

# Why farmers' markets may not improve dietary disparities in urban communities

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## Background

- Obesity and diet-related diseases disproportionately affect urban, low-income, minority communities.
- Low consumption of fruits and vegetables, partly due to poor access, may contribute to the problem.
- Farmers' markets may offer a partial solution.
- Researchers and government agencies have proposed farmers' markets as mechanisms to bring fresh produce into poor urban communities.
- Unfortunately, there has been little research on farmers' markets; how farmers' markets might contribute to urban food environments is unknown.

## Methods

- Investigators compiled a comprehensive list of all Bronx farmers markets through community groups, government agencies, and private institutions.
- Two researchers visited all 26 farmers' markets, June - July 2011, recording all food and beverage items offered and details about quality and price.
- Researchers also assessed all produce items offered in the two nearest produce-selling stores within a 1/2-mile walk of each farmers' market.

## Results/Discussion

- Most farmers' markets were open July-Nov, one weekday, for 4-9 hours (mostly during business hours), vs. stores open year-round, 7 days, >100 mean hrs/wk.
- All farmers' markets were within a 1/2 mile of a supermarket and/or other store that sold greater than twice as many varieties of produce on average.
- Produce at farmers' markets was more "local" than at stores (98% vs. 0.5%), but generally more expensive and not meaningfully more "organic" (9% vs. 2%).
- The Table shows examples of price differences; the Figure explores issues around availability.




## Objectives

- To assess all farmers' markets in the Bronx (i.e., market accessibility; and availability, quality, & price of products).
- To compare produce at farmers' markets & nearby stores (i.e., nearest stores selling produce within a 1/2-mile walk).

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Table. Sample food prices: farm markets vs. stores

Example Item (for each 'type of quantity')	Price at Farm Markets: Mean (Range)	Best price at nearby stores: Mean (Range)
 (per bunch)	\$1.66 (\$1.00 - \$2.00)	\$0.99 (\$0.50 - \$1.50)
 (per lb)	\$1.62 (\$0.99 - \$3.00)	\$1.48 (\$0.89 - \$2.49)
 (per pint)	\$3.25 (\$2.00 - \$5.50)	\$2.89 (\$1.00 - \$5.59)

## Conclusion

- Farmers' markets sell (and promote) items non-ideal for good nutrition and health, and carry more expensive, less-varied produce in low-income neighborhoods that already have stores with better hours.

## Next Steps

- To analyze customer data and do economic analyses, considering payment methods and assistance programs.

