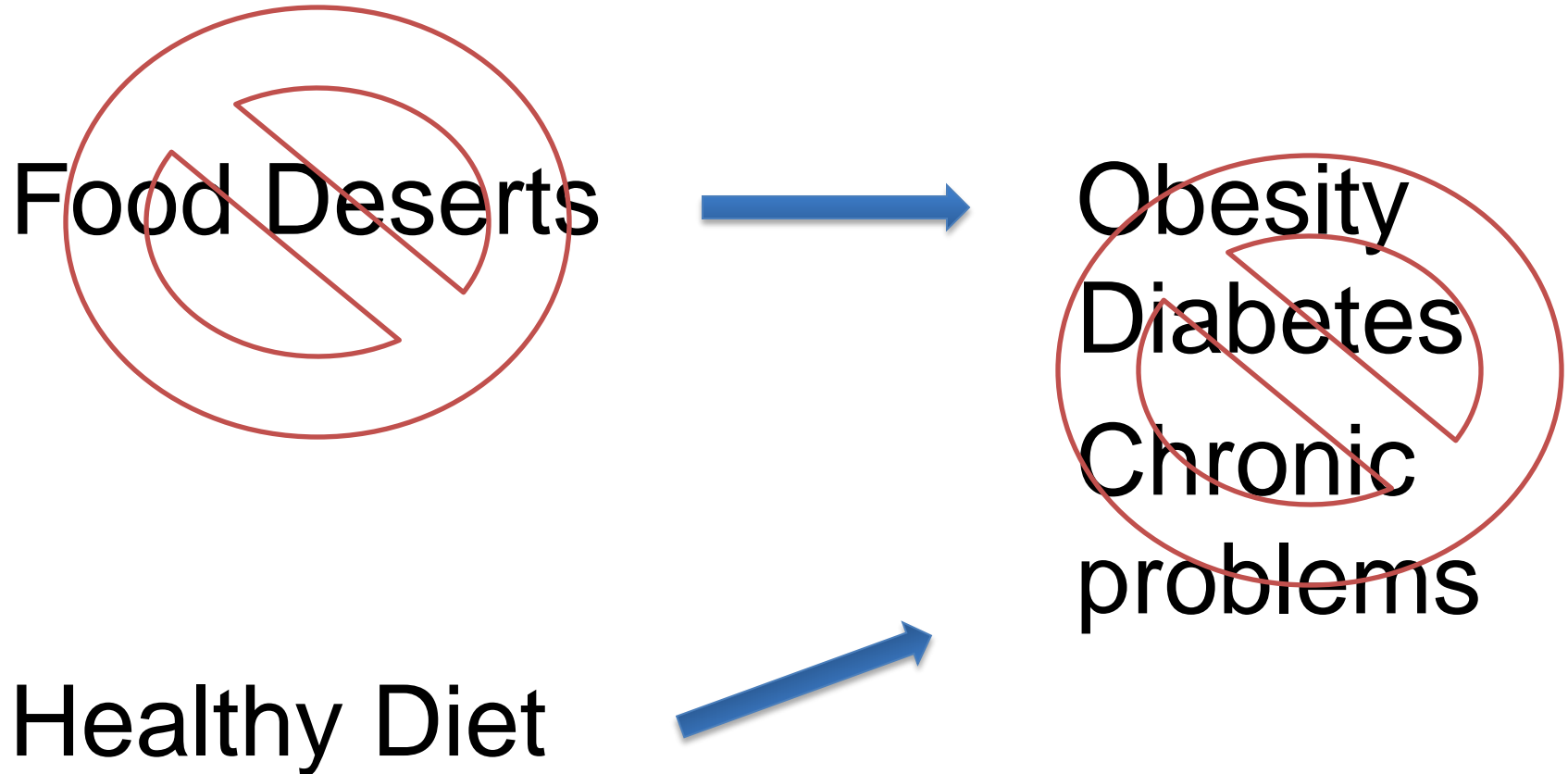
Tend to be lower income and/or minority

Food is less available, costs more, of lower quality, with less variety

Link to Health Consequences?



Link to Health Consequences?



But Specific Links are Unclear

Individual studies have conflicting results on whether the main problem is food environment (supply) or consumer behavior (demand)

Raleigh, we have a problem...

No clear path on how to address it

But it is clear barriers exist on both supply and demand side of issue

Many proposed solutions

Policy proposals address all aspects of the supply-demand framework

Fall 2013 NCSL Report

School meal policies/Farm to School

Nutrition education/physical activity

Public health screening/education

Grocery financing initiatives

Food production/system
improvements

Farmers Markets/Gardens/Food Hubs

Studies/Commissions

Example: Access to Summer Meals

Barriers to accessing available healthy school meals means the state doesn't access over \$2 million per day each summer, funds that could be spent in the NC food system

Overall combination approach?

Access to affordable, appealing
healthy food

Capacity to store and prepare

Consumer knowledge and desire

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