

Food Access in Saskatoon

Background

Limited access to healthy and affordable food is linked with negative health outcomes (e.g., type II diabetes, heart disease, certain types of cancer), particularly for disadvantaged groups.¹⁻⁴ These health problems have been shown to get worse if the area has a high number of nearby fast food outlets.¹⁻⁴ When people have trouble accessing healthy foods because of where they live and because of limited resources, they are said to live in a “food desert”.⁵

Our purpose

The primary purpose of the food access study was to identify food deserts in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan. In addition, we also examined the link between food access and public transit.

What we did

Geographic locations for all major supermarkets and fast food chain outlets within the city of Saskatoon were collected.

What we looked at

Three measures were used to determine access:

- **Proximity:** the minimum distance from the centre of each city block to the nearest supermarket.
- **Diversity:** the number of supermarkets within a 15 minute walk from the centre of each city block.
- **Variety:** the average distance from the centre of each city block to the nearest three supermarkets of different chains.

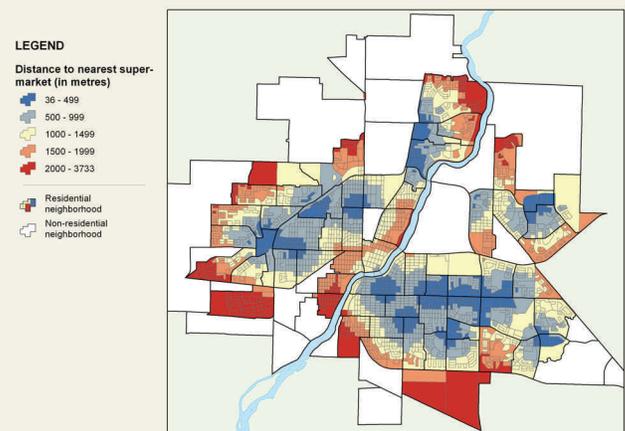
These three measures were then combined to create an **index of accessibility** for each city block in Saskatoon. A food balance score for each block was also calculated, which represented the ease of choosing between healthy food stores and fast food outlets. Food balance and accessibility were then combined to identify food deserts in Saskatoon. Food deserts were mapped according to areas of deprivation.^a For an additional measure of access, public transit travel times to supermarkets were calculated for each city block.

a. The Deprivation Index measures two types of deprivation using 2006 census data: material (e.g., income, employment) and social (e.g., marital status, lone parent family). Deprivation Index scores were divided into five categories, or quintiles, based on population size. Quintile 1 represents the least deprived areas of Saskatoon and quintile 5 represents the most deprived areas of Saskatoon.

What we found...

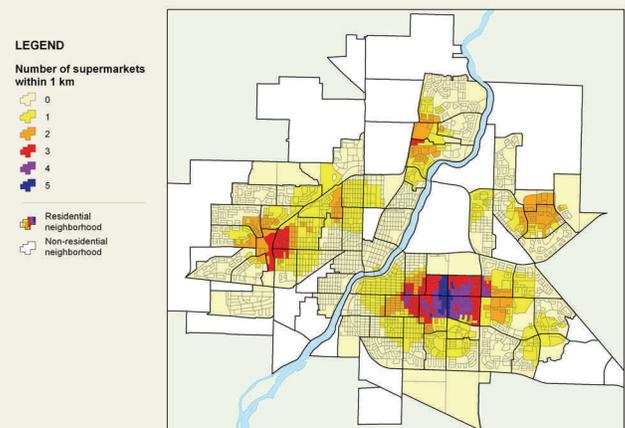
- Overall, just under half (45%) of the city of Saskatoon's population lives within walking distance (1km) of a supermarket (Fig.1).

Figure 1. Proximity to nearest Supermarket, Saskatoon, 2008



- Seventeen percent of Saskatoon residents have more than one supermarket within walking distance (Fig.2).

Figure 2. Number of supermarkets within one kilometre from the centre of each city block, Saskatoon, 2008.

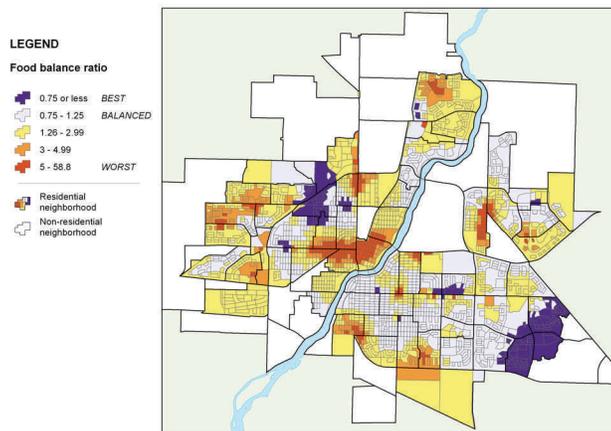


- Three-quarters (75%) of the city's population lives within walking distance of a fast-food outlet.

...What we found...

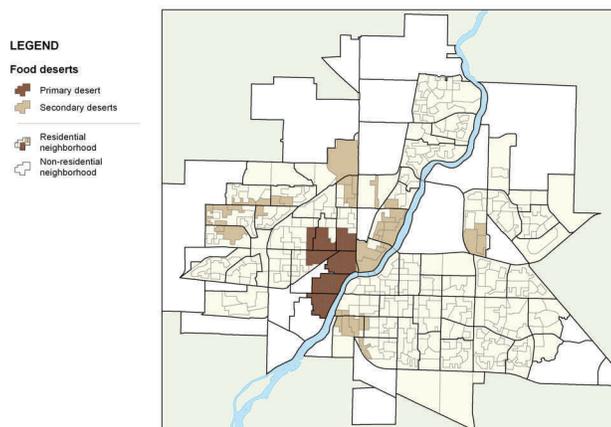
- The average resident has at least three fast food outlets within walking distance.
- Residents across Saskatoon live approximately twice as far from a supermarket as they do from a fast food outlet (Fig.3). In some areas, food balance ratios are as high as 58.8. This means that these residents live 59 times closer to a fast food outlet than to a supermarket.

Figure 3. Food Balance Ratio, Saskatoon, 2008



- Saskatoon has a primary food desert in Saskatoon's core and surrounding neighbourhoods: Holiday Park, King George, most of Riversdale, portions of Caswell Hill, Pleasant Hill, Westmount, and Mount Royal (Fig.4).

Figure 4. Food Deserts in the City of Saskatoon, Saskatoon, 2008



...What we found

- The majority of Saskatoon residents (73%) live within a ten-minute bus ride to a supermarket. However, residents living in some areas of Saskatoon may have to travel up to 65 minutes.

Limitations

- Data was collected at different points in time (e.g., census data was collected in 2006, whereas supermarket data was collected in 2007).
- Bus routes constantly change, which could affect travel times.

Summary

The results of our study are some of the few findings about food deserts in Western Canada. We found that food deserts do exist in Saskatoon, and are situated in some of the most deprived areas of Saskatoon. The results from this study will be presented to community stakeholders to identify which responses should be pursued to increase food accessibility in Saskatoon.

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