

Searching for Healthy Food

The Food Landscape in Marin County

JANUARY 2007

STUDY AND FINDINGS

The California Center for Public Health Advocacy (CCPHA) analyzed retail food outlets in counties and cities with populations greater than 250,000 and in the state as a whole, and found far more opportunities to purchase the generally less healthy food available in fast-food restaurants and convenience stores than the generally healthier food available from supermarkets and produce vendors.

- In **California** as a whole, there are **4.18** times as many fast-food restaurants and convenience stores as supermarkets and produce vendors (ranging from a ratio of 1.84 in Santa Cruz County to 5.72 in San Bernardino County).
- In **Marin County**, there are **1.85** times as many fast-food restaurants and convenience stores as supermarkets and produce vendors.

WHY THIS IS A PROBLEM

Obesity is a serious and growing epidemic in California. There is growing evidence that what we choose to eat is influenced by what's available locally. Previous studies have found a relationship between available food outlets and health:

- Where there are high numbers of fast-food restaurants compared to grocery stores, there are also higher rates of diabetes, cardiovascular disease, and cancer.
- People who live near supermarkets are more likely to eat more fruits and vegetables and less likely to be obese.
- Eating at fast-food restaurants is associated with consuming more calories and fewer vegetables; it is also associated with higher rates of obesity.
- People consistently underestimate how many calories are in fast-food meals.

WHAT CAN BE DONE

Given the uneven access to healthy food in California communities, CCPHA calls on federal, state and local policy makers to enact policies to accomplish the following:

1. Increase the number of grocery stores and other produce vendors in neighborhoods that have limited access to fruits, vegetables, and other healthy foods.
2. Support other innovative retail strategies to increase the availability of fruits, vegetables, and other healthy foods in California neighborhoods.
3. Set reasonable limits on the number of fast-food restaurants and convenience stores in California neighborhoods.
4. Utilize federal assistance programs, such as Food Stamps and WIC, to make fruits, vegetables, and other healthy foods more affordable to low-income families.
5. Require fast-food restaurants to provide consumers with nutritional information for all items on menus and menu boards.

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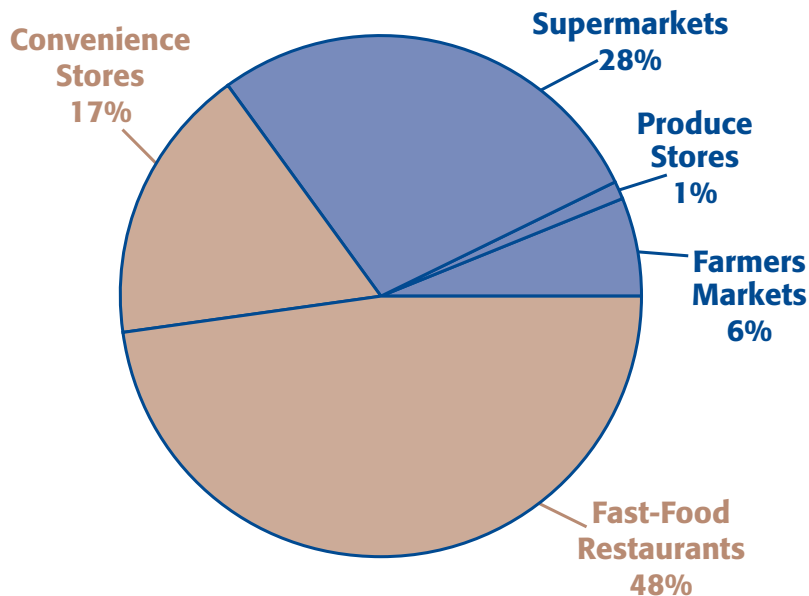
MARIN COUNTY RETAIL FOOD ENVIRONMENT INDEX (RFEI)

In Marin County, the Retail Food Environment Index (RFEI) is 1.85.

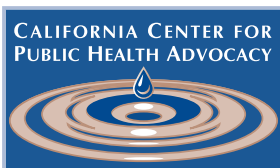
CCPHA's retail food environment index is constructed by dividing the total number of fast-food restaurants and convenience stores by the total number of supermarkets and produce vendors (produce stores and farmers markets) in the county. The result is the ratio of retail food outlets that offer little in the way of fruits, vegetables, and other healthy foods to those in which fruits, vegetables, and other healthy foods are readily available.

$$\text{RFEI} = \frac{(\# \text{ Fast Food Restaurants} + \# \text{ Convenience Stores})}{(\# \text{ Supermarkets} + \# \text{ Produce Stores} + \# \text{ Farmers Markets})}$$

DISTRIBUTION OF RETAIL FOOD OUTLETS IN MARIN COUNTY



In Marin County, there is almost twice as many fast-food restaurants and convenience stores as supermarkets and produce vendors, for a Retail Food Environment Index (RFEI) of 1.85.



This fact sheet is derived from information in the CCPHA report, *Searching for Healthy Food: The Food Landscape in California Cities and Counties*, available at www.publichealthadvocacy.org/searchingforhealthyfood.html. Support for this project was provided by a grant from the California Vitamin Cases Consumer Settlement Fund. For additional information, contact CCPHA at PO Box 2309, Davis, CA 95617; 530 297-6000; www.publichealthadvocacy.org.

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