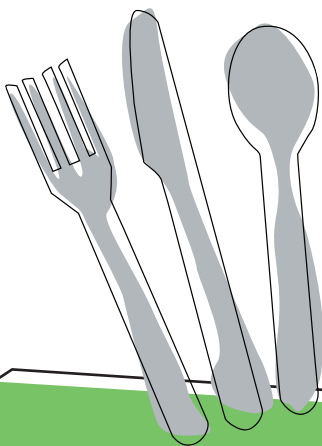


# Unequal Access: Two Tiers of Food Safety & Sanitation in Detroit's Corner & Grocery Stores

By: Doing Development Differently in Metro Detroit (D4), the Restaurant Opportunities Center of Michigan (ROC-Michigan) and Metropolitan Organizing Strategy Enabling Strength (MOSES)



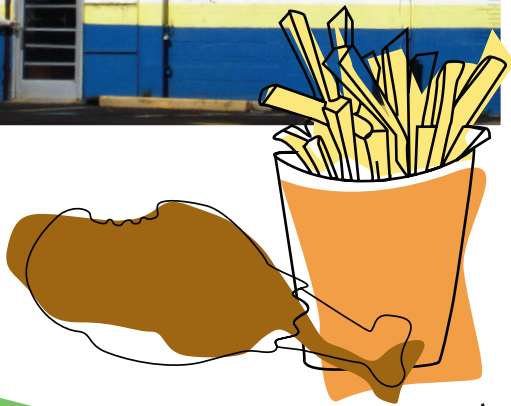
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# A Critical Link in Detroit's Food System

Food retailers with liquor licenses are a major source of food purchases for Detroit residents. For example, fringe food locations such as liquor stores, party stores, and convenience stores constitute 92% of authorized food stamp retailers in the city.<sup>1</sup> Over 1,000 establishments possess liquor licenses and are authorized to accept food stamp electronic benefit transfers (EBT).<sup>2</sup> These vendors have far-reaching geographic distribution throughout the city, with every Detroit resident living an average of .7 miles within one of these establishments.<sup>3</sup> In comparison, roughly 550,000 Detroit residents, or over half the city's total population, must travel twice as far to reach the closest mainstream food retail outlet, such as a grocery store, as they must to reach one of these fringe food locations. With such widespread penetration into the city's markets, fringe food retailers with liquor licenses have an undeniable impact on the safety and integrity of food that is available Detroit's residents.



## A Two-Tiered Food Retail Environment



Our research reveals a two-tier system of access to fresh and healthy foods within the city of Detroit. Top-tier retailers make sufficient efforts to ensure the cleanliness and safety of their establishments, facilitating trust and positive relations with the community, repeat customers, and an enhanced bottom line. Low-tier retailers on the other hand are characterized by unsafe, expired, or dangerous food products in an unsanitary environment, putting consumers and the public at risk. A significant number of retailers in the city of Detroit appear to be low-tier retailers – contributing to a retail environment in which violations of sanitation and food safety laws are all too common. For example, a survey of health department records in the city of Detroit found rates over twice the statewide average of critical (1.3 vs. 0.5) and non-critical (5.0 vs. 2.1) violations.<sup>5</sup>

Our own survey of corner stores and food retailers with liquor licenses in Detroit found a substantial percentage of stores with severe food violations that could directly result in consumer illnesses, including: sales of expired food (38%), sales of expired meat (22%) and decaying fruits (22%) and vegetables (18%). Unsanitary physical conditions were also common. For example, presence of mold and filth was reported in one-third of the stores we surveyed. One in four establishments were what we defined as *severe violators* of food safety standards, with three or more food safety violations occurring in their establishments. A somewhat higher percentage (38%) of the establishments we surveyed had three or more sanitation violations in the physical upkeep of the store. Five percent (5%) of stores we characterized as *extreme violators* of food safety and sanitation standards. These establishments had 5 or more food safety violations and 6 or more food sanitation violations per store.

Notably, a minority of violators are responsible for a disproportionate share of the food safety and sanitation problems in Detroit's corner stores. For example, our survey shows that 7% of the stores we surveyed were responsible for 30% of the total food safety and sanitation violations we recorded. Clearly, while improvements in food safety and sanitation are needed system-wide, a minority of extreme low-tier establishments are having an outsize impact on the problem of food safety and sanitation in the city of Detroit.



92% of authorized food stamp retailers in Detroit are party stores.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Gallagher, M. (2008). Examining the Impact of Food Deserts on Public Health in Detroit. Mari Gallagher Research & Consulting Group.

<sup>2</sup>Linn, *Mapping the Strait*, (2010). Retrieved from: <http://mapdetroit.blogspot.com/2010/11/detroits-liquor-stores.html>

<sup>3</sup>Id.

<sup>4</sup>Id.

<sup>5</sup>Guest G. & Turk V., (2006, October 24). Food Violations Higher in Detroit: Buyers face a commute for groceries. *Detroit Free Press*. Retrieved from: <http://www.freep.com>

# Unequal Impacts, Unequal Outcomes

The consumer options available to Detroit residents are compounded by historical and current patterns of racial and economic inequity as well as residential segregation. One of the key findings of this study is that a two-tiered system for Detroit's consumers exists, in which consumers in neighborhoods with higher concentrations of African-Americans and Latinos, children, and poverty are significantly more likely to be subjected to low-tier retailers selling unsafe foods in an unsanitary environment. In other words, the income levels, racial composition, and number of children in a neighborhood are associated with the rate of food and sanitation violations in local food and retail outlets. Our analysis demonstrated that those census tracts most likely to experience high rates of food sanitation and safety violations in their neighborhood corner stores were census tracts with: (1) higher concentrations of African-American and Latino residents; (2) higher rates of poverty; or (3) larger numbers of children. Unsafe and unsanitary food retail choices disproportionately impact many of the city's most vulnerable residents, including people of color, the poor, and children. These individuals and neighborhoods experience the triple impact of few choices, high prices, and poor food safety, working together to undermine community food security.<sup>6</sup>



## The Hidden Economic Cost of Food Sanitation and Safety Violations

Food and sanitation violations not only pose a risk to the public, they also carry hidden costs to consumers, residents, and tax payers. For example, poor food quality has been cited as a cause of retail leakage that deprives the city of much needed revenues and impedes the attraction of new residents. Detroiters spend upwards of \$200 million per year on grocery purchases outside the city – lost revenues that if spent inside the city could result in increased local tax revenues and economic growth. High rates of non-compliance also burden already strained public resources. Repeat and chronic violators consume a disproportionate share of taxpayer resources by triggering more frequent mandatory inspections and enforcement measures. Clearly, targeted and efficient policy strategies to increase compliance are needed in order to supplement limited public resources.

Detroiters spend upwards of **\$200 million** per year on grocery purchases **outside the city.**

<sup>6</sup>Pothukuchi, K., Mohamed, R., Gebben, D. Explaining Compliance in Food Safety Compliance by Food Stores: Does Community Matter? *AGRIC. HUM. VALUES.* (2008) 25:319–332

<sup>7</sup>Detroit Economic Growth Corporation (2008, August). Detroit Fresh Food Access Initiative: Report of Task Force Findings, p. 6.

<sup>8</sup>Social Compact (2009). 2009 Detroit Drilldown: Neighborhood Market Drilldown, Catalyzing Business Investment in Inner-City Neighborhoods. Retrieved from: <http://datadrivendetroit.org/projects/social-compact-drilldown/>

<sup>9</sup>Pothukuchi, K. et al., at note viii. Center for Urban Economic Development at the University of Illinois at Chicago et al. at note v.

## Safe & Clean Food Retail Outlets Are Possible

One of the most notable findings of our study is the extent to which it is possible to operate a safe and sanitary food retail outlet while still maintaining a viable business in Detroit. In fact, a substantial minority of the corner stores we surveyed did not report a single food (36 %) or sanitation (37 %) violation, illustrating that clean and safe conditions are not beyond the capacity of store owners. Food retail establishments do have the potential to serve as a positive force for food access in the city, as long as there is the commitment to serving safe and clean foods to the public.

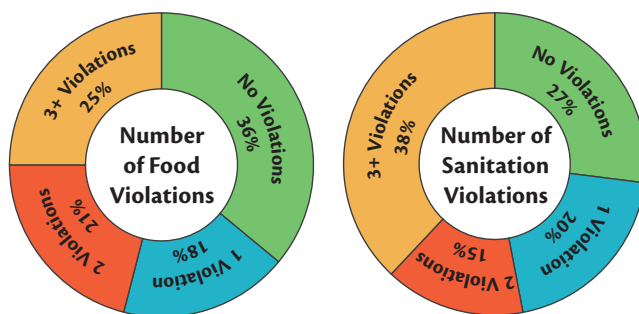
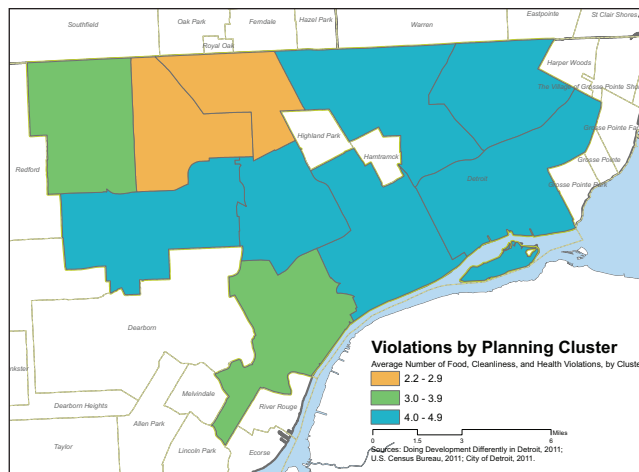


# About This Study

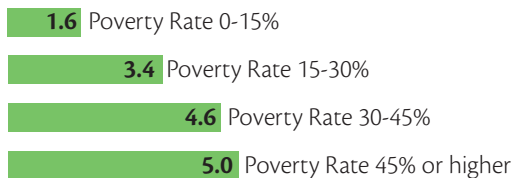
This study was conceived of and designed by the Food Policy Task Force of Doing Development Differently in Metro Detroit (D4), a broad-based coalition of community residents and forward thinking business leaders as well as local and regional labor, environmental, faith-based, economic development, and community organizations. D4 is dedicated to strengthening metro Detroit through meaningful engagement in the creation of sustainable 'win-win' development strategies. The D4 Food Policy Task Force is coordinated by the Restaurant Opportunities Center of Michigan (ROC-Michigan).

The study uses data from 207 surveys of food retail establishments in the city of Detroit. The survey instrument was developed by Metropolitan Organizing Strategy Enabling Strength (MOSES), based on food safety criteria used by the Michigan Department of Agriculture (MDA). Surveys of the 207 establishments were conducted from September 2010 through May 2011 by community volunteers. Surveyed establishments were sampled at random from a list of all establishments in the city of Detroit possessing both a liquor license and authorization to accept food stamps/EBT transfers (one-fifth sampling rate). The results of this primary research were supplemented by secondary data, such as Census tract data from the 2005-2009 American Community Survey produced by the US Census Bureau, and a review of existing academic literature.

Our study was motivated by the need to examine and analyze the food retail and service sectors as economic drivers in metro Detroit that are critical to the lives of hundreds of thousands of residents. It is essential to make information about this industry available to all stakeholders to ensure effective and equitable economic development strategies that will create good jobs, while ensuring a healthy, safe environment for all communities.



## Average Food Safety & Sanitation Violations: By percent poverty rate in Census Tract



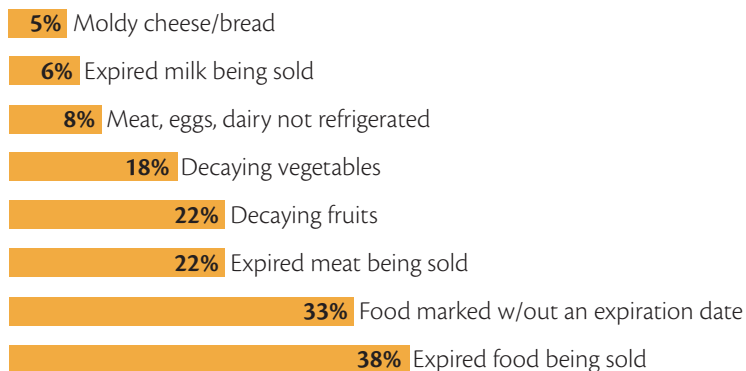
## Average Food Safety & Sanitation Violations: By percent children in Census Tract



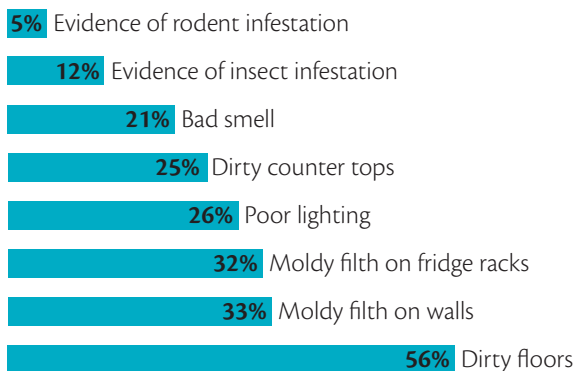
## Average Food Safety & Sanitation Violations: By majority racial group in Census Tract



## Type of Food Violation

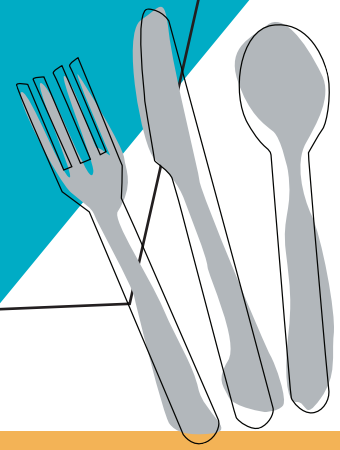


## Type of Sanitation Violation



# Our Recommendations

Doing Development Differently in Metro Detroit (D4) and the Good Food, Good Jobs Coalition recommends the following action items to address the food safety and sanitation problems documented in this study:



# 1

**Enforce food safety and sanitation laws in the food retail industry with an emphasis on targeting repeat and chronic violators.**

Public policy makers should consider an establishment's compliance with these and other legal standards that directly impact residents' quality of life when granting government licenses. By statute, these licenses are only intended to be granted to responsible employers who do not jeopardize the public safety and well-being. Better enforcement policies will also help level the playing field for the significant number of store owners who are playing by the rules.

# 2

**Incentivize best practices to lift standards and practices across the board.** Initiatives and incentives should be considered to assist and encourage a greater number of food retail establishments in the city to provide fresh, healthy, and affordable foods to Detroit residents. Creative local, statewide, and federal policies like Healthy Food Finance and Healthy Food Incentives that generate resources for enhancing the availability of fresh and healthy foods in independent urban retailers should be considered, especially those that help to ensure good jobs and other positive quality of life indicators in the community.

# 3

**Promote model retail practices.** Model retail practices should be publicized and disseminated to promote best practices in the industry.

# 4

**Support local and regional sourcing of foods (especially fruits and vegetables) as part of the solution.**

Detroit is home to a vibrant, community-based urban agriculture movement located in one of the most agriculturally diverse regions in the country. The irony is that much of this agricultural bounty is inaccessible to Detroit's residents. We need policies, investment in infrastructure, and incentives to change that.

# 5

**Support further research, study, and community dialogue with a wide range of stakeholders to generate effective and sustainable solutions to the issues identified in this study.**

Given the disparate impact of these problems on poor as well as African-American and Latino communities, as well as the disproportionate impact of the industry's practices on neighborhoods with high concentrations of children, research that engages a wide range of community residents and institutions will be critical to generating long-lasting, effective solutions.

The information collected here is critical to ensuring that metro Detroit's food service and retail industries realize their full economic potential as powerful drivers of healthy communities.



## Doing Development Differently in Metro Detroit (D4) and Good Food Good Jobs Coalition partners include:

Corporation for a Skilled Workforce

Detroit Eastside Community Collaborative (DECC)

Detroit Food Justice Task Force

Detroit Food Policy Council

Detroit Local Initiatives Support Corporation (LISC)

Detroit Residents

Detroiters Working for Environmental Justice (DWEJ)

Fair Food Network

Food Service and Food Retail Employers

Food and Water Watch

Greater Detroit Building Trades Council

Greater Woodward CDC

International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers (IBEW), Local 58

Metropolitan Detroit AFL-CIO

Metropolitan Organizing Strategy Enabling Strength (MOSES)

Michigan Building Trades Council

Michigan Suburbs Alliance

Michigan Teamsters Joint Council, 43

Restaurant Opportunities Center of Michigan (ROC-Michigan)

Restaurant Workers

Rosa Parks Institute for Self-Development

Sierra Club

Southwest Detroit Community Benefits Coalition

Southwest Detroit Development Collaborative (SDDC)

Southwest Detroit Environmental Vision

Storehouse of Hope

Sugar Law Center for Economic and Social Justice

United Food and Commercial Workers (UFCW), Local 876 & Statewide

United Way of Southeastern Michigan

UNITE-HERE Local 24

Urban Neighborhoods Initiatives

Vanguard CDC

Wayne State University Labor Studies Center

Doing Development Differently in Metro Detroit and the Good Food, Good Jobs Coalition would like to thank the many community volunteers, students, and interns who devoted many hours to conducting surveys for this project. In particular we would like to thank the following University of Michigan students for their assistance in gathering and inputting survey data: Raymond Arroyo, Miriam Bernstein, Tracy Ko, and Weiqian Vivienne Zhang.

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