

FOOD DESERT: Does it exist in American Samoa?

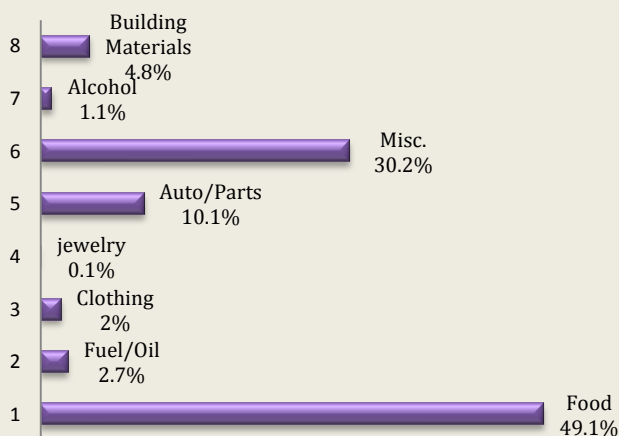
What Is the Issue?

Obesity is one of the main concerns for medical professionals, community leaders, and parents in American Samoa. Studies reveal the increasing number of overweight children in American Samoa. These children are more likely to become obese and suffer from non-communicable diseases in the future. Most children attend public schools. This study assessed if the environment surrounding schools are food deserts, and therefore contribute to unhealthy diets.

What is Food Desert?

- Geographical areas where mainstream grocery stores are either totally absent or inaccessible.
- An area that lacks nutritional food.
- First Lady Michelle Obama defines "food deserts" as places where fresh produce and affordable, healthy choices are nonexistent to battle the child obesity epidemic in the U.S.

FY 2009 American Samoa Imports



Statistics:

- About 95% of food supplies are imported from the US and other nations.
- Three-fourths of adults in American Samoa are obese.
- 55.6% of American Samoan schoolchildren are either overweight or obese.
- 1 in 3 children are at risk for preventable diseases like diabetes and heart disease due to overweight and obesity.
- 60% of deaths in American Samoa are NCD related deaths.

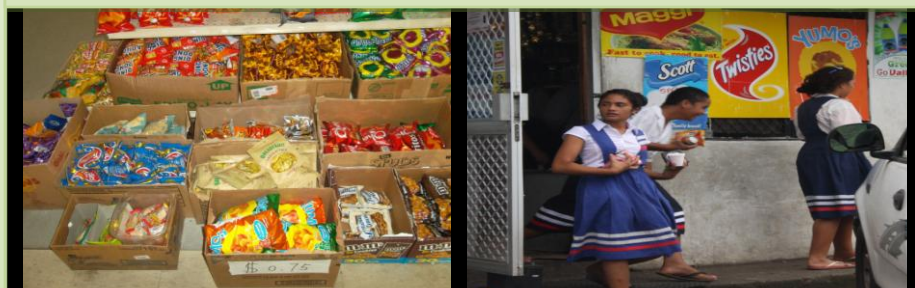
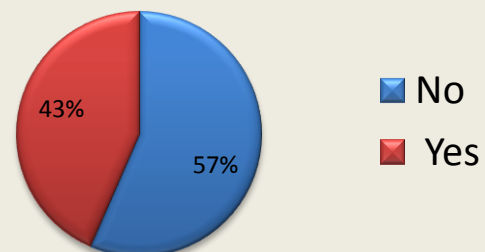
How was the study conducted?

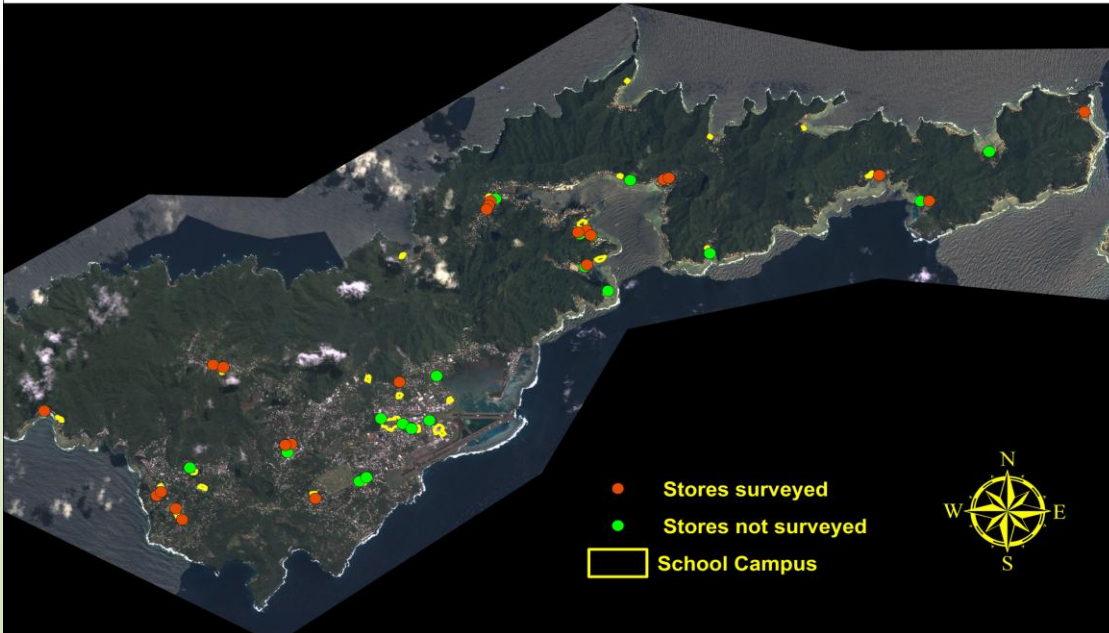
- The target areas are stores located around the public school campuses.
- A Food Checklist instrument was used to assess the exterior and the interior of the stores.

What did the Study Find?

- 74% of the stores are visible from school grounds. 26% were not visible from the school campuses but were close enough for students to walk and purchase items.
- 57% did not stock any fruits or vegetables.
- Of the 43% that stocked fruits and vegetables, only 20% scored 4 of 5 on quantity, quality, and variety.
- Only 9% of all the stores surveyed stock fruits and vegetables with good quantity, quality, and variety.
- 100% of the stores stocked junk food in the front entrance while the fruits/vegetables were placed in coolers located on the side or the back of the stores.

Did the store stock any fruits or vegetables?





The map shows the locations all the schools, private and public. All the stores near schools were also mapped, but only stores near public schools were surveyed (the red dots).

Notes or Comments:

- The overall results from the survey indicate that school locations in American Samoa are in food deserts.
- People of American Samoa depend on imports for 95% of their food. So it is hard to make choices when there aren't many.
- All of the stores are swamped with unhealthy or processed foods.
- The business sector has a goal of making profits and with price of oil increasing every year, so has the prices of food.
- Businesses are reluctant to stock perishable food (fruits and vegetables) because they want to make sure the foods are sold before they expired. It is why canned and frozen foods are very popular in local stores and diets.
- People are overeating but are undernourished, prone to overweight, obesity, diabetes and chronic illnesses.
- "We are what we eat" phrase realistically defines what is happening in American Samoa.
- Many factors are associated with the increasing prevalence of obesity in American Samoa, and Food Desert is just one of those factors.

Needs:

- There is a great need to change or improve lifestyles in American Samoa so that the future generations would not have to experience a life of obesity and NCD's.
- Children need to learn and live a healthy lifestyle.
- School Lunch Program should serve as a model because it might be the only nutritional food available for most children throughout the day.
- More research on the food system in American Samoa.

Recommendations:

- Create policies to minimize access to unhealthy food on school campuses.
- Improve access to healthy food.
- Well-developed programs to educate the educators and the students in Nutrition using locally grown food.

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