



Baltimore City Food Desert Retail Strategy

One in four Baltimoreans lives in a food desert – areas where residents lack access and sufficient economic resources to purchase healthy food. The Baltimore Food Policy Initiative (BFPI) employs the following strategies in food deserts to address food access from economic, social and environmental perspectives.

- 1) **Retain and Attract Supermarkets and Grocery Stores:** BFPI works to ensure that existing supermarkets and grocery stores continue to serve Baltimore residents, and works to attract new stores where there is retail leakage.
 - **Develop funding, incentives and tax credits in Food Desert Retail Incentive Areas:** BFPI created Food Desert Retail Incentive Areas to strategically target food retail development and have the highest impact on food access. New food stores that locate in the Incentive Areas are eligible for a ten-year abatement on personal property taxes. Existing supermarkets that successfully “mitigate” food deserts are eligible to receive the Personal Property Tax Credit for renovations that increase their ability to provide healthy staple foods. BFPI will utilize and help develop additional federal, state and local policies, funding streams and financing tools to specifically support healthy food development and infrastructure for stores of all sizes.
 - **Increase the number of small grocery stores:** Not every neighborhood can support a full-service supermarket. BFPI works to encourage growth in small-format grocery stores that provide a wide product line and healthy food at the neighborhood level.
 - **Provide technical assistance to new and existing stores:** The Food Retail Economic Development Officer at BDC provides supermarkets and small-format grocery stores in-depth technical assistance throughout the development process and beyond. This includes loans, grants, mentorship and supply chain development. The Small Business Resource Center supports smaller stores through technical assistance, grants and financing.
 - **Maximize federal nutrition benefit expenditures on fruits and vegetables:** With many Baltimore residents utilizing federal nutrition benefits including Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP or food stamps) and Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children (WIC), ensuring that these benefits are maximized supports both customers and retailers.
- 2) **Improve Non-Traditional Grocery Retail Options:** While they remain most residents’ primary food source, supermarkets are not the only point of access in the food environment and may not be appropriate for every neighborhood.
 - **Improve and/or convert existing corner stores to increase availability of healthy food in neighborhoods:**
 - i. **Depth of stock**—BFPI is creating strategies to ensure that smaller stores comply with federally proposed increased stocking requirements in order to remain eligible to accept SNAP, and increase access to healthy food while remaining cost-effective for the business owner.
 - ii. **Healthy corner stores**— BFPI supports strategies to increase the availability of healthy food in corner stores through targeted programs that provide technical assistance, equipment and/or

financing or funding to corner stores. This includes the BCHD Baltimarket Healthy Stores Program, which plans to expand from its target area on the west side to a city-wide program.

- **Support innovative food access models in food deserts:** BFPI will support and provide technical assistance to organizations exploring innovative models such as non-profit stores, cooperatives, mobile markets, ride sharing services and delivery platforms. One such program is the Baltimarket Virtual Supermarket, which allows residents to order groceries online and have them delivered without fees to a central drop off site at low-income senior, disabled, and public housing sites.

3) **Improve Healthy Food Availability in the Public Market Setting:** Public markets provide a wide variety of food, physical infrastructure and social capital, and anchor the food environment in several neighborhoods without supermarkets.

- **Support the revitalization of Avenue Market:** After the loss of the anchor grocery store tenant and high vacancy, Avenue Market went through a Local Foods Local Places visioning process hosted by several federal agencies. Combined with strong community-led advocacy and programming, this process helped create a vision for the market that will include nonprofit food and produce retail spaces, job training and opportunities for entrepreneurship.
- **Implement the Lexington Market Master Plan:** BFPI will continue to support market management and vendors on vendor mix and product diversity to emphasize a market basket of fresh healthy staple foods at affordable prices.
- **Maximize the collective impact of the market system:** Baltimore's six Public Markets are the oldest continuously operating public market system in the US. This creates a unique opportunity to capitalize on the intact system and create synergies in purchasing, staffing and maintenance between markets. Further, recent strong community buy-in demonstrates the potential of the markets to build on existing support and encourage community leadership within the markets and on the Board.

4) **Address Gaps in Transportation That Impact Food Access:** Based on national data and qualitative interviews, the majority of Baltimoreans prefer to do the bulk of their grocery shopping at full-service supermarkets. As many food deserts are in residential areas and not all communities are able to support a full-service supermarket, BFPI has developed transportation strategies to bring people to food and to bring food to people.

- **Make public transit more conducive to food shopping:** BFPI advised the Maryland Transit Authority on the BaltimoreLink bus plan and its impact on food deserts as it relates to routes connecting underserved neighborhoods to supermarkets. Future strategies could include outfitting bus stops and/or bus interiors to make transporting groceries easier.
- **Support innovative strategies and organizations creating transit-related solutions:** There are additional opportunities to partner with ride sharing companies, shuttles, mobile markets and private solutions, to which BFPI can provide best practices research and technical assistance.

5) **Support Innovative Models to Strengthen and Amplify the Food Economy:**

- **Create structural change in supply chain and distribution:** Many small grocery retailers struggle to offer healthy affordable food because the supply chain's orientation towards large businesses makes it unaffordable in a fragmented sector with narrow margins. BFPI explores mechanisms to make the supply chain more favorable to smaller businesses, such as collaborative purchasing.
- **Increase the impact of food-based business in Baltimore's economy:** Baltimore understands the power of small food business and entrepreneurship in job creation and economic development. The City supports projects that incubate food-based small businesses, provide job training and offer skills-based employment opportunities.