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MAYOR EMANUEL ANNOUNCES NUMBER OF LOW INCOME RESIDENTS IN FOOD DESERTS HAS DECLINED MORE THAN 20 PERCENT

City of Chicago and Partners Continue a Coordinated Strategy to Expand Efforts to Eliminate Food Deserts

Mayor Rahm Emanuel announced today that since the launch of the City's efforts to reduce the number of food deserts in June 2011, the number of low income Chicagoans living in these areas has declined by 21 percent. The Chicago Department of Housing and Economic Development (DHED) continues to track this progress as the City of Chicago makes great strides in neighborhoods with the greatest need for healthy food options.

"No one should live in a community that does not provide residents with healthy and accessible foods," said Mayor Emanuel. "While the City's efforts have shown great progress in reducing food deserts in Chicago, I will continue to work towards eliminating these areas and increasing the quality of life for all Chicagoans. Access to high quality food is not just a health issue; it is a basic building block of a strong community and a vibrant local economy."

The City of Chicago has prioritized bringing grocery stores to neighborhoods with the highest level of need, which led to a decrease of the number of residents in food deserts from 100,159 in June 2011 to 79,434 today. DHED defines "food desert" residents as all Chicagoans living in a census tract located more than a one mile from a retail food establishment licensee with a business location larger than 10,000 square feet. Locations such as gas stations and fast food restaurants were not included in the data set.

Mayor Emanuel convened a summit in June 2011 to begin a coordinated strategy to eliminate Chicago's food deserts. At the summit, Chief Executive Officers from six national and regional grocery store chains committed to open or rebuild area grocery stores, which all offer fresh fruits and vegetables.

In October 2011, Mayor Emanuel hosted First Lady Michelle Obama and eight other mayors to share best practices and call attention to the needs of underserved neighborhoods. The meeting served as a national model for the role of public-private partnerships in combating food access issues.

These efforts continue to expand with numerous achievements. The City of Chicago and its partners have opened 15 stores and converted 2 CTA buses into mobile produce markets in 7 food desert neighborhoods. They have also licensed 14 fresh produce carts, with half in low food access areas, while launching 5 new successful farmers markets on the West Side food deserts. This partnership produced 253,000 pounds of fruits and vegetables grown in the first year on more than 15 acres of urban farms and distributed to 85 restaurants, pantries, grocery stores, farmers markets, and private residents.

In 2011, Mayor Emanuel launched the Healthy Chicago public health agenda that prioritizes obesity prevention through providing greater access to healthy food options and eliminating food deserts by 2020.

A two-year report on the progress made to combat food deserts can be found [here](#).

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