

Re-Storing the Crescent City:

Food Access in Three New Orleans Neighborhoods

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Summary: Research shows that low-income and minority communities are most often affected by poor access to supermarkets and other stores that sell fresh fruits and vegetables. Such disparities in access to healthy and affordable food exist in New Orleans, a problem which was worsened in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina. Using data on the number and type of food stores, as well as shelf space information on fresh produce and snack foods, the Prevention Research Center at Tulane University has mapped the food environment of three neighborhoods: Central City, Hollygrove, and the Lower 9th Ward.

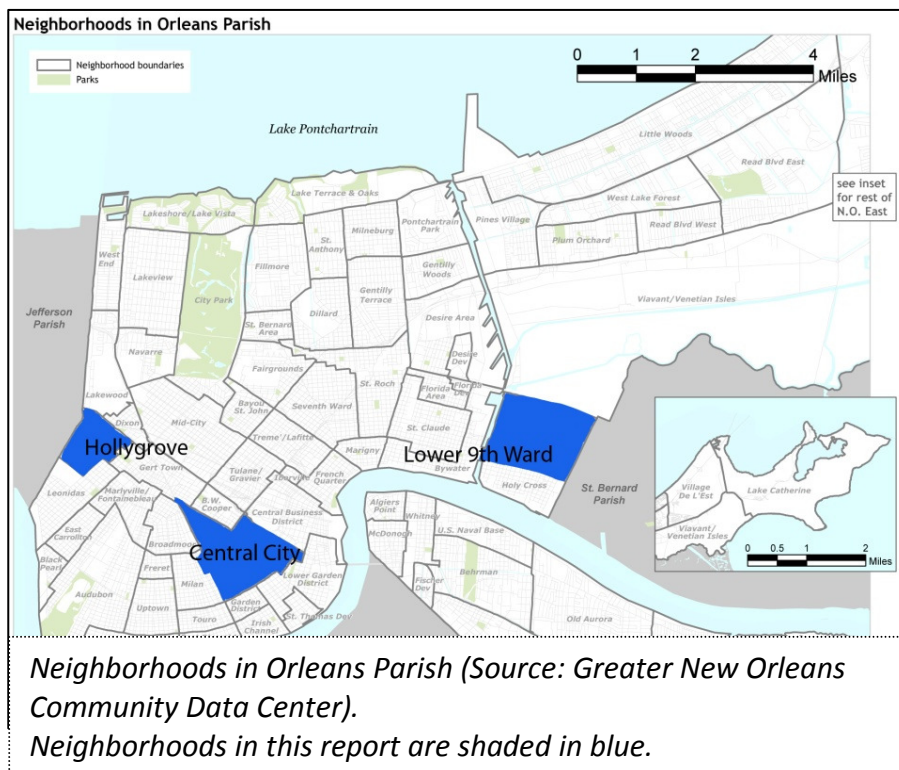
Communities which support healthy lifestyles should provide access to fresh food through any number of food retail outlets, including supermarkets, small food stores, and farmers markets. While most neighborhoods in New Orleans have access to one or more food stores, not all neighborhoods have equal access to retail outlets which sell fresh fruits and vegetables. Small food stores – or “corner stores” – can fill this gap, offering food that is quick and convenient. However, unlike supermarkets, which offer a large selection of foods, neighborhood corner stores generally carry a limited selection of items, and make most of their money from alcohol, tobacco, high-calorie snacks, and sugar-sweetened beverages.

Not only do fruits and vegetables play a central role in promoting a healthy diet, but they also help prevent obesity, which has become a major public health concern in the US. Too many people live in communities where fresh produce is hard to find, making it challenging to eat well and to maintain a healthy body weight and active lifestyle. Improving access to fresh produce is important, especially in low-income communities of color, which tend to have the least access to nutritious food and the highest rates of obesity and diet-related diseases.

By illustrating the neighborhood food environment with maps, charts, and data tables, *Re-Storing the Crescent City* aims to provide local groups with information and in turn to support improvements in community food security. The report examines three predominantly-African American neighborhoods in New Orleans – Hollygrove, the Lower Ninth Ward, and Central City – presenting information on accessibility to stores and availability of fresh fruits and vegetables as compared to high-calories snack foods. The report begins with a description of our methodology, then illustrates each of the three neighborhoods, and concludes with a discussion of the importance of food access to the development of New Orleans.

Illustrating the Neighborhood Food Environment

In this report we illustrate the **food environment** in each of three neighborhoods. By “food environment,” we mean the number and type of retail food outlets that are located within a two kilometer (1.2 mile) radius surrounding the center of a neighborhood. Looking at the supermarkets, corner stores, and markets that fall within this area provides a snapshot of what the “on the ground” retail environment looks like. Indicators like median income, levels of car access, distance from the neighborhood to the nearest supermarket, and the number of small stores in a neighborhood helps paint a picture of the food environment, suggesting what types of food may be sold and residents’ ease in traveling to food stores, among other factors.



Data sources and analysis

This report presents food store data collected and analyzed by the Prevention Research Center at Tulane University (Tulane PRC), and demographic estimates (2009) obtained from the Environmental Systems Research Institute (ESRI).

Information on food retail outlets in Orleans Parish was gathered by researchers at the Prevention Research Center in the fall of 2007, 2008, and 2009. Information on food retail outlets was initially obtained from InfoUSA, a commercial market information firm. This listing

included supermarkets, grocery stores, and convenience stores. Since commercial data are often not accurate, the Tulane PRC sent two-person teams out to verify these data by driving up and down every street of every census tract in Orleans Parish and counting stores; additional stores were identified through this process. In-store shelf-space measurements were calculated based on a sampling of stores. Availability of a predefined set of fruits, vegetables, and energy-dense snack foods (salty snacks, cookies and crackers, doughnuts and pastries, candies and carbonated beverages) was identified, as well as shelf-space measurements of other categories of fresh, canned, and frozen fruits and vegetables.

Each neighborhood includes a map with streets and census tract boundaries outlined in black. These maps show all the supermarkets, medium-sized stores, and corner stores within each neighborhood.

Data presented for each neighborhood include the distance from the geographic center of the neighborhood to the closest food stores, the number of food stores located within 2km of the geographic center of the neighborhood (that is, stores within the neighborhood food environment), and an estimate of the total footage of shelf space devoted to fresh produce and snack foods in the neighborhood. More specifically, because neighborhoods are made up of census tracts, figures are calculated by summing the number of stores (supermarkets, for example) within 2km of the center of each census tract in a particular neighborhood and then dividing by the number of census tracts in that neighborhood. Because some tracts have a larger population than others, they are given more value in the calculation. This methodology explains fractions (.6 supermarkets in Hollygrove, for example) of food stores.

Additionally, we present data on the “average New Orleans neighborhood.” Using the methodology described above, we calculated indicators of food access for each of the 73 neighborhoods in Orleans Parish. We then took a simple average for each indicator, which represents the average neighborhood in New Orleans.

Indicators

Supermarkets

We define supermarkets as large, full-service grocery stores with annual sales greater than \$5 million dollars. Examples of supermarkets would be Rouses, Winn-Dixie, and Whole Foods. Supermarkets are important community assets, not only providing groceries, but also money for the local economy and jobs for residents. Since they offer a wide variety of fresh foods at affordable prices, access to supermarkets also plays a role in supporting a healthy diet.

Medium-sized store

We define a medium-sized food store as one with greater than \$1 million and less than \$5 million in annual sales. Many medium-sized stores in New Orleans are family owned, and have played a strong role in their communities for generations.

Corner stores

We define a corner store as a store with less than \$1 million in annual sales. Unlike supermarkets, corner stores are found in neighborhoods all across the city. However, their presence is especially felt in communities without supermarket access, where their abundance of snack foods, sodas, and candies provides the most convenient option.

Farmers markets

Farmers markets do not require a permanent structure, and so can be set-up with relative ease. Perhaps because of this, there are a growing number of farmers and produce markets throughout the city, helping to fill the food gap in neighborhoods that do not have easy access to supermarkets. Though not shown on the maps, we note the location and hours of farmers markets in the three neighborhoods we examine.

Fast food outlets

While we do not include information on fast food outlets in this report, they play an important role in the neighborhood food environment. Fast food outlets offer quick, inexpensive meals. Regular fast food consumption, however, has been associated with obesity in several studies.

Food Balance

The balance of food in many neighborhoods is heavily weighted toward unhealthy food, with healthier options being hard to find. Shelf space data on fresh fruits, vegetables, and snack foods tell us about the food balance in a community.

Map of Food Stores in Orleans Parish



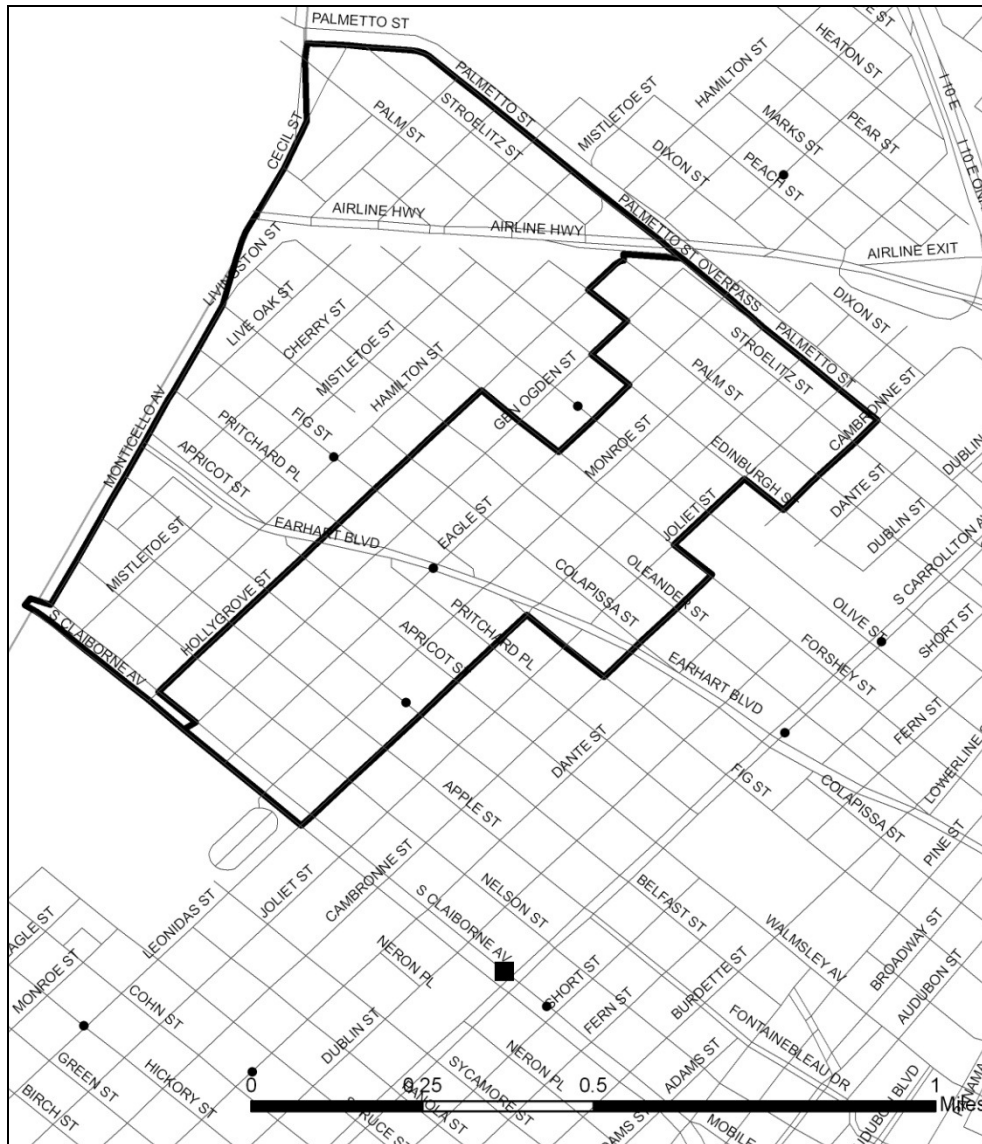
(Source: Tulane PRC)

Orleans Parish Demographics (2009)

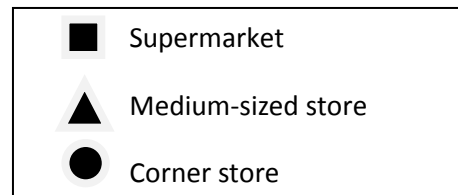
Population	
Geographic land area (mi ²)	181
Total population	326,968
Population density (pop/mi ²)	1,811
Total households	124,294
Average household income	\$47,178
Average per capita income	\$18,355
Race	
White	27.4%
Black	67%
Hispanic	4.3%

(Source: ESRI)

Hollygrove



Map of Hollygrove (Source: Tulane PRC)



Market

Hollygrove Market and Farm, located at 8301 Olive Street, is open every Tuesday from 12 noon to 6 p.m. and every Saturday from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. Information is available at: www.hollygrovemarket.com.

Hollygrove Demographics (2009)

Population	
Geographic area (mi ²)	0.6
Total population	4,567
Population density (pop/mi ²)	7,612
Total households	1,666
Average household income	\$32,970
Average per capita income	\$12,103
Race	
White	1.8%
Black	96.7%
Hispanic	0.8%

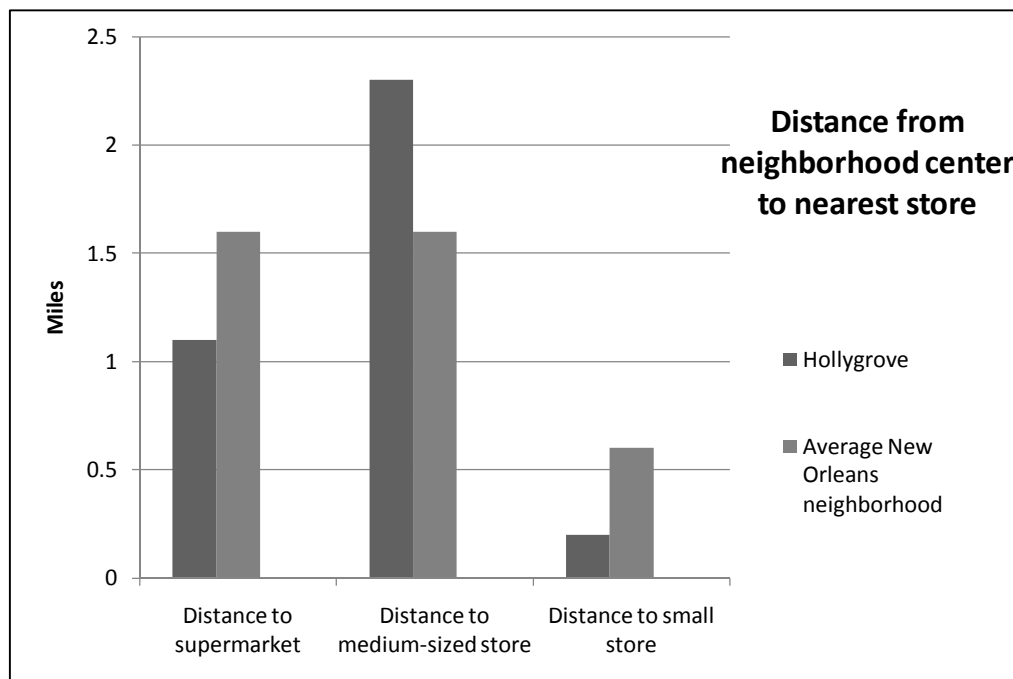
Market Distances (2009)

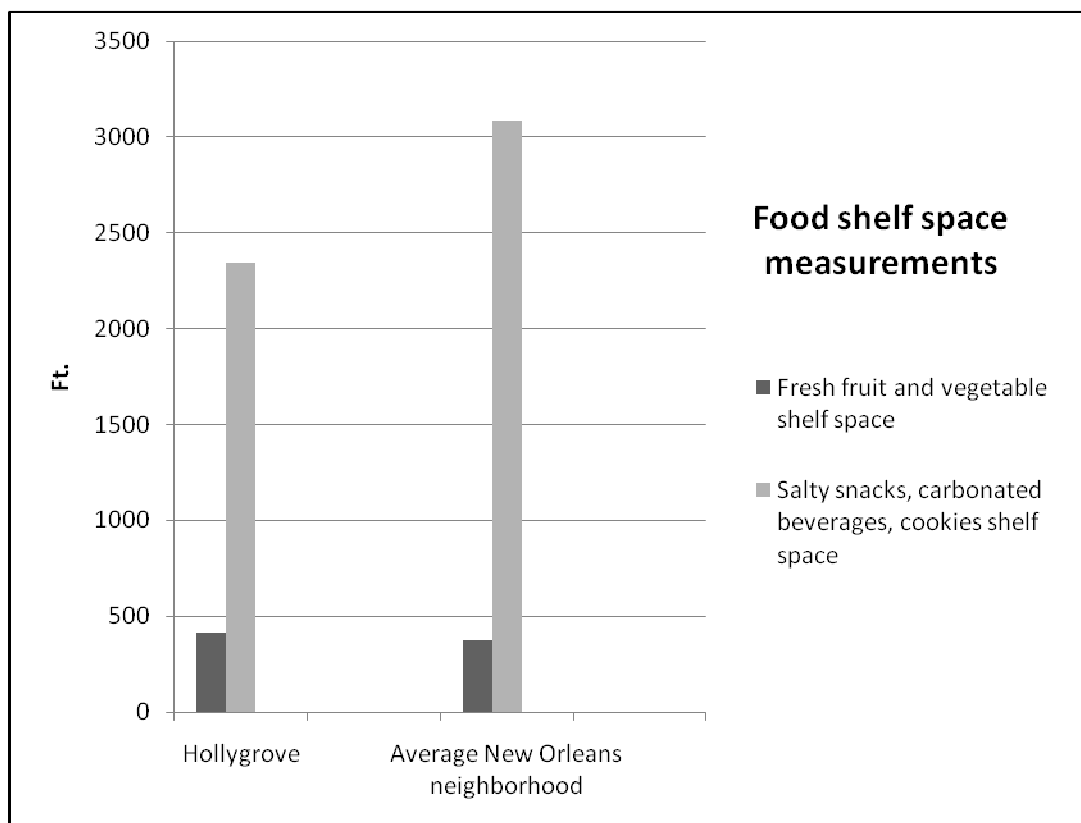
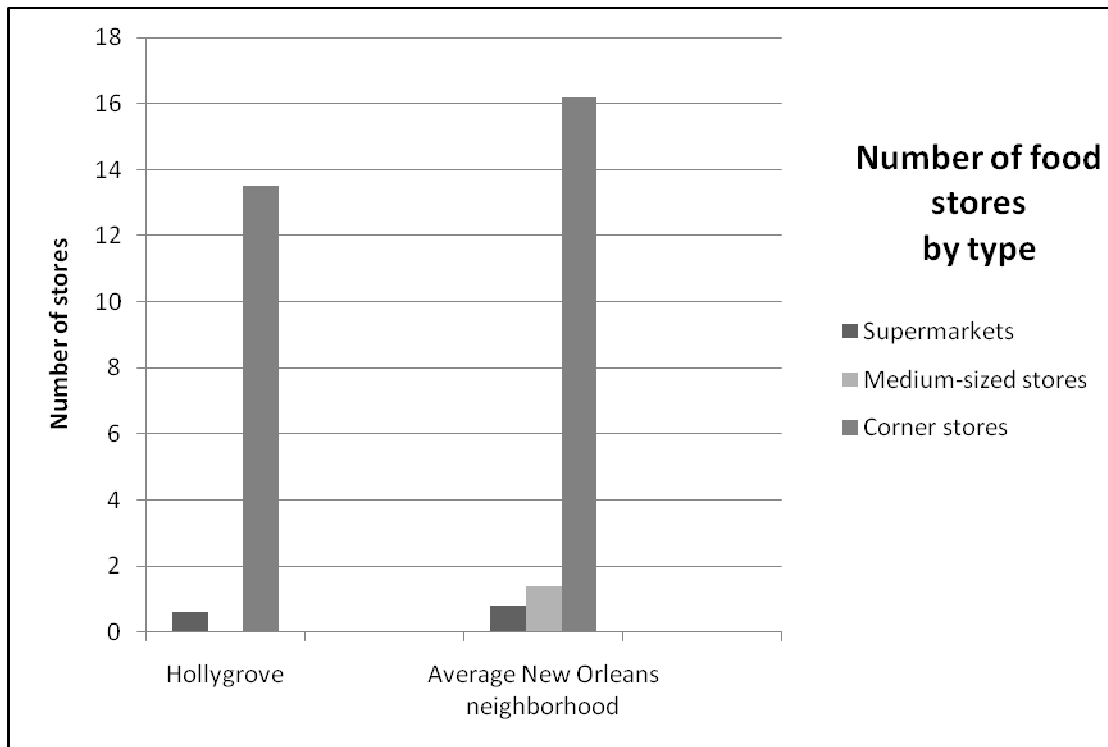
Variable	Hollygrove	Average New Orleans neighborhood
Distance from neighborhood center to nearest supermarket (mi)	1.1	1.6
Number of supermarkets within neighborhood	0.6	0.9
Distance from neighborhood center to nearest medium-sized store (mi)	2.3	1.6
Number of medium-sized stores within neighborhood	0	1.4
Distance from neighborhood center to nearest small store (mi)	0.2	0.6
Number of small stores within neighborhood	13.5	16.2

Two fresh food stores were built near Hollygrove after Hurricane Katrina. Robert's Fresh Market is a full-service supermarket. Hollygrove Market and Farm is a small market selling locally grown fruits and vegetables, presently open two days each week. Both of these markets provide the neighborhood with access to fresh produce. The proximity of Robert's Fresh Market means that the average Hollygrove resident travels about a mile to reach the nearest supermarket, while the average resident in the city of New Orleans travels 1.6 miles to the nearest supermarket. On the other hand, a Sav-A-Lot supermarket which was located in the neighborhood before Katrina has remained closed since the storm.

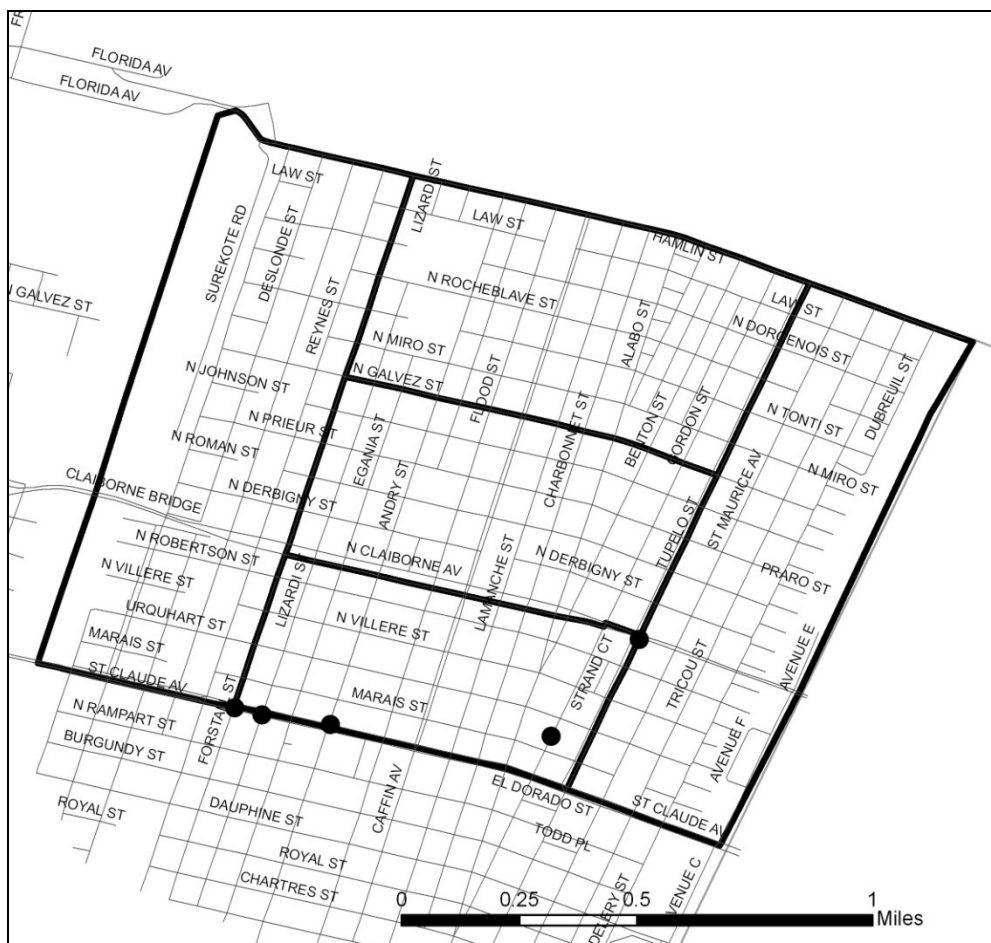
Hollygrove also has numerous corner stores which are easy to reach. The nearest corner store is only .2 miles from the center of the neighborhood. Corner stores in Hollygrove, like those in the rest of the city, offer mostly snack foods, candies, and carbonated beverages.

By many indicators, access to food is similar in Hollygrove and in the average neighborhood in the city of New Orleans. The most striking difference is the absence of any medium-sized store within Hollygrove.





The Lower 9th Ward



Map of the Lower 9th Ward (Source: Tulane PRC)

■	Supermarket
▲	Medium-sized store
●	Corner store

Markets

Sankofa Marketplace, located at the intersection of Caffin and St. Claude Avenue, is open every 2nd Saturday of the month from 1 p.m. to 4 p.m. Information is available at: <http://www.sankofamarketplace.org>.

Our School at Blair Grocery operates a weekly Sunday farmers market which rotates among Lower 9th Ward churches. Information is available at: <http://schoolatblairgrocery.blogspot.com>.

Lower 9th Ward Demographics (2009)

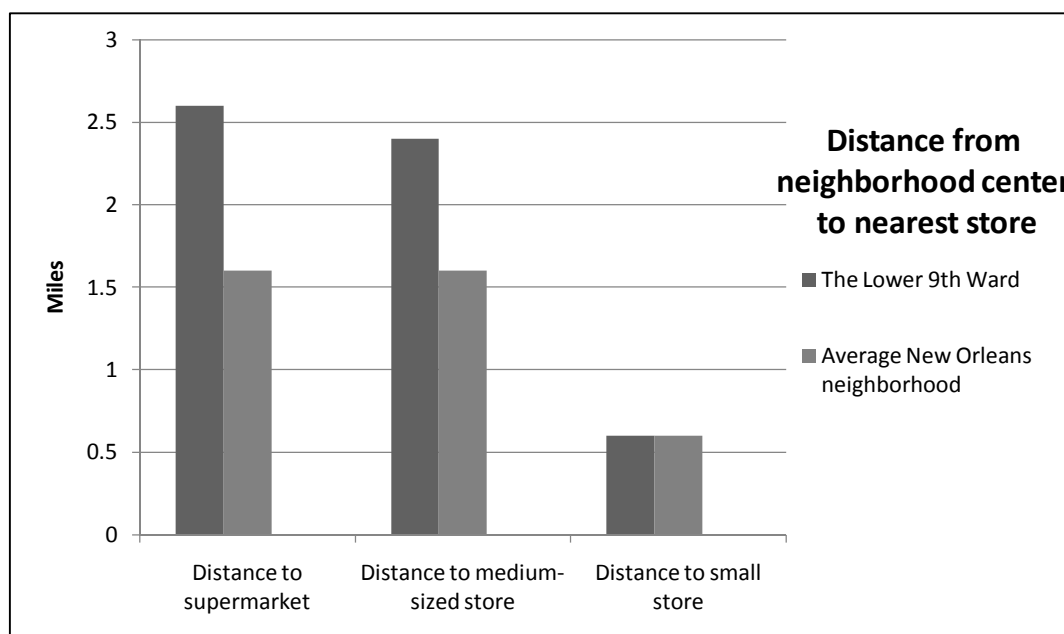
Population	
Geographic area (mi ²)	1.6
Total population	1,845
Population density (pop/mi ²)	1,153
Total households	603
Average household income	\$27,160
Average per capita income	\$8,880
Race	
White	0.4%
Black	99.1%
Hispanic	0.4%

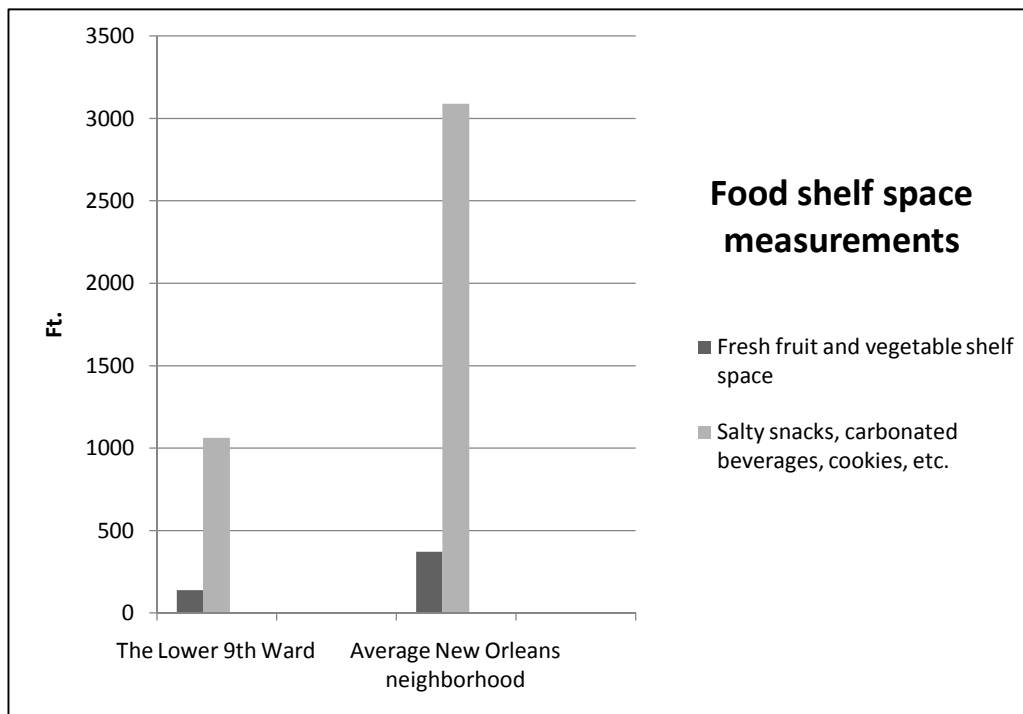
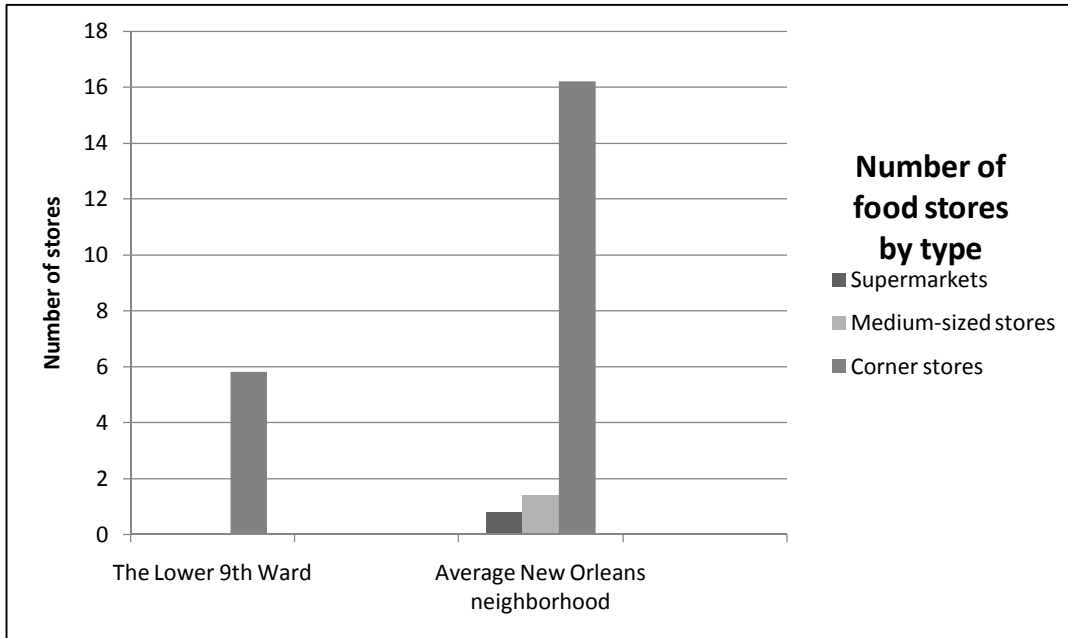
Market Distances (2009)

Variable	The Lower 9th Ward	Average New Orleans neighborhood
Distance from neighborhood center to nearest supermarket (mi)	2.6	1.6
Number of supermarkets within neighborhood	0	0.9
Distance from neighborhood center to nearest medium-sized store (mi)	2.4	1.6
Number of medium-sized stores within neighborhood	0	1.4
Distance from neighborhood center to nearest small store (mi)	0.6	0.6
Number of small stores within neighborhood	5.8	16.2

The lack of food retail outlets in the Lower 9th Ward is striking. Out of the three neighborhoods examined, this neighborhood has the lowest availability of fresh fruits, fresh vegetables, and snack foods. There is no supermarket in the neighborhood and residents here travel the greatest distances to reach food stores of any type. While there are corner stores, the Lower 9th Ward has less than half the number of corner stores than the average New Orleans neighborhood. This lack of stores means that the neighborhood has one third the amount of fresh fruit shelf space and less than half the amount of fresh vegetable shelf space as compared to the average neighborhood in the city of New Orleans. While farmers markets and other community-led efforts to increase food access have begun, building a permanent food stores is crucial for redeveloping the economy in the Lower 9th Ward. A supermarket has the potential to attract other retail outlets, provide jobs, and spur development within the neighborhood.

Though the Lower 9th Ward lacks supermarkets, two farmers markets help provide residents with access to affordable fruits and vegetables from local growers. Sankofa Marketplace sells fresh produce to the community on a monthly basis while Our School at Blair Grocery, an agricultural and academic program, holds a farmers market every Sunday. Community gardens are also being developed and expanded in the neighborhood. These efforts play an important role in rebuilding the Lower 9th Ward, and it is important that they maintain a strong community presence even after more fresh food stores are built.

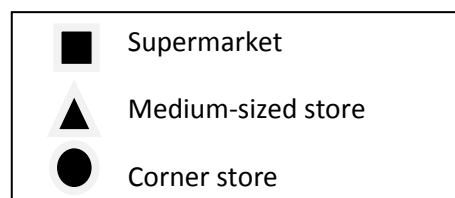




Central City



Map of Central City (Source: Tulane PRC)



Market:

O .C. Haley Fresh Market, located at 1712 O.C. Haley Boulevard, is open every 3rd Saturday of the month from 11 a.m. to 3 p.m.

Central City Demographics (2009)

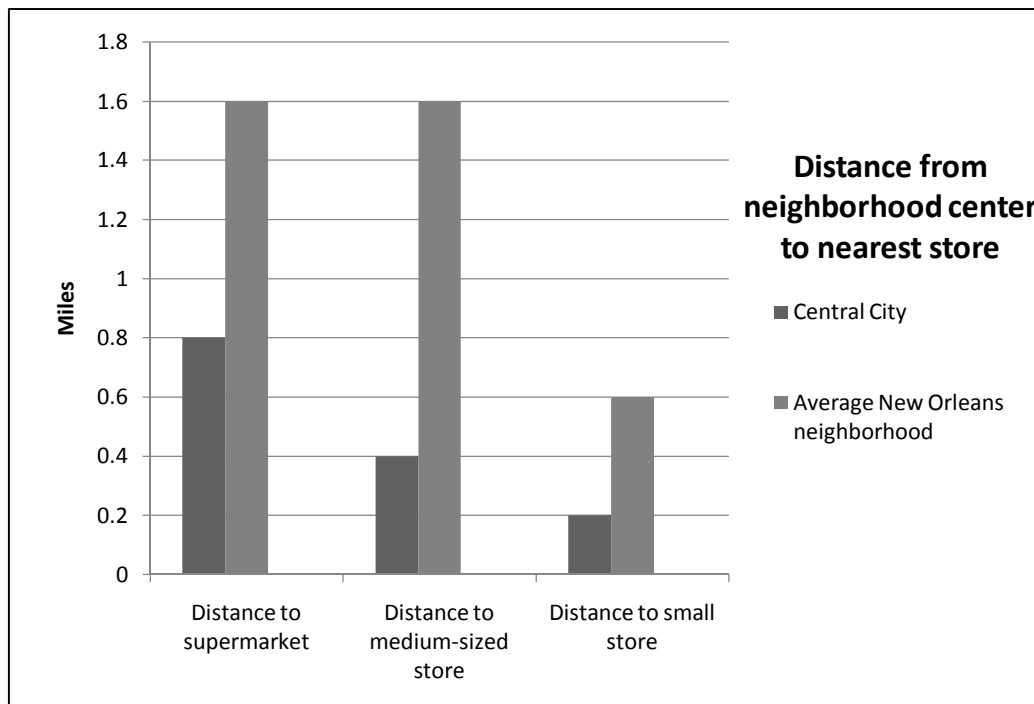
Population	
Geographic area (mi ²)	1.4
Total population	14,225
Population density (pop/mi ²)	10,160
Total households	5,422
Average household income	\$25,913
Average per capita income	\$13,014
Race	
White	7.2%
Black	90.7%
Hispanic	2.5%

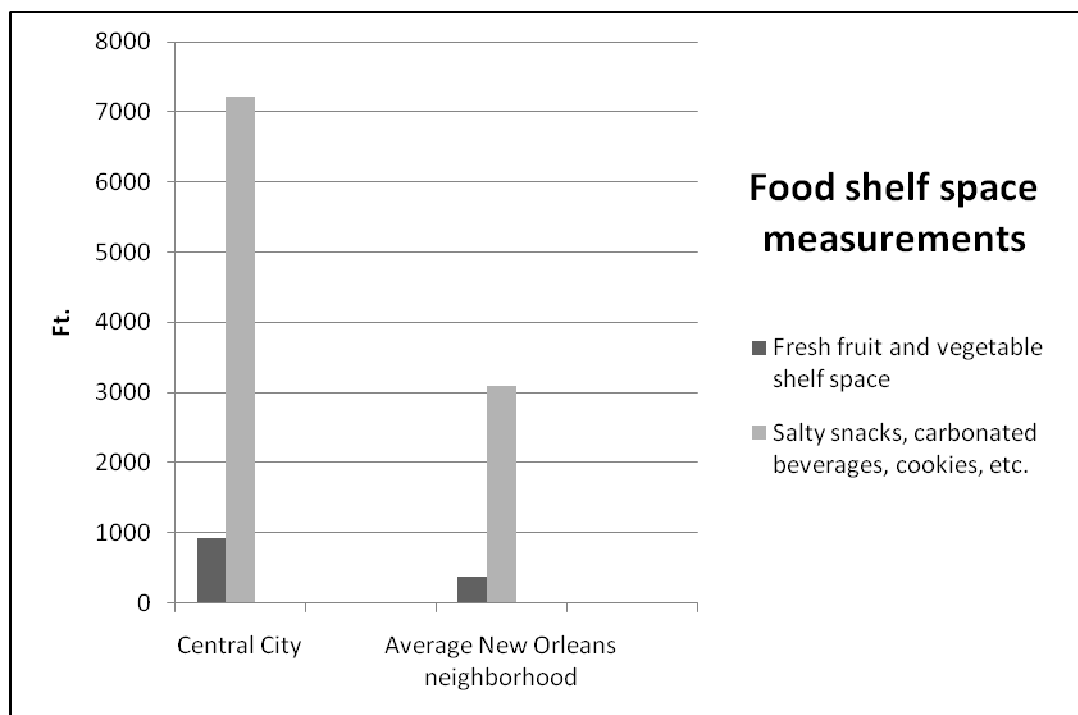
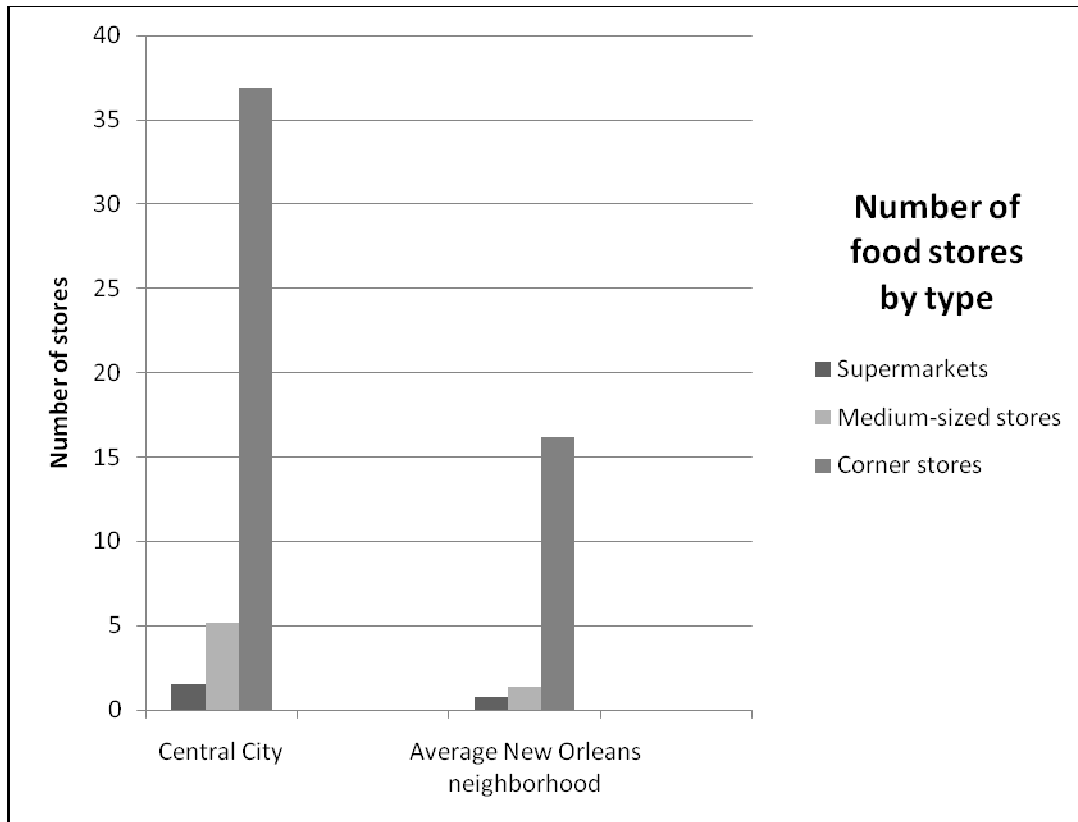
Market Distances (2009)

Variable	Central City	Average New Orleans neighborhood
Distance from neighborhood center to nearest supermarket (mi)	0.8	1.6
Number of supermarkets within neighborhood	1.5	0.9
Distance from neighborhood center to nearest medium-sized store (mi)	0.4	1.6
Number of medium-sized stores within neighborhood	5.2	1.4
Distance from neighborhood center to nearest small store (mi)	0.2	0.6
Number of small stores within neighborhood	36.9	16.2

Out of the three neighborhoods examined, Central City is distinguished by its relatively high number of *all* food stores, but especially of medium-sized stores and corner stores. There are twice as many corner stores and four times as many medium-sized stores here than in the average New Orleans neighborhood. These stores are also relatively accessible—the average distances to them are less than the same distances at the city level. The nearest supermarket is 0.8 miles from the center of the neighborhood.

Because of the high density of stores here, there is a greater amount of shelf space for fresh fruits and vegetables in Central City as compared to the average New Orleans neighborhood. The large number of food stores here also means that Central City has far more shelf space devoted to candies, salty snacks, and similar foods than the average neighborhood. This phenomenon is intensified by the many corner stores within the neighborhood. This high concentration of snack foods has been referred to as a “food swamp,” where unhealthy options may swamp out healthy choices, and has both public health and policy implications.





Discussion

The post-Katrina rebuilding process continues to affect the Lower 9th Ward, Hollygrove, and Central City differently. Disparities in household income, local stores, available resources, community involvement, and other variables lead to different outcomes at the community level. A neighborhood with many citizens involved in community issues might have different resources than a neighborhood that is still struggling to repopulate. This inconsistency is reflected in the city's food environment—some areas have seen new markets built, while others are still waiting to see old supermarkets return.

Efforts to create a healthy, equitable city-wide food environment will require cooperation on the part of both city government and community groups. Cities around the country have begun to think about how to attract supermarkets to low-income communities. New York City has implemented NYC FRESH, an initiative aimed at reducing inequality in food access. This innovative program provides zoning and financial incentives for supermarkets to locate in low-income communities. Any market that wants to participate in the program must provide at least 500 square feet of retail space for fresh produce. In Pennsylvania the Fresh Food Financing Initiative, a state program administered by The Reinvestment Fund and The Food Trust, works to increase the number of supermarkets in underserved communities statewide.

A similar program has been proposed for New Orleans. The Fresh Food Retail Incentive Program would provide loans and forgivable loans (grants) to food stores that help improve access to fresh fruits and vegetables in underserved neighborhoods.

Any visitor or resident of New Orleans knows that it is a place rich with food traditions. As it moves forward and looks to create a just city for all, New Orleans must not overlook the many roles that food stores and public markets have played and continue to play in the social and physical landscape of the city. Paying special attention to the redevelopment of food stores in both the communities where they were previously located and in neighborhoods that were underserved pre-Katrina will ensure fair access to food and create a healthier New Orleans.

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