

## **Finding Food in the Riverdale Community Area: Summary Report, January 8, 2007**

### **Northeastern Illinois Community Food Security Assessment**

#### ***The Project:***

In fall 2003, researchers at Chicago State University and UIC were funded by the Chicago Community Trust to perform a region-wide analysis of access to healthy food. This study, named the Northeastern Illinois Community Food Security Assessment, called for region-wide mapping and deep analysis of a number of case study areas. The Riverdale Community Area was chosen as a case study area. Researchers partnered with People for Community Recovery to collect the Riverdale data.

The Northeastern Illinois Community Food Security Assessment measured access to food in Riverdale through four techniques. First, Riverdale was part of a broad mapping of food access sites in the six-county Chicago area. This data was analyzed by the number of stores in each community and also by a technique that looked at the mean distance from all street addresses in a community to stores of various types. Second, Riverdale was one of six case-study areas where qualitative group interviews were performed. These interviews included consumers, store managers, emergency food system workers, service providers, and local activists. Third, a market basket study, where stores are assessed for the availability of foods on a standard list, was performed. Fourth, a door-to-door survey, focusing on hunger and accessing healthy food, was performed.

#### ***The Riverdale Community***

For this study, “Riverdale” refers to the Riverdale Community Area within the City of Chicago. It does not include the Village of Riverdale, an adjacent but separate municipality. We follow the borders set by the city. The Riverdale Community Area extends from I-94, the Bishop Ford Expressway, on the east to the Metra Electric Line on the west. It stretches from 115<sup>th</sup> Street on the north to the Chicago boundary at 138<sup>th</sup> Street on the south. The area north of 130<sup>th</sup> is entirely industrial. The main residential area of Riverdale lies between 130<sup>th</sup> Street and the Little Calumet River. The main portion of this area is the Altgeld-Murray Homes Chicago Housing Administration public housing project, usually known as Altgeld Gardens. Altgeld Gardens is currently undergoing complete renovation. This has meant that the number of people living in Altgeld Gardens, and in Riverdale as a whole has fluctuated greatly. In addition to Altgeld Gardens, Riverdale also includes the Golden Gate housing development to the east of Indiana Avenue and surrounding private homes. Overall, the 2000 census reported a population of 9809 in 2000, 97% of whom were African-American. Due to the changes at Altgeld Gardens, this amount has fluctuated and generally been less since 2000.

Riverdale is one of the most isolated communities in Chicago. It is surrounded by industrial zones and is miles away from large retail districts. One frequent CTA bus line serves the community, the 34, which provides a connection to the 95<sup>th</sup> Street Red Line stop. A less frequent suburban PACE bus also provides connections to the Red Line and to the south suburbs. However, taking the bus plus the Red Line downtown takes over an hour.

**Store Mapping:**

Key Findings of the mapping study include:

- Overall, Riverdale has the worst food access of any community area in the city.
- The number and concentration of supermarkets in Riverdale is very low. There is one, small, independent supermarket, Rosebud Farmstand, a meat oriented store with a small fresh produce and packaged goods selection attached to a nearby poultry and egg wholesaler.
- The nearest large, full-service supermarket, the Jewel-Osco at Halsted and 115<sup>th</sup> Street, is over three miles away and involves a transfer to reach by public transportation.
- Aside from Rosebud, other options are minimal. A small store in the Altgeld Gardens community has now closed. This caused an average increase of almost ½ mile to the nearest corner store. Two other corner stores are open but small. The nearest discount chain store, an Aldi, is almost as far away as the Jewel. Nearby communities, such as Dolton, the Village of Riverdale, and the Chicago communities of Roseland and West Pullman, also have poor food access.
- The average Riverdale resident must travel over three miles to reach the nearest large or smaller discount supermarket (such as an Aldi). Other types of stores, such as chain drug stores, chain convenience stores, and even fast food chain restaurants, are also relatively far from the average resident.
- The area appears to be well served by food pantries, although in interviews residents often appeared to have poor information about them.
- The area is very far from the nearest farmers' market and specialty stores such as Whole Foods.
- The patterns seen in Riverdale are somewhat unique to its extremely isolated status, but overall they are similar to patterns in many African-American neighborhoods in the city and suburbs.

**Qualitative Analysis (Structured Group Interviews):****Analytical Approach**

Six qualitative interviews were conducted with the Riverdale community across five sectors of the food system. The food sector groups and their participants are described below.

Food Sector	Number of Participants	Gender	Race/Ethnicity
Retail Food Outlet	1	M	African American
Retail Food Outlet	1	M	Middle Eastern
CBO Farmer's Market Community Gardeners Food Security Advocate	5	F	African American, Asian, white
Community Members	8-7	M/F	African American
Restaurant	1	M	Middle Eastern
Emergency Food Programs	1	M	African American

Separate interview guides were developed and used for each food sector, and all interviews were tape recorded. The verbatim transcripts were coded and analyzed using Atlas-Ti qualitative software, with the most frequently used codes for the Riverdale analysis are listed below. The results presented here reflect the analysis across all of the food sector interviews.

Code	Frequency of Use
Barriers to food security	9
Participants most vulnerable to CFIS	8
Strength (of Program in addressing FIS)	8
Make healthy food available	7
Buy food where CM	6
Community food insecurity	6

CFIS: Community Food Insecurity

### Key Findings:

- Transportation was identified as a major barrier to food security for the community members due to both the geographic isolation of Riverdale as well as the inadequate public transportation system.
- Community members are concerned about the quality and availability of food in the neighborhood. Many felt that they were ignored by the City due to their location and density of low income residents.
- Emergency food programs were not well known among the interview participants.
- Many participants recommended stringent policies to avoid misuse of available resources, especially by emergency food assistance program staff. Misuse of services seems to result in hostility and jealousy among those in need.
- Riverdale was described as a highly social community in which residents help each other out. This characteristic emerged in Riverdale more than in the other case study community areas studied.
- At the time of data collection the community was undergoing a great deal of change. There was some uncertainty as to a public housing plan to improve quality of public housing in the City by creating more mixed income housing. The thought was that the uncertainty created a general sense of insecurity and thus things were stagnant in the community. Residents didn't want to spend time on community issues if they wouldn't be around in a year.
- There was a general lack of knowledge of food assistance programs. Most people perceived that there was no senior meal program and were largely unaware of other food assistance services. It was suggested that the programs, if they exist are not well advertised.
- Some community members suggested that they experience problems when using or trying to use the emergency food programs. These include program volunteers take food before residents get it; and both the staff and the recipients taking more food than they are allowed.

***Improving access to healthy foods in Riverdale:***

Several ideas were generated in the community member interview.

- Make foods we want available in stores we have
- Establish and enforce standards of cleanliness for stores
- Provide public transportation to the large supermarkets
- Start a food co-op
- Start farmers' markets in the community
- Establish a community garden
- Receiving more assistance (e.g., more food stamps, WIC vouchers, universal school meals, etc)
- Increase the availability of healthy foods
- Better/more/foods from emergency food system

Final thoughts from the researchers:

- Riverdale has the worst food access in Chicago. This point should be made known to city officials who often have overlooked the food access issues here.
- As the construction at Altgeld Gardens completes, it is possible that demand will be there a new small grocery in the community.
- At the same time, transportation options to large stores outside of the community should be looked at.
- Riverdale may be able to team with neighboring suburban and city communities to help bring a larger store into the region.

***Contact Information:***

For more information, please contact:

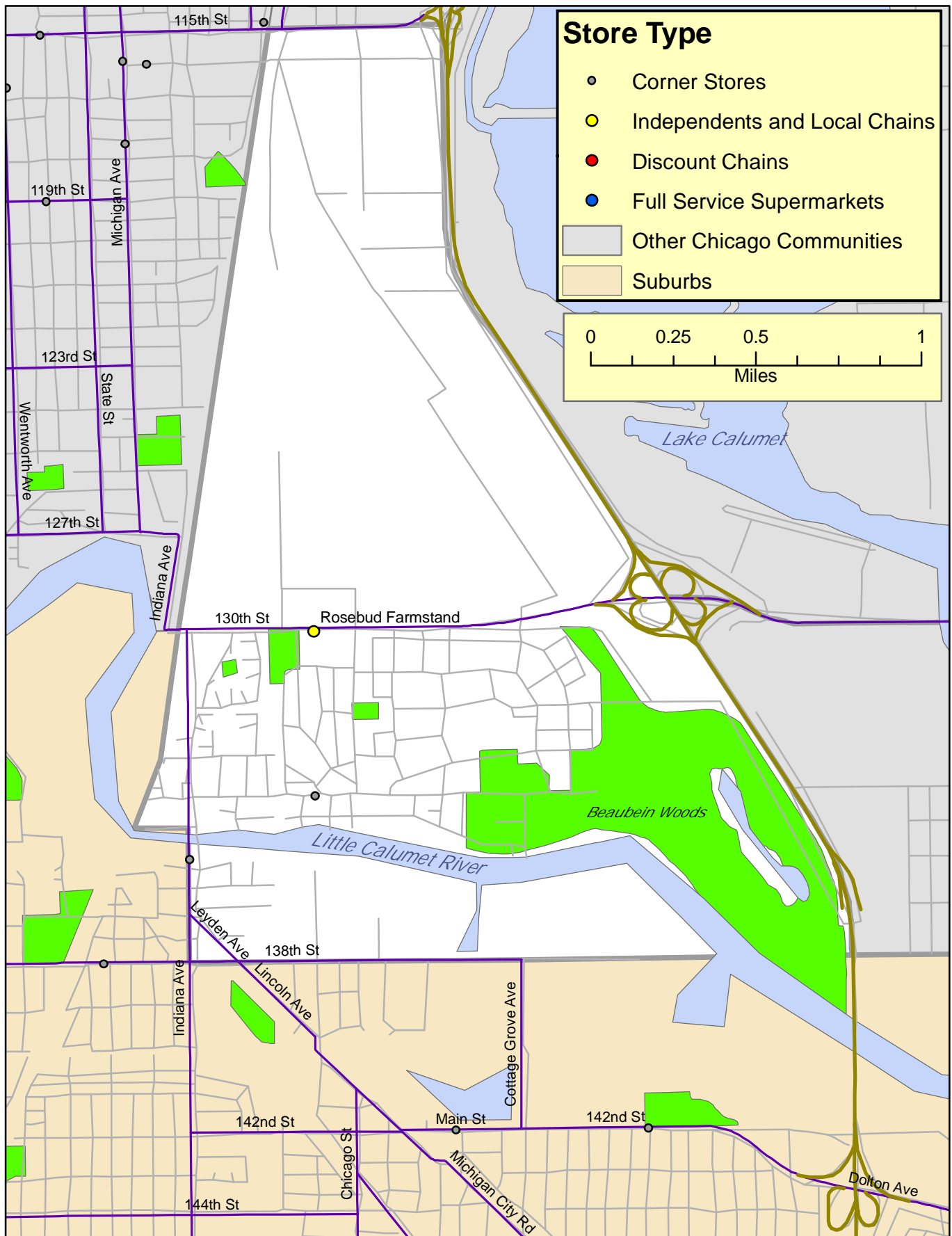
Daniel Block,  
 Coordinator, Neighborhood Assistance Center  
 Chicago State University  
 773-995-2310  
 dblock@csu.edu

Noel Chavez  
 Community Health Sciences Division  
 School of Public Health  
 University of Illinois-Chicago  
 312-996-0747  
 nchavez@uic.edu

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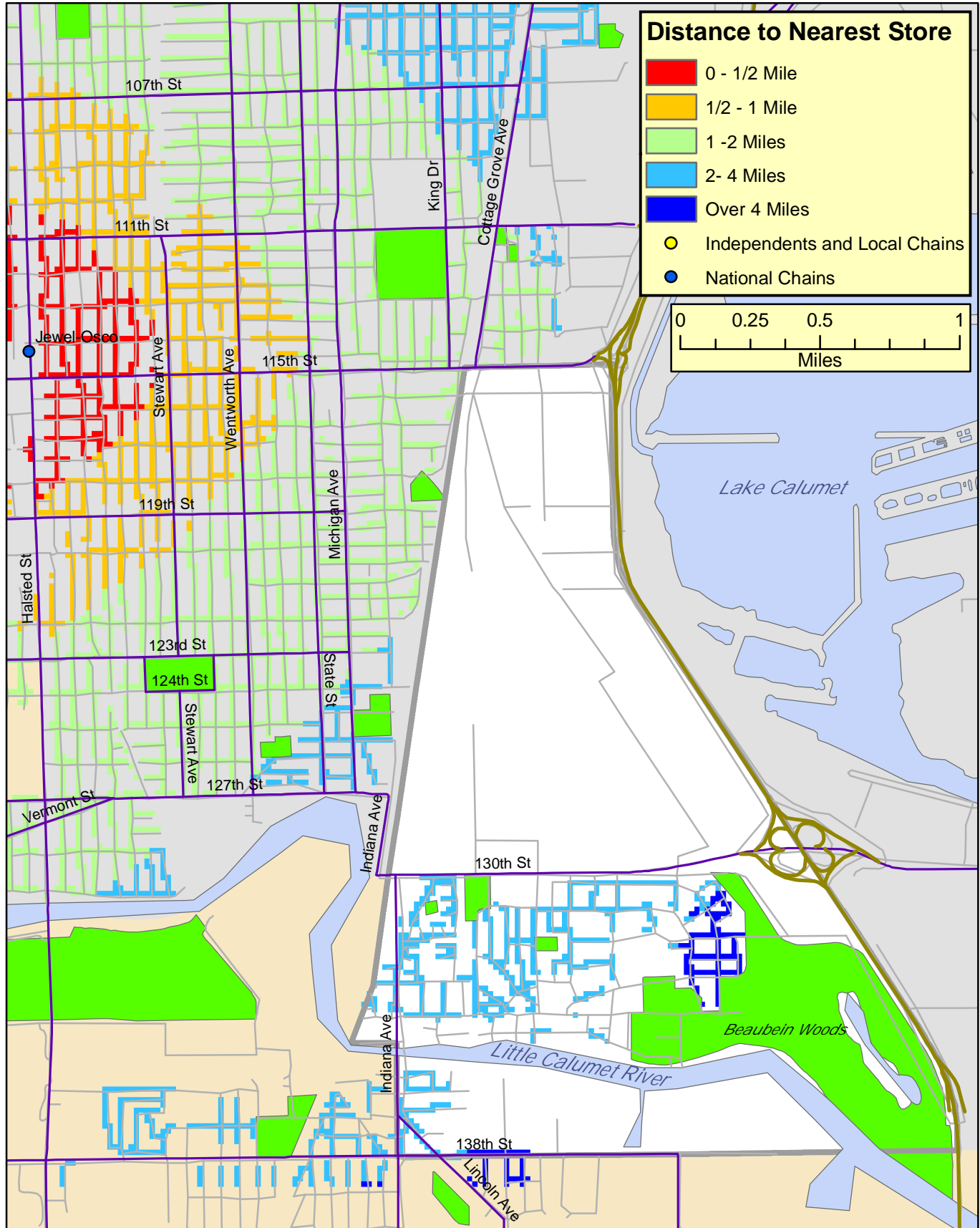
# Supermarket and Corner Stores in Riverdale



Sources:  
 Supermarkets: Company Websites and In-person Surveys, Summer, 2007  
 Corner Stores: InfoUSA, 2003

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 Chicago State University, Neighborhood Assistance Center  
 December 2007

# Distance to Nearest Full-Service Supermarket Riverdale, 2007



Sources:  
 Supermarkets: Company Websites and In-person Surveys, Summer, 2007;  
 Streets and Land Use Data: Chicago Metro Agency for Planning, ESRI

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