

Tulane PRC: Cooking at home, shopping frequency influence consumption

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When residents of two New Orleans neighborhoods tended to shop at a farmer's market or prepare food at home, they also tended to eat more fresh fruits and vegetables, according to a recently published study by the [Tulane Prevention Research Center](#) (PRC).

The study was published in the June 2017 edition of the journal [Preventive Medicine Reports](#), and study authors included partners from the project's steering committee.

In 2012-2013, the [Makin' Groceries partnership](#) collected 900 door-to-door household surveys asking people in two under-resourced New Orleans neighborhoods – the Upper 9th Ward neighborhood surrounding Bunny Friend park and the MidCity/Treme/Lafitte area surrounding the current ReFresh Project – about their grocery shopping. Among their similarities, both neighborhoods lacked a full-service grocery store at the time of the surveys. The surveys were developed with the help of the community-based Makin' Groceries Steering Committee, brought together by the Tulane PRC to provide guidance and feedback on the project and help share results with the community. The ReFresh Project, a grocery store and community healthy hub that later opened in one of the neighborhoods, also supported the Makin' Groceries study via Steering Committee participation.

Among the study findings, the authors found a strong connection between certain food-related habits and diet: Daily servings of fresh produce increased by 76% for those who shopped at a farmer's market and by 38% for those who prepared food at home. Also, most survey respondents said they cooked at home from scratch less

than once per day.

"I was surprised to learn so many people ate outside of their homes," said Ms. Leonetta Terrell, a study author, Makin' Groceries Steering Committee member, and professional social worker in New Orleans. "New Orleans is known for good cooks, and this was a surprise to see the number this high."

Other findings from the study showed that each additional trip to a grocery store was associated with a 3% increase in servings of fresh produce, while each additional trip to a convenience store was connected to eating 3% more chips, candy, and pastries.

"National trends indicate an increase in people eating outside the home and buying prepared food, which is less likely to be healthy. So it's important to emphasize the benefits of cooking at home and understand what people need in order to cook at home more often and encourage those things," said Dr. Jeanette Gustat, the study's lead author, an investigator at the Tulane PRC, and a clinical associate professor of epidemiology at the Tulane School of Public Health and Tropical Medicine.

"Furthermore, our study adds to growing evidence that shopping frequency and where people shop are important factors when it comes to diet. We see potential in convenience stores and corner stores expanding their offerings to include fresh produce."