

To: Debbie Mucarsel- Powell (D-FL)

From: Brittney Revan

Re: Food Deserts

Date: December 6, 2019

South Florida has multiple food deserts and people are struggling to put food on their tables. I am urging you to create a policy initiative including various solutions to make conditions more livable.

Background

There are over 125 food deserts in South Florida alone. A food desert is essentially an area that lacks access to affordable fruits, vegetables, and other foods that make up a healthy diet. Food deserts come about mainly because of the lack of grocery stores or other healthy food providers in an area. About 23.5 million people live in food deserts and nearly half of them are low-income.

Florida's 26th district has a population of 790,373 people which consists of 72% Hispanics, and 10% Blacks, meaning more than 1/3 of the residents there are minorities. (See *Figure 1*) About 200,000 of those people live in a food desert, meaning they live 1 or more miles from the nearest supermarket in urban areas and 10 or more miles in rural areas.

Minority and poverty status are more prevalent in areas with limited access to healthy and affordable food. The United States Department of Agriculture stated: "the higher the percentage of the minority population, the more likely the area is to be a food desert." These environments are plagued with low income, low education levels, and high unemployment rates which are all

unattractive conditions for markets and grocery stores. In addition, lack of access to healthy food options leads to an increase in health issues like cardiovascular disease, diabetes, and obesity just to name a few. According to a PBS article, 5.9% of the food deserts in the U.S. were in “minority central” counties and as a result of this, 32.6% of the residents in these “minority central” counties struggled with obesity and 12.2% had diabetes.

Recommendations

In order to curb these disastrous effects, it is imperative to implement a policy initiative that allows Florida, specifically the 26th district, to reduce food waste by planting community gardens, and to educate its residents through community programming.

“The United States is one of the biggest culprits of food waste and needs an agricultural land base 7x larger than a land base in India just to compensate for the waste. By reducing waste in the United States, India and China, approximately 413 million more people would be able to be fed a year. (Verchot, M.) The creation of urban gardens can keep this number extremely low because it allows for all the food to be consumed rather than lost due to supermarkets’ lack of desire to sell “deformed” or “ugly” produce. These gardens also eliminate the issue of transportation which reduces the likelihood of fruits and vegetables expiring during transit.

“Health in the Hood” is a nonprofit that is invested in implementing and maintaining community gardens in the hood. They strive to provide free fruits and vegetables to those who do not have access to them and attempt to educate children and parents on healthy eating habits and safe environmental practices.

Education is the most important part of the policy because if someone has never been

exposed to fresh food and does not know what to do with it, providing fresh and nutritious food is not enough. In fact, a recent study suggested that opening new supermarkets had little impact on the eating habits of people in low-income neighborhoods (Roost, A.) The National Institutes of Health found that “if the average consumption of fruits and vegetables increased by about 0.4 servings per day, about 1.93 million cardiovascular disease events would be prevented and \$39.7 billion in health care costs would be saved.” Creating more urban gardens would increase food security, build community morale, and make efficient use of land. Furthermore, educating consumers will improve health conditions and save billions of dollars in health care costs.

On the flip side, one of the biggest limitations of this initiative would be funding because implementing new programs are extremely expensive. Another limitation is the drive of the constituents in these communities because they may be unwilling or unmotivated to make these changes but the benefits greatly outweigh the costs.

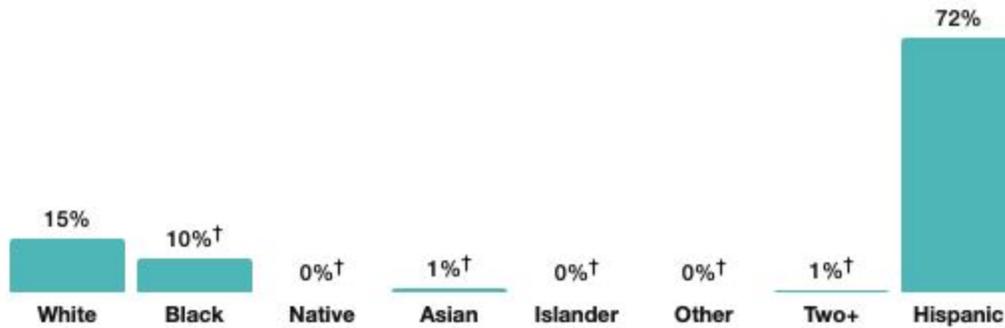
Conclusion

Food deserts tend to wreak havoc on minority and low-income communities and the reality is food should not be treated as a privilege, no one deserves to go hungry. By creating this policy initiative, the majority of the aforementioned solutions would be implemented and conditions would be made more livable in these areas. Furthermore, food waste would decrease significantly, community morale would increase and billions of dollars would be saved on healthcare costs.

Appendix

Figure 1

Congressional District 26, FL



* Hispanic includes respondents of any race. Other categories are non-Hispanic.

The graph above includes the percentage of each race in South Florida with regards to the population of the district as a whole. It was incorporated to show the disparities between the races and highlight the vast amount of majorities in this dense area of the state. Retrieved from Census profile: Congressional District 26, FL. (n.d.). Retrieved from <https://censusreporter.org/profiles/50000US1226-congressional-district-26-fl/#race>.

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