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RINCON & ASSOCIATES LAUNCHES STUDY OF ACCESS TO FOOD PROVIDERS IN DALLAS COUNTY

(October 28, 2024) Much like the 3,143 counties in the U.S., Dallas County, Texas has endured a history of segregated food distribution practices that have resulted in the creation of over 6,500 food deserts in the U.S. that do not provide healthy food choices to the predominantly lower-income African Americans and Latinos that reside in these communities. According to the Department of Agriculture, Dallas County currently includes about 90 food deserts with over half of these located in Southern Dallas, a community that is populated primarily by lower-income African Americans and Latinos. While many factors contribute to the persistence of these food deserts, it is generally recognized that recent industry trends have made things more difficult for the average consumer --- including continued price gouging on foods following the pandemic, the growth of dollar stores that discourage investment by mainstream supermarkets, the closure of many food providers that are unable to compete with larger food chains, and a general indifference by public agencies to sponsor research that could identify viable solutions in negatively impact communities. As a consequence, the food distribution system remains largely segregated along race and economic strata. At Rincon & Associates, we believe that we have a unique solution to the persistence of food deserts in Dallas County, and perhaps other counties like Dallas that have been unable to eliminate their segregated food distribution system.

Our Solution

In a previous study of food deserts in the City of Dallas, [1] study investigators Chetan Tiwari and Dr. Edward T. Rincon developed an Urban Site Selection Model based on credible secondary sources of information that successfully identified several food deserts or census tracts that revealed sufficient economic potential to support the annual sales of a 50,000 sq. ft. supermarket. We propose to use a similar model with significant improvements, including an enhanced analysis of food insecurity and market potential for food store locations at much more granular spatial scales, specifically block groups. This approach not only enhances current USDA definitions of food deserts but also provides a more targeted understanding of the population characteristics impacted by food insecurity. Additionally, this offers a more detailed scale of analysis for location modeling to guide food retailers and investors in setting up new stores and expanding access to essential services such as pharmacies, thereby increasing the availability of critical resources across Dallas County.

The study will address the following questions:

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[1] Rincon, E. T. and Tiwari, C. (2020) Demand Metric for Supermarket Site Selection: A Case Study, Papers in Applied Geography.   Accessed at:
https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/23754931.2020.1712555

Competitive Analysis

1. Which food providers are <u>currently serving the communities</u> in Dallas County? Food providers would include supermarkets, grocery stores, dollar stores, and community gardens. A comprehensive source of food retailers (Chain Store Guide) will be used as the source for this competitive analysis.
2. Which communities are being <u>under-served</u> by current food providers? Which communities are being <u>over-served</u>, that is, multiple providers are already present in some areas. Are specific communities over-populated by dollar stores? Is a larger presence of dollar stores discouraging investment by other food providers?
3. Which pharmacy or drug store chains are serving these communities? Many pharmacy store chains, including Walgreens, CVS and RiteAd have been closing stores across the U.S., [2] resulting in concerns about the creation of "pharmacy deserts" which are often targeted in lower-income African American and Latino communities.

Economics

4. What are the current economic assets of Dallas County communities? More specifically, how many annual dollars are generated from employment income and food stamp benefits?
5. What are the annual food expenditures for these communities, and are they sufficient to support the annual sales of a supermarket?
6. Sources of economic information include the American Community Survey, Dept. of Agriculture, and Food Marketing Institute.

Demographics

7. What are the demographic characteristics of Dallas County communities, including such characteristics as race-ethnicity, age, native vs. foreign-born, disabled, household size, and English language speaking ability?
8. Do food providers have the resources (i.e. staff, products, technology) to serve the needs of these diverse consumers – including language support, ethnic food products, online orders, medical prescriptions and immunizations among others?
9. Demographic characteristics for Dallas County will be retrieved and mapped from the American Community Survey.

Crime Patterns

10. What are the crime patterns in Dallas County communities, and how different are these patterns across communities?
11. Source of information will be the most current Dallas Police Dept. crime files.

Methodological Approach

Using the proposed sources of information, the Rincon & Associates team will utilize a combination of GIS software, including ArcGIS Pro for spatial analysis and visualization, alongside spatial databases like PostGIS for managing and storing geospatial data. We will

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[2] Murphy, T. (2024) Struggling Walgreens to shutter 1,200 stores. Dallas Morning News, Accessed at: https://www.dallasnews.com/news/national/2024/10/15/walgreens-to-close-1200-stores-after-3-billion-quarterly-loss/

implement methods such as downscaling data to ensure compatibility across different spatial units, allowing for more refined and accurate analyses. The team will design detailed, color-coded maps to illustrate the findings and conduct statistical and geospatial assessments to interpret the results and identify patterns of food insecurity and market potential. We plan to begin the analysis mid-November 2024 and complete the study by February 15, 2025. A top-line summary of the study findings will be provided at no cost to persons or organizations that request it while a copy of the detailed study report will be available by subscription only. Please email Dr. Rincon at edward@rinconassoc.com to request a top-line summary report. If you are interested in subscribing to the detailed study report, please send a request for the subscription form.

Study Implications

The study is expected to reduce the risks associated with introducing a supermarket or grocery store in Dallas County communities and also consider the implications of creating pharmacy deserts in lower-income communities. Importantly, the study is also expected to improve existing measures used to define food deserts and food equity by using more current metrics than is currently used by the Dept. of Agriculture. By utilizing more current and objective information from credible sources that reveals the economic potential of these communities – whether food deserts or not – interested investors will be more likely to proceed with their planned stores with renewed confidence, and public agencies or foundations that want to incentivize new ventures will have a roadmap to guide the selection of the most promising geospatial units and vendors that can best serve Dallas County communities. Further, we believe that the successful implementation of the Urban Site Selection Model can be replicated in other markets since the sources of information used are available for most U.S. geographic areas in the U.S.

The Study Team
The study investigators bring significant experience in food equity, geospatial analyses, multicultural research, demography and studies in the food industry as demonstrated by past publications.

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