Urban Food Deserts: Working Across Disciplines to Address Food Insecurity in Richmond, Virginia

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Background & Statistics

Food security and access are central metrics of Richmond City’s health status, environment, and economy. Efforts in the city to reduce hunger and increase access to healthy foods have been independent, geographically specific initiatives, but food-related issues remain.

- One in three children in Richmond City lives below the federal poverty level.
- 40,020 residents in Richmond City are food insecure and lack access to enough food for an active health lifestyle. That is roughly 20 percent of the total city population, compared to 11.8 percent in Virginia and 16.6 percent nationally.
- Access to affordable, nutritious foods is a severe problem facing many families and is the leading cause of the increase in childhood obesity.

Citywide Assessment

Mayor Dwight C. Jones established the Food Policy Task Force to provide the administration with recommendations that will improve access to quality, affordable, healthy fresh foods throughout the city.

Policy and Program Recommendations

- Policy Implementation and Integration
- Innovations in Land Use and Urban Agriculture
- Access to Fresh, Healthy Food
- Healthy Living Media and Marketing
- Fresh, Local and Healthy School Food

VCE Richmond City Response

- Address urban agriculture needs, support urban gardens and farms, deliver 4-H content
- Deliver nutrition education to limited-resource youth and adults
- Deliver food safety, nutrition and wellness education, food preparation, and food preservation
- Initiated new MG program to support gardening efforts in city
- Connect partners and resources, encourage and support efforts to increase access

Statewide Task Force & Documentary Followed

Richmond City allocates $25k to VCE office to address food desert issues

VCE- Richmond Hosts First Urban Food Desert Symposium in VA

Over 100 participants met and shared resources, ideas, and promising strategies, from prescription produce to indoor farms

Documentary available on YouTube – search "Food Deserts in Virginia"

31st Street Baptist Church partners and becomes 1st urban church to have USDA certified farm

First Lady of Virginia kicks off symposium

Changing palates and eating habits