

**Questions and Answers about the Contra Costa County
Food & Nutrition Policy Consortium's Thrifty Food Plan Market Basket Survey**

Question	Answer
1. Where was this study conducted?	In 4 Contra Costa neighborhoods in the cities of Antioch, Brentwood, and San Pablo, and the unincorporated town of Rodeo.
2. How were the neighborhoods selected?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We chose cities/towns in the county with poverty rates that exceeded that of the county, but were not typically the focus of many other public health efforts. • We met with city planners and resident groups to define "organic" neighborhoods within these cities (as distinct from simply identifying census tracts.) • Because we were interested in food access for low income residents, we looked only at neighborhoods where there was a census tract block group with at least 25% of residents living below 185% of the federal poverty level. • Based on the recommendations in Liz Crockett's "how to..." manual, we limited neighborhood size to 1.5 square miles (in the case of Rodeo, this happened to be the entire town).
3. How were foods chosen for inclusion in the survey?	<p>We started with the experience of Liz Crockett who conducted similar studies in New York. The Thrifty Food Plan is a defined set of food and menus established by the USDA to meet most of the Recommended Dietary Allowances for Americans at the lowest cost. Specific foods were included because</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) many of the foods are commonly eaten by low income households; 2) the foods chosen are "relatively" nutritious and economical choices; and 3) the list represents a conservatively-chosen TFP pattern with few higher priced food items.

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4. How do you know that people actually use these foods?	We focus tested the food list with low income residents using a combination of oral questions and answers and a food frequency questionnaire.
5. How were low fat and culturally acceptable foods chosen for inclusion?	We identified foods common to cultures in Contra Costa and focus tested them to ensure the inclusion of at least five common foods. Low fat foods were identified based on federal criteria and by determining acceptable lower fat alternatives to Thrifty Food Plan foods commonly consumed.
6. Why were low fat and culturally acceptable foods included?	The Food and Nutrition Policy Consortium includes in its definition of "food security" access to foods that are nutritious and culturally acceptable; thus, we believed it was important to assess accessibility of these foods.
7. How did you determine which markets to survey in the study neighborhoods?	We identified all food stores within the geographic boundaries of the neighborhoods. Each store in each neighborhood was assigned to a surveyor. If the store did not accept food stamps, we did not enter the store for further assessment.
8. Why were stores that did not accept food stamps not included?	For shoppers using food stamps, food is not accessible if it cannot be purchased with this form of currency.
9. How was access to fresh produce assessed?	We added to Crockett's survey total number, type, and quality of produce items under the assumption that a nutritious diet generally includes fresh produce and that fresh produce is a part of the standard American diet.
10. Who did the surveying?	FNPC staff managed the study. We provided hands-on training to FNPC members and community residents. FNPC members were paired with residents to go to the markets to collect information. Residents were given a small stipend for their time.
11. Who funded your study?	The staffing was paid for in part by the county, MAZON, the Jewish Response to Hunger, and Food For All. Funding for stipends was provided by the East Bay Community Foundation.

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12. What did you learn?	We posed the following questions to be answered by this data collection effort:				
What is the actual cost of the TFP in the study and control areas?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Comparing the cost of small stores to the large stores in the study neighborhoods, the cost for the TFP food list was 11% higher. ◆ When costs of large stores in the study neighborhoods were compared to those in the control neighborhood, it was 8% higher (we haven't determined whether this is statistically significant). 				
How much does the TFP cost in small markets relative to chain supermarkets?	◆ When all stores (both large markets and small) were compared to the one supermarket in the comparison neighborhood (in Martinez), we found the TFP Food List cost an average of 23% more.				
What is the density of large food outlets in the study areas?	◆ There were <i>no</i> large markets in half the study neighborhoods (Antioch and San Pablo).				
	Antioch (2 sm) "West Rivertown"	Brentwood (1 sm, 2 lg) "Village Drive"	Rodeo (4 sm, 1 lg)	San Pablo (8 sm) "Brookside"	
Is the Thrifty Food Plan (TFP) accessible in the study and control areas?	47% of food list foods were unavailable	1% of food list foods were unavailable	4% of food list foods were unavailable	21% of food list foods were unavailable	
Are low fat foods available in low income neighborhoods? <i>We looked for reduced fat snacks (pretzels and cookies), reduced fat meats (ground beef and hot dogs), and reduced fat mayonnaise and milk.</i>	No stores in study areas stocked 4 of the six items: leaner ground beef, reduced fat franks and mayonnaise, or 1% fat milk.	At least 2 of the 3 stores surveyed stocked each of the lower fat items on the list.	At least 2 of the 5 stores surveyed stocked each of the lower fat items on our list.	Fewer than 1/4 of the stores stocked all the items on our list.	