UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, SAN DIEGO

Food Deserts and Access to Fresh Food in Low-Income San Diego

A Thesis submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts

in

Latin American Studies (International Migration)

by

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The Thesis of Emily Theresa Puhl is approved and it is acceptable in quality and form for publication on microfilm and electronically:

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Chair

University of California, San Diego

2011

To family and friends everywhere

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ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS

Food Deserts and Access to Fresh Food in Low-Income San Diego

by

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Government studies and public health literature have long promoted supermarkets as the optimal retail outlet for affordable, healthy food. This emphasis on large, nationwide, corporate-owned stores obscures the ability of other, smaller retail outlets to provide fresh produce in low-income neighborhoods. While, indeed, many urban neighborhoods lack retailers that offer produce for sale, ethnic enclaves offer an alternative image of a fresh food environment within a low-income community. This study looks at the presence and price of fresh produce in three San Diego

neighborhoods that are classified as “low-income.”

The results of this study counter the characterization of small, independent grocery stores as unable or unwilling to offer produce at low prices. Both predominantly-*mexicano* neighborhoods have a greater number of stores with produce for sale than the non-immigrant neighborhood in Southeast San Diego. Also, the average price of produce in the stores in these immigrant neighborhoods does not differ significantly from prices offered by a discount supermarket in the non-immigrant neighborhood. The persistence of these ethnic enclaves that demand produce and place great importance on the culture of the *mercado* creates an alternative economic sphere in which small stores are responsive to the demands of neighborhood residents. This provides affordable healthy food to low-income households, allows immigrants to hold on to their own ideas of cuisine, and prevents coerced assimilation to the unhealthy diet of American society.

1. Introduction

In February 2010, First Lady Michelle Obama started the nationwide "Let's Move" campaign to combat the increased prevalence of Type-2 diabetes among children in the United States. The campaign stated that one of its many goals was to combat obesity by increasing access to affordable healthy food. Emphasizing the importance of supermarkets for accessing this healthy food, the campaign's website explained:

> More than 23 million Americans, including 6.5 million children, live in low-income urban and rural neighborhoods that are more than one mile from the nearest supermarket. These communities, where access to affordable, quality, and nutritious foods is limited, are known as 'food deserts.' In these communities, grocery stores that sell healthy foods such as fresh fruit and vegetables are inaccessible or healthy foods are too expensive. (Let's Move Campaign, 2010)

According to this government initiative, food deserts are areas absent of supermarkets; large stores that are expected to provide cheap and fresh fruits and vegetables. Grocery stores, on the other hand, are either unwilling or unable to offer produce at prices low enough for low-income individuals to afford it in these food deserts. Supermarkets, thus, appear to be the implied solution to this problem. If a supermarket exists, then it's not a food desert.

The First Lady came to San Diego in April 2010 as part of the Let's Move kick-off promotion tour. The campaign chose to visit the neighborhood of City Heights, a low-income community in the eastern area of the city with a diverse population of immigrants and refugees from around the globe. In visiting a marginalized neighborhood to create awareness of the issue of food deserts, the campaign chose to visit a community that ironically does not lack access to healthy food. Although this

large neighborhood contained only one chain supermarket, community organizations had already begun many food programs that helped make healthy food more accessible and affordable. A recently established neighborhood farmers market created a system allowing Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) participants to use their benefits to buy produce at the market's vendors. Also, the local office of the International Rescue Committee broke ground on the New Roots Community Farm, a community garden to be used by residents for growing their own supply of fruits and vegetables. An attempt to get a spot in the fully-occupied community garden or a trip to the Saturday farmers market to see the large crowds of women loading their shopping bags with brightly-colored vegetables illustrate that community members were already taking advantage of these new avenues for obtaining fresh fruits and vegetables.

In addition to these community programs, the streets of City Heights also suggest that this neighborhood's retail environment is not devoid of healthy food and produce. Traveling down El Cajon Boulevard and University Avenue between Interstate 805 and Euclid Avenue, small and medium-sized stores line the streets, many of which offer selections of produce for the diverse groups of immigrants and refugees that live in the neighborhood. Stores such as Pancho Villa, North Park Produce, and Viet Dong Supermarket promote the sale of ingredients from the Caribbean, Mexico, China, the Philippines, Vietnam, and the Middle East, suggesting that small grocers can capture sufficient demand to support the sale of the fruits and vegetables that make up these international cuisines. However, the federal government's characterization of non-supermarkets as unable to offer affordable produce denies the existence of such smaller retail outlets in City Heights, which do take steps to provide healthy food at prices

affordable for community residents. This thesis explores the retail environment in two distinct but predominantly-Mexican neighborhoods in San Diego, to see if independent stores in these more uniform ethnic communities can also find sufficient demand for affordable produce.

My experience living in Chicago suggests that ethnically Mexican and Latino neighborhoods also do not fit the image of a "food desert" promoted by the Let's Move campaign. Less than one year after I moved to a Latino neighborhood on the northwest side of the city, the large chain supermarket less than three blocks from my apartment closed down, presumably because neighborhood residents had avoided the less-than-appealing shopping environment within the store. The over-priced produce seemed to be perpetually on the verge of rotting, the shelves were always half-empty, and the few employees were always disgruntled, despite being unionized. The closure of this supermarket meant that no chain supermarket remained within the neighborhood boundaries, let alone within walking distance of my apartment. I quickly came to discover and rely on the plethora of independent Mexican grocers in the neighborhood, some with buildings as small as a corner store and others almost as large as the supermarket that had fled the community. The produce at these Mexican grocers was of higher quality, and it, along with other items like beans, tortillas, and cheese, was much less expensive than at any mainstream supermarket in the city.

I noticed a similar business environment in the predominantly-Mexican neighborhoods where I worked on the south side of the city. Among the streets lined with smaller specialized stores like panaderías, tortillerías, and carnicerías, larger independent and local chain grocery stores were scattered throughout these

communities, displaying tall stacks of brightly-colored fruits and vegetables that begged to be incorporated into jugos, salsas, tacos, enchiladas, moles, and tostadas. Conversations in Spanish filled the air inside these markets as individuals and families of all sizes milled around, stopping to fill their cart with avocados, a dozen types of dried chiles, some cuts of beef, or a stack of freshly-made tortillas. Produce vendors with trucks of varying sizes (and ages) could often be found on the street corners in areas without—and sometimes with—these grocers, through the sweltering heat of the summer and the sub-freezing winds of winter. There seemed to be a demand for this produce in the city and a great number of independent entrepreneurs felt motivated to satisfy these consumers.

These Chicago neighborhoods, such as Pilsen, La Villita, and Albany Park on the north side, illustrate how the past century of immigration from Mexico to the United States has increasingly brought areas within the United States under the umbrella of Latin American Studies. Because of the shared border, economies, and histories between these two countries, people of Mexican origin and heritage make up an ever-increasing percentage of the population in the United States. According to the 2010 Census, Hispanics grew the fastest of all demographic groups (except for Asians) in the ten years since 2000, accounting for more than 50 million people and representing more than 16 percent of the population (Pew Hispanic Center 2011). The percentage of immigrants from Mexico has grown more than any other nationality since 1970, constituting 30 percent of the foreign-born U.S. population (Jimenez 2008). Mexican immigrants and their children also form more than 65 percent of the Hispanic demographic in the United States, with more than 31 million individuals claiming

Mexican origin in 2009 (Pew Hispanic Center 2011). The increasing growth and geographical dispersal of *mexicanos* within the United States indicates that the cultural influences that immigrants bring from Mexico will increase in visibility among U.S. communities located beyond the border shared by these two countries.

Of course, major assimilation scholars, such as Douglas Massey, Roger Waldinger, Frank Bean, Rubén Rumbaut, and those at the Pew Hispanic Center have not overlooked this trend. The study of Mexican immigrant assimilation has focused on spatial integration (c.f. Massey; Massey and Denton; Waldinger, 1989), educational attainment (Portes and Rumbaut 2001), and political and economic integration (Bean, Brown and Rumbaut, 2004) with mixed conclusions on the assimilative progress of Mexican Americans. Some have declared that generations of Mexican Americans have become sufficiently American, arguing that such emphasis on assimilation to European whiteness devalues all other cultures. Others worry that their incorporation is slower than previous European immigrant groups. While spatial integration or educational attainment can indicate the degree to which an individual or group has taken on membership in U.S. society, none of these factors are as repetitive and rooted in one's own identity as the daily act of eating. The relationship that bodies form with the diet they consume creates profound meaning around the food that an individual chooses to purchase and eat. However, the dietary acculturation among Mexican immigrants and their children has yet to be fully explored, neither in the types of food they demand nor the types of businesses that try to satisfy this demand. Due to the general low-income status of Mexican and other Latino immigrants, studies suggest that a large percentage could be living in these marginalized areas often referred to as food deserts. However,

similar to immigrant neighborhoods like City Heights, few observers or community residents would characterize these Mexican neighborhoods in Chicago as lacking in healthy food, despite falling into the federal government's definition of lacking a supermarket. The plethora of stores offering very large and visible displays of fresh produce does provide residents of these immigrant neighborhoods with the fruits and vegetables (along with other staples) that are consumed as part of Mexican cuisine.

I was surprised to find few-to-no descriptions of these immigrant neighborhoods among the extensive academic literature concerning the connection between neighborhood food environment (i.e. the number and types of stores within a neighborhood) and health issues such as diabetes and obesity. In recent decades, concern has emerged over the growing rates of obesity and health problems that have been associated with a larger-than-normal body size—namely diabetes and heart disease. Study after study references reports that low-income individuals (mostly blacks and Latinos) have greater percentages of such health problems compared to higher income brackets. The public health narrative, represented in Morland et al. (2006), increasingly asserts that the cause of these problems comes from a lack of healthy food sold by stores in the low-income neighborhoods where these individuals seem to live. In addition to the label of "food desert," depictions abound of the low-income urban neighborhood that contains no businesses other than fast food chains, convenience stores, and the occasional small grocer with unaffordable produce, a concept that is never defined.

This emphasis on the existence of a supermarket within a neighborhood invites questions about what qualifies as a supermarket and whom they serve. While the North

American Industry Classification System (NAICS) does not distinguish between supermarkets and grocery stores, supermarkets are generally accepted as larger stores that are part of a national chain with multiple locations. The economic benefit of a chain supermarket is that a company with a high volume of sales can deal directly with suppliers and control much of the supply chain. This would allow the company to minimize operating costs and provide food at lower prices to customers. However, the downside of these large stores is the disproportionate control over the food retail industry by a limited number of large companies. According to *Supermarket News*, a weekly trade magazine for the food distribution industry, 71 retailers across the country had at least one billion dollars in sales in 2010; none of which had a notable ethnic specialization. Conversely, many smaller chain grocers that serve specific ethnic groups, such as Cermak Produce in Chicago or Northgate Market in Southern California, are discounted from this supermarket definition by the food industry and researchers because their annual sales fail to reach the profit levels of these larger corporations.

Large supermarket chains generally do not acknowledge ethnic communities which limits opportunities for purchasing affordable, culturally-appropriate food in many areas of the country. Walking under the bright florescent lights of a Vons, Albertsons, or Ralphs in San Diego, assumptions about the ethnicity and class of the store's clientele become apparent in the products lining the shelves. Produce sections often display large and cheap amounts of fruits and vegetables typically associated with an American diet: apples, bananas, grapes, bagged lettuce and spinach, potatoes, onions, and tomatoes. Meanwhile, produce associated with "ethnic" cuisines, such as peppers,

chiles, avocados, jicama, mangos, papaya, and choi are either stocked in small amounts and sold at high prices or are otherwise non-existent. Regardless of the size of produce sections in these supermarkets, shelves stocked with processed foods such as chips, sodas, cereals, candy, boxed pasta entrees and frozen microwave dinners dominate the interior of the store, taking up more than half of the floor space. If one is lucky, ethnic-specific products like soy sauce, curries, salsas, tortillas, and rice will occupy one aisle of this interior, but generally take up only a few feet of shelf space. Many times, these items labeled as "ethnic" are not affordable for members of the actual ethnic groups. Frequently these items are sold at a premium because the supermarket expects its clientele to view these products as "specialty" items to be purchased on infrequent and special occasions. The result is that individuals maintaining a diet with these "ethnic" items cannot afford to prepare their typical cuisine and will pursue cheaper alternatives, either within or outside of the supermarket.

At the same time, the lack of acceptance of ethnic grocers as supermarkets undervalues the retail options that do exist in low-income immigrant neighborhoods. Referring back to the characterization of grocery stores by the Let's Move campaign, a business classified as a grocery store (and especially a convenience store) tends to provide either no produce, or very expensive produce. This assumption stems from the type of food stocked by the stereotypical small store. Upon walking into a corner store or liquor store, a customer often encounters dimly lit, dirty aisles filled with packages of processed foods such as chips, crackers and candy, or cans and boxes of overpriced dry goods. Coolers with shelves upon shelves of soda, water, and alcohol line the walls around the room. Sometimes the store will dedicate a small, hidden, refrigerated space

at the back of the room to milk, cheese and, in rare cases, a few fruits and vegetables. The shelves behind the cash register often prominently display a plethora of cigarettes and bottles of hard liquor. Ironically, the products sold in small neighborhood stores are also found at supermarkets in even larger quantities. However, supermarkets do not suffer from the anti-healthy social stigma of convenience stores because their large size allows them to dedicate more space to fresh produce, meat, and dairy—items more-frequently associated with a healthy lifestyle. Disqualifying smaller, ethnic supermarket chains from this "healthy" category of supermarkets creates the impression that the stores in these low-income ethnic neighborhoods do not offer produce for sale, obscuring the large amounts of healthy food that could possibly, and generally tend to exist.

Additionally, the definition of a "food desert" is far from simple or universally accepted. While some areas could be classified as food deserts based on their physical characteristics, a lack of access to healthy food can also stem from social circumstances as well. Shaw (2006) complicates the definition of a food desert by expanding this criteria beyond the mere presence or absence of a neighborhood supermarket and by considering the particular experiences of individuals. She defines three types of food deserts, emphasizing distinct factors that impede certain individuals from obtaining fresh food. First, food deserts can result from a lack of physical access to healthy food, whether due to an absence of stores or because significant physical boundaries such as large roads, freeways or canyons, prevent travel to food outlets. A second type of food desert forms from an inability to pay for transportation to the store or to afford the supposed higher prices of fresh produce. Finally, a third, intangible food desert forms

from certain personal or cultural attitudes toward food that prevent individuals from accessing healthy food. This includes a lack of knowledge of how to prepare the healthier foods that are otherwise available to the individual (especially in the case of immigrants adjusting to the food of a new region) or a lack of time or resources to prepare such foods. In the case of low-income and immigrant neighborhoods, a reluctance to shop at a store because of a lack of culturally-appropriate or familiar foods, a fear of neighborhood crime, or cultural constraints on venturing out alone would also fall into this category of attitudes that create food deserts.

While it is important to take into consideration all of the physical, financial and attitudinal factors limiting access to healthy food, this thesis contests the academic literature that fails almost entirely to acknowledge the unique food environment of these predominantly-immigrant or predominantly-*mexicano* communities. These neighborhoods, such Pilsen or La Villita in Chicago, do not appear within these studies, possibly because the researchers have not visited the neighborhood and do not recognize the large ethnic supermarkets and the healthy food that they provide to the community. An alternative explanation for this lack of recognition is that these communities with healthy ethnic stores are obscured when, in a particular study, they are lumped together with other low-income neighborhoods that actually do lack large grocery stores. This project seeks to highlight how Mexican communities in San Diego, because of a constant and concentrated demand of Mexican cuisine, do contain stores where produce and other healthy food can be culturally appropriate and affordable.

Methodology

This thesis compares three San Diego neighborhoods that are classified as low-income according to 2000 Census data. San Diego provides two advantages for studying the relationship between ethnic neighborhood identity and retail access to healthy food. Despite San Diego's proximity to the Mexico-U.S. border, it has not been a traditional immigrant destination in the vein of Los Angeles or Chicago. Many families from Baja California settled in borderland towns in the first half of the twentieth century, such as San Diego, Lemon Grove, Calexico, Tijuana, Rosarito, and Mexicali (Alvarez 1987), but the bulk of Mexican migration to California before 1970 was directed toward agricultural areas in the Imperial and Central Valleys (Marcelli and Cornelius 2001). Many of the *mexicanos* within the city of San Diego, such as large communities from southern states like Oaxaca, have histories spanning only a generation or two, limiting the residents' exposure to American ideas of cuisine. At the same time, Barrio Logan, a small but significant section of the city, has had a history of Mexican settlement dating back to the late nineteenth century (Norris 1983). Comparing this neighborhood to newer immigrant communities, such as Linda Vista, might provide insight into the effect of second-, third-, and fourth-generation U.S. acculturation on the demand for food in an immigrant neighborhood.

Barrio Logan and Linda Vista are both recognized as *mexicano* neighborhoods, but the history and specific identity of these two neighborhoods differ greatly. Barrio Logan, along with Logan Heights opposite Interstate 5, is a much older neighborhood with a mix of immigrants from Mexico and multiple generations of Mexican-American residents. Mexican immigrants first began to settle there in large numbers in the 1910s

and 1920s due to the violence of the Revolution and subsequent economic turmoil in Mexico. In the 1940s and 1950s, Logan Heights, which at the time spanned the area of both Barrio Logan and Logan Heights, was the second largest Mexican American community in California, numbering more than 20,000 residents (Delgado 1998). However, in the late 1950s, the city changed the zoning for the area to allow the establishment of white-owned junkyards, which angered residents. The construction of Interstate 5 in 1963 and of the Coronado Bay Bridge in 1969 split the neighborhood, displacing many people from their homes and dividing the residents who remained.

In the early 1970s, the community's struggle to prevent the construction of a California Highway Patrol office and to establish the Chicano Park underneath the Coronado Bay Bridge reunited community residents and revived the spirit of the community. Because of the influence of the Chicano movement among the community organizers and muralists who helped establish the park, Barrio Logan has a strong Chicano identity. Although immigrants from Mexico continue to settle in this area, generations of *mexicanos* who were born in the United States but identify as Chicano make up a large portion of the community as well. As a result, Barrio Logan contains a mix of residents with diverse expressions of *mexicano* culture and varied degrees of incorporation into political, economic, and social life in the United States. While some community residents maintain strong ties to Mexico, others largely identify with Mexico symbolically through the Chicano culture, which is predominantly based in the United States.

In stark contrast, Linda Vista is a much newer neighborhood with a larger community of recently-arrived immigrants. The neighborhood was designed and built

by the federal government in 1941 as housing for factory workers. Restrictive covenants were prohibited, and so the community has a history of diversity, due to its status as one of the few areas where non-white, non-wealthy residents could live (Killory 1993). While the neighborhood today has a substantial community of Southeast Asians, more than 40 percent of the neighborhood's foreign-born residents are *mexicanos*, a large portion of this group coming from the state of Oaxaca. Informal conversations with community residents indicate that Oaxacans began to settle in the neighborhood during the 1980s and have continued to arrive through the present day. Many residents obtained residency through the amnesty provision in the 1986 Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA) and thus had access to legal avenues for bringing their families to Linda Vista. This legal status allows them to return to Oaxaca when visits are financially feasible, maintaining strong ties to hometowns and contemporary Mexican culture. As a result, the *mexicano* community in Linda Vista is very distinct from the community in Barrio Logan. Since the U.S.-born, second generation of Mexicans in Linda Vista is just entering early adulthood, cultural influences from Mexico may play a larger role than U.S. culture in guiding the decisions and preferences of community residents.

In order to illustrate the effect of a Mexican ethnic identity on community sources of food, it is necessary to compare these neighborhoods to a neighborhood lacking an immigrant identity. This comparison illustrates that the numerous suppliers of produce in Linda Vista and Barrio Logan are not merely just an effect of San Diego's location on the border with Mexico (which grows much of the seasonal produce sold in the United States) nor of San Diego County's large agricultural sector, of which the

production is either sold at farmers markets or exported (Sharma 2009). However, the history of California and of San Diego in particular makes it difficult to select a neighborhood in San Diego that is both low-income and without a large percentage of immigrants. The proximity of the city to the Mexico-U.S. border has attracted many immigrants from Mexico since the 1970s. In addition to drawing Latin American immigrants, California has also historically been a destination for immigrants from Asia, leading to numerous areas in the county with large Asian communities. In contrast, African Americans have historically settled in Los Angeles in higher numbers and have less frequently moved to San Diego[1] (Schragge 1994). Finally, San Diego has historically campaigned for the settlement of affluent migrants from within the United States (Davis 2003), resulting in a native white population that largely has an economic advantage over fellow non-white residents. Any native whites with low incomes seem either to be dispersed throughout the city or reside instead in the many suburbs on its north, east and south sides.

Taking these factors into consideration, the southeast side community of Lincoln Park (along with the eastern adjacent neighborhood of Valencia Park) appeared to be the most appropriate community to use as a comparison neighborhood that lacks a strong immigrant identity. The area has long been the heart of the black community in San Diego, a result of restrictive covenants in the 1940s and 1950s that forced non-white residents to live south of Market Street and east of downtown. Although neighborhood demographics have changed drastically in the past decade, with

[1] The African American population in San Diego jumped from 4,143 (2% of total) in 1940 to 13,136 in 1946 (only 3.6% of total population) (Shragge 1994).

increasing numbers of Latinos and Southeast Asians, the neighborhood still maintains its image as the African American area of the city. Because the community does not contain a significant number of stores catering to these immigrant groups, the Lincoln Park neighborhood will be used to represent the conditions of a typical low-income neighborhood that is described by academic literature as a food desert.

This thesis compares the three neighborhoods according to the following criteria: the number of stores offering produce for sale, the size and quality of the selection in each store, and the price of a sample of items in each neighborhood. Chapter Two outlines the literature on access to food in low-income neighborhoods and critiques the assumptions and justifications that these researchers use about supermarkets and smaller stores when claiming that low-income neighborhoods are devoid of affordable produce. Chapter Three details the number of neighborhood stores with produce selections and describes how the quantity and size of these selections varies with the identity of the neighborhood. To gather information about the stores in each neighborhood, I traveled on every street in the three neighborhoods to record the location of all food stores within each neighborhood's census tract boundaries (see Appendix A). Because the appearance of a store cannot consistently predict which stores do or do not stock fresh produce, I then visited and observed every retail outlet to determine whether produce was offered for sale. I also recorded the number of produce items in each selection and observed the quality of these items. Contrary to what is reflected in the literature, Linda Vista and Barrio Logan contain a high percentage of stores with large selections of produce, despite the fact that all but one of the stores are smaller, independent grocery stores and convenience stores.

Chapter Four conducts a price comparison of six produce items from a sample of stores in Linda Vista, Barrio Logan, and Lincoln Park to determine if, in fact, produce costs more at smaller grocery stores and convenience stores than at supermarkets. The difference in average prices for different types of stores, such as supermarkets, grocery stores and convenience stores, will illustrate how the economy of scale at a supermarket benefits supermarket consumers. However, this chapter actually shows that grocery stores do offer produce at prices similar to or lower than prices at the discount supermarket Food 4 Less. Finally, Chapters Four and Five include interviews with store managers at a sample of stores in both Barrio Logan and Linda Vista to understand how and why these small businesses are able to offer their produce at prices similar to a discount supermarket. Chapter Five explores the effect that Mexican ethnic identity and immigrant replenishment in a neighborhood have on why these stores establish themselves in these ethnic neighborhoods and what they decide to sell.

While an individual's daily diet includes other types of food beyond fruits and vegetables, this study focuses on the presence and cost of produce because it has become the focus of government and community health initiatives in recent years. In addition to the attention given to produce by the Let's Move campaign, the United States Department of Agriculture has released numerous studies in the last decade asserting that low-income consumers are buying smaller amounts of fruits and vegetables than those with a higher socioeconomic status.

In response to this articulated problem, community organizations and government redevelopment agencies have pushed for a variety of programs to increase the availability and consumption of fruit and vegetables. The Jacobs Center for

Neighborhood Innovation played a primary role in bringing the Food 4 Less to Lincoln Park in 2001 and a coalition of community groups worked with the Barrio Logan redevelopment agency to break ground on the Mercado del Barrio, which will include a Northgate Gonzalez Market.

Other groups have organized more grassroots, individual level programs, such as the People's Produce Project programs encouraging farmers markets and community gardens in Southeast San Diego and a recent community garden in Linda Vista established by the Bayside Community Center. Absent from these efforts in San Diego are plans to work with established grocery stores to ensure that produce is offered and at affordable prices. This thesis explores the economic feasibility of small stores offering produce to communities characterized by low incomes.

The issue surrounding the benefits or drawbacks of small grocery stores is important because it drives the debate surrounding Type-2 diabetes in the United States. Cowie et al. (2002) reported that the Latino population in the United States is twice as likely to suffer from Type-2 diabetes than non-Latino whites. Individuals on low incomes, which include many Latinos and immigrants, are also at a higher risk of developing this disease. This disease causes serious health complications, such as kidney failure and complications with the cardiovascular and nervous systems. This is a problem faced by many Latino and Latino immigrant communities in the United States.

However, while access to healthy food is one problem contributing to the prevalence of diabetes, supermarkets are not the answer to solving or avoiding this problem. Supermarkets drive smaller grocery stores out of business, either through buying out their competition through consolidation or through initial predatory low

pricing, eliminating the customer base of these other stores. This results in fewer local options for purchasing food and greater food insecurity for neighborhoods, not to mention longer and more arduous distances to travel in order to reach these supermarkets. Prioritizing the importance of price in the food access debate, and overlooking other factors such as quality, culture, and store-client relationships, removes the human aspect from what is a very universal and personal daily act.

The importance given to supermarkets also supports the colonization of these neighborhoods by large corporations, which have little incentive to foster connections with the community in the same way that small stores must cultivate relationships with customers in order to stay in business. As this thesis shows, store managers in these Mexican ethnic enclaves create relationships with their customers, and they emphasize that their customers identify what they want to buy, either through oral communication with store employees or through refusing to buy the products that they do not want or cannot afford to consume. Emphasis on the supermarket as the solution to obesity and diabetes ignores how consumer demands influence smaller independent stores and obscures the effect of human agency on the types of food available to a community.

Small grocers are worth examining because they are located at the intersection between the food distribution structure and neighborhood food culture/consumer demand. While the price of items is important in order to sustain a business in a low-income neighborhood, social factors also influence where people shop. The quality of produce can affect whether customers actually purchase these items. The location of an establishment can affect both the visibility of the store and the degree of difficulty that customers without automobiles have in accessing the store. The environment or

perceived safety of a street or neighborhood can deter or encourage shopping at a business—residents with a fear of crime or deportation will avoid shopping in environments that they perceive as risky. Finally, the relationship that a storeowner has with community residents or the ethnicity of owners or workers can sometimes determine whether or not a business continues to operate in the neighborhood.

These influences on consumer behavior are all perceived by storeowners and guide the actions they take in running their businesses. Tiendita del Barrio in Barrio Logan sells pre-conditioned avocados so that they uniformly ripen and are appealing to customers at the moment they arrive in the store. The grocery El Arbolito opened its doors in Logan Heights when the police station was constructed on 25th Street and Imperial Avenue, taking advantage of the improved security that the police could provide for the store and its clientele. The grocer also does not carry liquor, partly out of respect for the police, but also to encourage a family-friendly atmosphere. Finally, Lupe at Gabi's Produce in Linda Vista asserts that many of his customers have supported his businesses for years, since he opened his first stores in Linda Vista and nearby Clairemont Mesa.

Thus, this thesis argues that the academic and government literature paints an inaccurate picture of small and independent grocery stores in low-income neighborhoods, which are indeed able to offer culturally appropriate produce at low prices when a concentrated demand for produce exists in the neighborhood. The two ethnically-Mexican neighborhoods considered in this study have a greater number of stores with produce for sale than the stores in Lincoln Park, a low-income, non-immigrant San Diego neighborhood. Additionally, these small stores offer produce at

prices not significantly higher, and in some cases lower, than a discount supermarket. The presence of affordable produce in these ethnic neighborhood stores reflects a demand for produce from *mexicano* or Hispanic residents, who managers claim are the primary customers of these small businesses. These managers sell produce at low prices for a number of reasons. Neighborhood residents and customers demand produce in an effort to maintain culinary connections with Mexico, either because these customers have recently arrived from Mexico, or because, for long-term residents, eating fruits and vegetables typical of Mexican cuisine helps individuals maintain their *mexicano* identity, whether literal or symbolic. Thus, the ethnic identity of these neighborhoods provides low-income residents access to healthy food and also helps maintain ties to a collective *mexicanidad* amid a receiving environment that insists on assimilation to American ways of life.

The process of international migration, especially migration from Mexico to the United States, creates situations in which two cultures and ways of life collide in a battle over a migrant's, and a community's, identity. The history of the United States has long been one of demanding the rejection of "Old World" culture so that immigrants can assimilate to "American" ways of life. However, despite more than a century of migration from Mexico to the United States, expressions of *mexicanidad* still remain visible, not in the least through the prevalence of Mexican cuisine in most of the country. Sidney Mintz, in his essay "Food and Its Relationship to Concepts of Power," explores how control in the food supply can affect the culinary habits of migrants in a new culture and the internal meaning that migrants ascribe to food:

> Structural power shapes the field of action so as to render some kinds of behavior possible, while making others less possible or impossible. […] When this perspective is applied to the subject of food habits, it is easy to see how structural or tactical (organizational) power undergird the institutional frameworks that set the terms by which people get food, maintain or change their eating habits, and either perpetuate their eating arrangements and the associated meaning or build new systems, with new meanings, into these arrangements." (Mintz 1995, 11)

These small stores, through their relationships with customers and responsiveness to their culinary demands, represent one method through which Mexican immigrants and their children can control one aspect of the power structure, the maintenance of their ethnic identity in U.S. society, and the terms on which they acculturate to life in the United States.

2. Caught Between White Suburbs and Black Deserts

In the past decade, numerous public health studies have asserted that immigrants and their children, particularly immigrants from Mexico, suffer disproportionately from adverse medical conditions through the process of dietary acculturation. This process refers to the increased consumption of foods that are associated with European American "mainstream" cuisine, which include foods made of simple carbohydrates, refined sugars, and many types of fats (Pérez-Escamilla and Putnik 2007). Mazur, Marquis and Jensen (2003) & Winkleby et al. (1994) found that Hispanics who have spent fewer years in the United States tend to be less-acculturated to a U.S. diet and consume less fat and more dietary fiber than Hispanics who have a longer history of living in the United States. Akresh (2007) reported that Hispanic immigrants who have been in the United States longer tend to eat more foods that are part of this typical American diet, characterized as red meat, white bread, and limitless variations on the fried potato. Neuhouser et al. (2004) studied Mexican Americans in Washington State and reported that more-acculturated individuals ate fewer fruits and vegetables. The authors asserted that this dietary acculturation, which is experienced both by immigrants and their children, negatively affects the health of these individuals. Albarran et al. (2006) echoes Neuhouser et al., finding that Mexicans with Type-2 diabetes report having diets with higher-than-recommended levels of total and saturated fat and cholesterol and lower-than-recommended levels of soluble fiber.

Underscoring these findings is a report by Cowie et al. (2002) that the Latino population in the United States is twice as likely to suffer from Type-2 diabetes than non-Latino whites. Ironically, according to the aforementioned studies, Latinos develop

Type-2 diabetes—and other health problems like heart disease and obesity—from eating the diet of mainstream, white American society. Researchers fail to address this irony and do not seriously discuss the socioeconomic factors other than diet that might contribute to these health disparities, including an absence of affordable health care or public recreation space in Latino communities. Instead, poor diet is blamed for health problems, and most studies point to the built environment where Latinos live as the reason for their unhealthy diets. A lack of access to fresh food in a neighborhood has been implicated in many reports on the health problems among immigrants and Latinos in the United States. Rundle et al. (2009) found that the number of healthy food outlets in New York City neighborhoods is inversely associated with body size in a particular neighborhood. In other words, by equating body size with health, Rundle et al. can argue that the mere presence of healthy food options in a neighborhood correlates with a healthier population of residents[1].

This chapter critiques the academic literature discussing how the built environment of an urban low-income neighborhood leads to problematic, unhealthy bodies. This narrative focuses primarily on what low-income neighborhoods lack: chain supermarkets and the benefits that they represent. The benefits of these supermarkets are primarily efficiency (in the ever-increasing selection of goods that they offer), affordability (in their seemingly-low prices), and whiteness (in their association with wealthy suburbs and mainstream Anglo-American culture). However, this portrayal of low-income neighborhoods as isolated from healthy food is just one piece of a larger

[1] See Guthman and DuPuis (2006) for a critique of health narratives that frequently equate thinness with healthiness.

framework that devalues communities of color as black ghettos devoid of value, culture, and agency.

Urban Neighborhoods as "Black Holes"[2]

Much academic literature argues that the decreased consumption of healthy food among Latinos stems from the fact that Latinos and immigrants take up residence in urban areas with an overall lower socioeconomic status. Research on the settlement of immigrants in the United States during the last half of the twentieth century report that Latin American immigrants and their children primarily took up residence in urban neighborhoods. Massey (2001) argues that because Latinos have high rates of in-migration to the urban core and lower rates of socioeconomic mobility, this group tends to have slower rates of spatial integration with other ethnic groups and tends to live in areas of predominately low socioeconomic status. This pronounced segregation of Hispanics within urban areas resulted from a large influx of Hispanic migrants into large cities in the 1970s along with a simultaneous decrease in white residents within these cities, as they moved in large numbers to suburban homes (Massey and Denton, 1987). Massey and Denton (1989) also argue that, upon settling in the United States, Latinos have a high degree of centralization, or settlement in and around the center of an urban area (384). This trend of urban settlement has continued into the twenty-first century. The Pew Hispanic Center reports that, since 2000, the Latino population (made up of immigrants and the native-born) has grown rapidly in metropolitan areas in the

[2] I use this term to refer to the depiction of low-income urban neighborhoods as empty areas where blacks reside, constructed as lacking the values of mainstream white American culture. This follows the use of blackness not only as a signifier of race but also of lacking in social, cultural, and economic value (Paperson 2010).

West and Northeast, with 94 percent of the fastest growth occurring in metropolitan counties (Fry 2008, ii).

These enclaves, also referred to as ghettos, are depicted as old, poor and dangerous urban areas by sociologists and demographers who study integration in the United States. Massey (2001) explains that:

> […] as racial segregation increases, decreasing incomes, increasing inequality, increasing class segregation, and increasing immigration are more strongly translated into geographic isolation of the poor. Thus these structural trends produce high and increasing concentrations of poverty for highly segregated groups, but low and falling concentrations of poverty among non-segregated groups. (421-422)

Because these areas are defined by their separation from suburbs (which are apparently not segregated), isolation from economic investment, or physical confinement to older communities, and researchers such as Douglas Massey and Nancy Denton correlate all of the problems in these enclaves with their physical, social and economic segregation from middle-class American society (Paperson 2010). Residents of ghettos live among high rates of crime, have limited educational attainment and thus low incomes, resulting in a lack of economic support for local businesses. The "isolation" of these typically urban ghettos closes off individuals within these poor enclaves and "prevents" them from integrating into the more prosperous American society on the outside.

Denton and Massey (1988) argue that this segregation of low-income immigrants (and other non-whites) within urban ghettos intensifies when subsequent generations of immigrant families improve in their socioeconomic status and move to suburban areas. They point out that Hispanics who moved to suburban areas in the 1970s had a higher socioeconomic status and were less likely to be immigrants. When

wealthier, U.S.-born Latinos settle in the suburbs, they leave behind others—generally immigrants, but also native-born Latinos and blacks—who are depicted as lacking the economic and social resources to move to more integrated communities. Denton and Massey (1988) use suburbs and whiteness as symbols of integration into American society, defining more integrated areas as suburbs with mostly white residents. Because ghettos and enclaves are places defined by segregation and inequality, these suburbs, as sites of integration, represent a promise of equality for those who are able to reach these territories.

As U.S.-born generations of immigrants improve in socioeconomic status and education levels, they leave their poorer enclaves and become more spatially integrated into what are considered to be more affluent, predominantly white neighborhoods. In this narrative of integration and equality, upon "escaping" to the suburbs, Latinos and other immigrants become members of American society and no longer experience problems associated with the poverty of urban enclaves. Suburbs thus represent the opposite of ghettos spatially, socially, and economically. Social problems do not exist in these communities; residents have high educational attainment, high-skilled jobs, upper-middle class incomes, unbroken families, and a lack of poverty-related crime (Massey 2001).

While Massey (2001) does admit that immigration correlates with segregated enclaves, he erases the presence of Latinos and Asians within these enclaves by emphasizing that blacks make up the majority of residents in segregated urban areas. He states that, "Because more than 70 percent of urban Blacks are highly segregated but 90 percent of all other groups are not, the population of poor experiencing high

concentrations of poverty is overwhelmingly Black" (Massey 2001, 422). Later, he asserts that the economic deprivation of these areas create problematic residents, broadly generalizing that "the concentration of male joblessness affects social behavior more than cognitive development, particularly among Blacks" (423). This erases Latinos and other immigrant communities from urban "black holes," which lack economic, cultural or social value, and mirrors the erasure of these non-black and non-white groups from narratives about access to food in low-income urban neighborhoods. This discourse defines areas lacking fresh food as "food deserts" and, through a series of assumptions, frames this lack of fresh food as a problem only for black residents who populate these economically depressed and isolated urban neighborhoods.

While the "food desert" designation does at times correspond to a real absence of stores in low-income neighborhoods (Raja, Ma, and Yadav, 2008), analyses of food retail options in low-income neighborhoods frequently proclaim that a neighborhood lacks healthy food simply because it lacks a supermarket or contains a greater number of convenience stores. The second part of this chapter discusses the great importance attached to supermarkets in academic studies on food accessibility. The history of supermarket locations within only affluent neighborhoods leads to characterizations of affluent neighborhoods as the ideal food environment and the designation of all low-income neighborhoods food deserts. This rich-poor neighborhood dichotomy leads to the assumption that all non-white low-income neighborhoods lack options for healthy food, which obscures the possible existence of affordable produce in smaller non-chain stores in low-income neighborhoods.

The Supermarket Solution

In food access narratives, the suburbs, represented by the supermarket, are promoted as the ideal environment for healthy (i.e. white and thin) bodies (Guthman and DuPuis 2006). This stems from the fact that supermarkets (i.e. national chain grocers) have primarily established themselves in affluent, white and mostly suburban neighborhoods during the last fifty years. Chung and Meyers (1999) compare the types of stores and food prices across suburban and inner-city areas in the Minnesota Twin Cities and found that only 22 percent of supermarket chain corporations existed in the inner-city areas. Conversely, almost half of the non-chain companies had locations within the inner cities, suggesting that chain stores seem to prefer the suburbs to cities. Among individual stores, the vast majority of chain supermarkets (89 percent) placed themselves in areas with poverty rates of less than 10 percent. The findings of this study demonstrate that, overall, supermarket chains avoid locating in non-affluent neighborhoods. This preference for affluent neighborhoods by supermarket chains results from the perception that economic activity in these communities would lead to higher profit margins while establishments in denser, less stable, lower-income urban communities would be financially riskier.

Eisenhauer (2001) discusses the historical factors that brought about the movement of supermarkets from urban areas to outlying suburban areas in the second half of the twentieth century. This exodus of supermarkets from cities indirectly and directly influenced the decline of independent food stores in urban communities. As middle-class families left cities for the suburbs after World War II, supermarkets followed these families, building shopping centers outside of the cities to serve these

financially secure households. The size of these stores grew physically throughout the 1950s with the construction of larger and larger stores, and also in the 1980s with the increased market share gained through leveraged buy-outs (127). Grocery stores began to disappear from urban areas as supermarket chains began to disinvest from urban neighborhoods in the 1980s and into the present. This disinvestment and 'price wars' between supermarket corporations during the 1970s and 1980s drove the majority of remaining urban independent stores out of business, due to a loss of clientele to larger stores[3]. Eisenhauer's study cites interviews with industry representatives, who point to higher costs of land and labor, low profit margins and increased theft as reasons for avoiding new or continued investment in urban areas (128).

Arguments justifying the superiority of chain supermarkets focus on one of two main "benefits" that this type of business provides: 1) these stores occupy larger buildings that can provide a larger selection of products and, 2) as a result, can sell these products at lower prices. Barratt (1997) shows this in a hypothetical weekly shopping trip for residents of Derbyshire, in which a representative customer paid more at a small store for an average diet of 52 food items than at a supermarket. These higher prices at the small stores stemmed from the fact that they were less likely to have sales, to offer economies of scale in larger sizes of products, or to be able to offer a cheaper generic store brand. Some goods in the study, such as whole wheat bread, yogurt, peanuts, and certain fresh vegetables, were at least twice as expensive on average at small stores than in supermarkets (65).

[3] Even this explanation by Eisenhauer (2001), which critiques the historical practices of supermarket chains, perpetuates the narrative that no independent stores remain to serve urban neighborhoods today.

MacDonald and Nelson (1991) examine randomly selected stores in ten metropolitan areas and calculate that stores in suburban locations charge prices that are 4% lower on average than stores in urban, central city areas. The study cites a number of factors for these higher prices, including the fact that more national chains had locations in the suburbs and more independent stores were located in central cities. The authors also strongly emphasized that the stores in the sample cities were 40% smaller than in corresponding suburbs, arguing that this factor increases the operating costs of a small store in the city. They point out that insurance premiums tend to be higher in central city areas because of the perception that these neighborhoods have higher rates of crime. Also, a reduced market share, based on the belief that residents in central city areas are poor and therefore lack mobility, might also compel smaller stores to raise prices. They also offer a narrower range of items and services, often eliminating bakeries, delicatessens, and meat counters. The researchers claim that a reduction in services or products does not translate into savings for customers, pointing to the small store prices in their study, which tended to be higher than at integrated (chain) supermarkets, regardless of location (356). However, no store managers were interviewed to confirm that these factors actually lead to increased prices. The only evidence offered for any of these suppositions is a regression model indicating that an increase of households without a car in a neighborhood correlates with an increase in store prices in this neighborhood (354).

In a subsequent attempt to determine if consumers in low-income, urban areas pay more for food, Chung and Meyers (1999) also posit that higher food prices result from an absence of chain supermarkets in low-income communities. They argue that the

type of stores in which one shops affects both the food that residents purchase and the amount of money that they spend on those purchases. Their study compares the prices of a "typical" diet (eaten by a supposedly homogeneous group of individuals and households) at a sample of stores in the Minneapolis-St. Paul metropolitan area. On average, this hypothetical consumer at a chain store would pay $16.62 less than if buying the same items at non-chain stores (Chung and Meyers 1999: 290). This disparity in prices was especially the case for dry goods such as flour and oatmeal, which were 10 to 40 percent less expensive than in non-chain stores.

Supermarkets Equal Healthy Consumers

Public health studies argue for the superiority of supermarkets by positing that people who live near supermarkets are healthier than people who live near smaller businesses like grocery and convenience stores. Morland, Diez Roux, and Wing (2006) study individuals in Mississippi, Maryland, Minnesota, and North Carolina and associate the presence of a supermarket in a census tract with a lower prevalence of obesity and hypertension among study participants (335). The same analysis also showed that any additional presence of grocery stores or convenience stores in a neighborhood was positively associated with obesity, hypertension, and diabetes for a study participant. Finally, the greatest increase in obesity in the study was found among individuals who lived in areas with no supermarkets and with only grocery stores and/or convenience stores (336). Basing their conclusions on the theory that "convenience is an important predictor for food habits," these authors promote the assumption that "individuals living in areas with few food choices other than convenience stores *may be*

more likely to adopt an energy-dense diet" (334, emphasis added). However, these studies fail to determine where residents purchase their food, or state what they actually eat, proclaiming supermarkets to be a source of health simply because the individuals who live near them are healthier.

The narrative that presents supermarkets as the solution to health problems and poor food access in urban ghettos also points to the stereotypically unhealthy environment in poor areas that have stores other than supermarkets. Morland et al. (2002) found that wealthier neighborhoods in Mississippi, North Carolina, Maryland and Minnesota contain three times fewer places to purchase or consume alcoholic beverages than poorer neighborhoods, implying that these wealthier neighborhood residents buy less alcohol and therefore are healthier as a result. By relying on the moral association of liquor with unhealthiness and idleness, Morland et al. can use this statistic to conclude that wealthy neighborhoods are superior to poor communities both in health and in morality.

Chung and Meyers (1999) declare that the healthiness of affluent neighborhoods stems from the fact that supermarkets offer more items and therefore make it easier to eat healthy. In a sample of 526 stores in the Twin Cities, every item from a list of forty-nine "common" items (defined by the researchers) was less available at inner-city stores than in suburban stores. They point out that items such as fresh fruit and vegetables were up to 50 percent less available in inner city stores than in the suburbs, meaning that a store in the suburbs is more likely to have fresh produce than a store in the city (288-289). Combining this finding with claims that supermarkets have lower prices than smaller stores, Chung and Meyers suggest that residents who shop at small stores in

low-income urban areas pay more not only in higher prices, but also through difficulty in obtaining healthy food:

> The problem is the location of chains and not poverty alone. […] More significant is that people who shop in nonchain stores pay an even larger premium—whether they shop in poor or affluent areas. Data show the premium for shopping at convenience stores and/or nonchain grocery stores exceeds the premium for shopping in poor areas. However, the poor are more likely to shop in nonchain stores. […] [W]ealthier shoppers tend to have a high value of time, purchase large-size items, and make less frequent trips to the store. These shoppers are likely to have a car and can easily transport large packages from chain stores if there is any volume discount or at least any price advantage. People who must walk to the store, often low-income shoppers, are limited by the distance they can travel and by the amount that they can carry. (Chung and Meyers 1999, 292)

The neoliberal values of increased growth, efficiency, and cost cutting resonate throughout Chung and Meyer's praise of supermarkets and devaluation of small stores. Residents of urban neighborhoods are at a disadvantage because they pay increased prices for the fewer options at the inefficient independent, non-chain stores in their neighborhood. Because supermarkets are a product of neoliberal economic policies, they have an inherent advantage over smaller stores, which disregards the emphasis that these independent stores may place on the cultural or social values of their customers that do not relate to size, efficiency, or cost.

Low-income Neighborhoods as Black Holes with Unhealthy Food

Poor neighborhoods have more small stores, which MacDonald and Nelson (1991) equal to a lot of unhealthy food. However, in addition to portraying all low-income neighborhoods as void of healthy food, this research also describes all non-white neighborhoods (regardless of socioeconomic status) as lacking sources of healthy

food. This results from historical influences that affect the residential patterns of groups classified as non-white in the United States and also stems from the ambiguous classification of groups that do not automatically fit in to the black-white binary of social science research. Not only do these studies depict non-white individuals as helplessly deprived of healthy food, but these researchers also fail to consider alternative food environments within many of these urban neighborhoods.

Because of the history of race- and poverty-based segregation in the United States, comparisons of disparities in access to healthy food between wealthy and poor neighborhoods lead to comparisons between white neighborhoods and black neighborhoods. This leads to broad characterizations, such as those stating that four times as many supermarkets are located in white neighborhoods than black neighborhoods, and that bars and taverns are less common in white neighborhoods than in predominantly black neighborhoods (Morland et al. 2002). Zenk et al. (2005) claim that this lack of supermarket might correlate directly with a neighborhood's blackness, as they found that chain supermarkets in Detroit are located farther away from low-income African American neighborhoods than low-income white neighborhoods.

This use of whiteness as a proxy for affluence (and healthiness) and blackness to represent poverty is not without some historical and statistical justification. Discriminatory lending practices and federal housing policies, restrictive covenants and violence throughout the twentieth century have encouraged and reinforced residential segregation of whites and black, usually confining African Americans to older, less desirable neighborhoods while whites moved to the suburbs (Zenk et al. 2005, 661). By the end of the twentieth century, African Americans and Hispanics had the highest rates

of poverty and were more likely than whites to live in urban areas (Eisenhauer, 2001:126). Morland et al. (2002) calculated that the proportion of black residents in a neighborhood increases as the wealth of the neighborhood decreases. Another publication by Morland, Diez Roux, and Wing (2006) uses a lack of personal transportation as a proxy for poverty, claiming that it is more common not to own an automobile within predominantly-black census tracts (30% of households in the study), while more than 90 percent of households in white neighborhoods in the study did own a personal vehicle (337).

While studying the effects of segregation has its merits, this comparison between white and black communities becomes problematic when the conclusions of these studies are based on generalizations. Many researchers and their comparisons fail to examine the conditions of particular neighborhoods used in their studies, instead pointing to broad historical trends in the residential patterns of poor blacks to make untested conclusions about stores in poor, black neighborhoods:

> The initial evidence suggests that observed differences in mean prices between poor neighborhoods and other locations reflect the influence of stronger price difference between central city and suburban locations. *The city-suburb price gap in turn affects poor households differentially by race*, because poor white households are typically spread throughout metropolitan areas, while *poor black households have historically been concentrated in central cities*. (MacDonald and Nelson, 1991: 348, emphasis added)

The results of MacDonald and Nelson's study do not show statistically with data that, indeed, black households in poor neighborhoods pay more for food. However, the researchers seem to conclude that blacks do not usually live in the suburbs, thus they pay more for food solely because they live in urban areas, which usually have small

convenience stores with high prices and unhealthy selections. Therefore, because the plethora of convenience stores causes poor, black neighborhoods to have a lot of health problems, supermarkets are needed to remedy this problem.

This white/affluent-black/poor comparison stems from the methodologies and samples used by researchers. In the above study, MacDonald and Nelson (1991) analyze supermarkets in ten U.S. cities, nine of which are located east of the Rocky Mountains. Only in Los Angeles did "non-white" immigrant groups settle in large numbers before 1965. Also, many of the sample cities—especially Atlanta, Detroit, Los Angeles, and Philadelphia—have a history of implicit, if not overt, residential segregation between whites and blacks, which eliminates examination of any truly integrated areas. In the same way that Latinos are erased from depictions of urban ghettos by demographers and sociologists, Latinos and other non-white/non-black groups are erased from the debate over food access in low-income communities. The narratives in this debate are created by disregarding the experiences of non-white and non-black individuals in academic studies, or by combining the statistics for all non-white neighborhoods into the same category when reporting findings.

Morland, Diez Roux, and Wing (2006) conduct their study among participants who live in Mississippi, North Carolina, Maryland and Minnesota, all areas in which Latinos and Asians have only recently settled (Lichter et al. 2010, 219). The article explains that the researchers excluded racial and ethnic groups that were not black or white due to the limited numbers of participants from these other groups, which effectively ignores the experiences of these individuals (334). Raja, Ma, and Yadav (2008) also establish a black-white dichotomy in their comparison of neighborhoods in

Erie County, New York. They report that predominantly black neighborhoods in their study had fewer grocery stores compared to white neighborhoods. Predominantly black neighborhoods also contained more convenience stores than white neighborhoods, confirming that whites are better off in this area of the country as well.

Two studies in New York do include Latino neighborhoods, but the researchers group them with so-called black neighborhoods to compare them only to affluent, white neighborhoods. In a study of all neighborhoods in New York City, Rundle et al. (2009) calculated that affluent, predominantly white areas in New York City had a higher density of healthy food outlets, such as supermarkets and health food stores. The authors explain that predominantly black or Latino neighborhoods in northern Manhattan and the South Bronx had fewer types of these healthy-food outlets, presumably because these areas are poorer and less dense.

The other study by Horowitz et al. (2004) compared stores in two specific neighborhoods in New York City: East Harlem (with lower-income black and Latino residents) and the Upper East Side (with mostly affluent, white residents). The authors found that stores on Upper East Side more frequently offered healthier options on average than stores in East Harlem, regardless of size, and despite the fact that East Harlem has more stores (1551). These authors, like the authors of the previously-mentioned studies, fail to examine closely how the types of food offered in stores varies *within* this group labeled "low-income" and "non-white." This method could result from the possibility that the "non-white" group was in fact mostly "black," as many Latino communities such as Puerto Ricans, Dominicans, and other groups from the Caribbean tend more often to identify as black. However, this lack of discussion about Latino

neighborhoods could also stem from the fact that grassroots food strategies utilized by Latinos and other immigrants complicate the overall narrative of non-white communities that are deserted from healthy food.

A study by Short, Guthman, and Raskin (2007) takes into consideration many of these critiques. The authors examined three low-income neighborhoods in the San Francisco Bay Area to determine whether small stores (grocery stores and convenience stores) can provide healthy food to these neighborhoods. Because of the history of Spanish-speaking Latin American groups within California, the study was able to eliminate the white, affluent reference category from their comparison. While one of the neighborhoods was predominantly African American, another had both African American and Latino residents, and a third neighborhood was predominantly Latino. They found that the predominantly-Latino neighborhood had considerably more retail outlets with produce and lower prices than the predominantly African American neighborhood (357-358). The study also compared prices for a list of food items at the smaller grocery stores to those of chain stores in adjacent neighborhoods and found that stores in the Latino neighborhoods were more affordable than the chain supermarkets (359).

This thesis aims to continue Short, Guthman, and Raskin's problematization of this literature by challenging negative assumptions about small stores and bringing to light some of the effective food strategies used by poor communities of color. Rather than subscribe to policies that promote the superiority of chain supermarkets, and therefore the colonization of these black, Latino, or Asian "holes" by large corporations, the following chapters take a closer look at the importance of independent grocery

stores and convenience stores in three low-income communities of color in San Diego. These neighborhoods contain groups with cultural value and the agency to create and support their own sources of healthy food. While small grocers and convenience stores dominate the landscape of these neighborhoods, the interiors of these grocery stores and convenience stores reveal large amounts of inexpensive fresh fruits and vegetables. This study argues that segregation from affluent, white communities does not always equal isolation from healthy food. In the case of the *mexicano* communities of Barrio Logan and Linda Vista, this cultural segregation may be their saving grace.

3. Small Stores, Large Selection

On March 15, 2011, a community forum took place to discuss the possibility of bringing a Target or Wal-Mart to the Southeast side neighborhood of Lincoln Park. Despite the presence one major supermarket in the neighborhood, members of the community, including many non-profit organizations, expressed concern over the dearth of healthy food for sale in their neighborhood. Some groups saw these big box stores as an additional option for purchasing healthy food on the Southeast side. Others, who wanted to encourage more local businesses, did not share the same enthusiasm.

A trip down Euclid Avenue in Lincoln Park clearly demonstrates this dearth of food, passing by empty lots, single-family homes, and apartment complexes. Interspersed among these are many empty storefronts and small corner stores, which sit back from the road and have bars covering their windows. Their signs offer few products that could be classified as healthy—liquor, soda, candy, hot dogs and tacos. The large shopping center and supermarket at Euclid and Market Street do little to remedy the overall-depressed economic district. Most cars on the roads drive straight through the area to reach one of the freeways that border the community. This neighborhood, considered by many to be low-income, appears to exemplify what public literature describes as a food desert.

A similar public forum occurred in the community of Linda Vista a month prior to this meeting in Lincoln Park. Rather than debating the construction of a big box store, a local organization held the meeting as an opportunity for neighborhood residents to give suggestions for services that they felt were not being adequately provided in the community. During the two-hour forum, none of the participants voiced

concern over a lack of access to healthy food. Instead, attention was focused on a lack of space for outdoor recreation, as well as a need for more space to hold community classes.

While the median incomes of these two neighborhoods do not differ greatly, a stark contrast exists in the visible presence of immigrant groups in each community. While English dominates on almost every storefront in Lincoln Park, the shopping area at the center of Linda Vista contains stores advertising in English, Spanish, Vietnamese and Korean. A constant flow of cars stream in and out of the parking lot of the Linda Vista Shopping Center, taking care to avoid the pedestrians who are also trying to get to the large Vietnamese supermarket that occupies the shopping center. This neighborhood may be considered low-income, but it appears not to be a food desert.

As discussed in Chapter two, narratives describing access to healthy food paint a uniformly bleak picture of the availability of healthy food in a low-income neighborhood. This chapter challenges the uniformity of this narrative by examining the food stores in three San Diego neighborhoods: the urban Chicano community of Barrio Logan and the contrasting communities of Lincoln Park and Linda Vista. Although all three are low-income communities, only Lincoln Park fits the image of a food desert—an area with little-to-no fresh produce, due to its many convenience stores and few supermarkets. However, the greater presence of fruits and vegetables in Linda Vista and Barrio Logan does not come from a larger number of supermarkets in these communities. Rather, these neighborhoods contain large quantities of fresh fruits and vegetables in many small grocery stores and convenience stores—the exact types of stores that academic literature expects not to provide such items. The small,

independent stores in Linda Vista and Barrio Logan challenge economic assumptions about these categories of stores and demonstrate the need for a more local analysis of the real options for produce available in low-income neighborhoods.

Background

The three neighborhoods in this study differ in terms of physical characteristics as well as in demographics. Linda Vista, the youngest neighborhood in this study, sits atop the southwestern portion of Kearney Mesa, which is a large plateau north of Mission Valley. The federal government built the neighborhood of Linda Vista at the beginning of World War II to serve as housing for military personnel and low-skilled workers attracted by jobs in the rapidly expanding aircraft factories. Killory (1993) explains that the location and design of the neighborhood was intended to contain these lower-class workers within Linda Vista and prevent their integration into the part of San Diego south of Mission Valley:

> The barren but relatively flat terrain was surrounded by jagged canyons on the south, east, and west which offered formidable barriers to encroachment [on wealthier areas of the city] that could 'cause blight' or compromise the desirability of the site by blocking ocean views. (Killory 1993: 37)

As a result of the original design of the neighborhood, only a few roads provide access to and from Linda Vista. From the southwest, Linda Vista Road travels up the mesa and through the middle of the neighborhood, serving as the main commercial street in the neighborhood. Genesee Avenue borders the community on the north and travels northwest to the adjacent neighborhood of Clairemont Mesa. Finally, Ulric Street provides passage south and east to two major San Diego roadways: Hwy 163, which

runs along the eastern edge of the neighborhood, and Interstate 8, which borders the neighborhood on the south. While Linda Vista encompasses a total of 2400 acres (City of San Diego 2003), the area studied in this thesis will be limited to the area south of Genesee Avenue (because this represents a break in the residential area surrounding the Linda Vista Shopping Center) and northeast of the University of San Diego, which sits at the edge of the mesa.

Linda Vista has a very low level of density and, thus, a very suburban feel. Much of the housing consists of single-family homes and duplexes situated along winding corridors and concealed cul-de-sacs. Some of the original four- and six-family dwellings built by the government still exist at the end of narrow roads that snake down the steep hills closer to the edge of the mesa and farther from the center of the neighborhood. While a few stores are scattered toward the edges of the neighborhood, the majority of businesses are clustered in and around a large commercial center at the intersection of Linda Vista Road and Ulric Street, which cross just north of the geographic center of the community. Linda Vista's history as a community of working-class families has created a very diverse community, including large groups of recently arrived immigrants from southern Mexico (especially Oaxaca) and from Southeast Asian countries such as Vietnam, Laos, and the Philippines.

Located just southeast of downtown, Barrio Logan has historically been the center of the Mexican and Chicano community in San Diego. This area west of Interstate 5 and adjacent to the San Diego Bay had previously been a part of Greater Logan Heights, which spans the area just north and east of Interstate 5. Established in the late nineteenth century, Barrio Logan is a much older and denser community than

the other two neighborhoods of study. Immigrants from Mexico began to settle here in large numbers during the first two decades of the twentieth century to escape the turmoil associated with dictatorship and the Revolution of 1910. In fact, it was the second largest community of Mexican Americans during the 1940s and 1950s (Delgado 1998).

While originally a middle-upper class neighborhood called East End, since the early twentieth century Barrio Logan has been a working-class community with a history of being a target of government and industrial intervention (Norris 1983). As part of the expansion of defense work during World War II, industrial and defense projects moved to the area starting in the 1940s. (Donoho 1998) Then, in the 1960s, the neighborhood was split twice with the construction of Interstate 5 through the middle of Logan Heights and the Coronado Bridge. As the City of San Diego explains, the construction of these two elevated roadways was expected to push Barrio Logan residents away from the coastline and into areas north of the interstate, but residents held their ground:

> Freeway I-5, sited generally following the dividing line between the residential and industrial zones, further contained the residential areas north and east of the freeway. It was assumed that, following these actions, the western area [present-day Barrio Logan] would eventually be totally redeveloped privately with industrial enterprises. Due to complicated and little understood economic, physical, and social considerations, the residents in this western area, did not move, but remained anchored to the Barrio. (City of San Diego Planning Department 2005: 10)

These developments, along with city zoning changes to allow the establishment of junkyards, displaced many residents from their homes and the neighborhood, effectively shrinking the community of *mexicanos* in the area. Many of those who remained were

inspired by the Chicano movement of the 1960s and 1970s to reunite the community behind the goal of building a community park, which was finally established as Chicano Park in 1972.

Today, the area along the San Diego Bay contains a mix of military and industrial warehouses, boat-building yards and other heavy industrial activities. Single-family homes, small apartment buildings, and independent businesses lie adjacent to this industrial area and stretch to the north and east across the freeway. Commercial districts are scattered throughout the residential areas both sides of the interstate. South of the interstate, large clusters of businesses can be found on National and Logan Avenues west of Cesar Chavez Parkway and farther east around 26th Street. The major commercial district north of the freeway runs along Imperial Avenue between 21st and 29th Streets. Few-to-no shopping centers or large stores exist in Barrio Logan and most stores occupy only one or two storefronts.

The neighborhoods of Lincoln Park and Valencia Park lie within the area of Southeast San Diego, which has historically been considered the center of the black community in San Diego. The area is bordered on the west by 47th Street, Market Street on the north, Valencia Parkway on the east, and the city limits of National City on the south. As African Americans arrived in the city to take on factory jobs in the 1940s, the prevalence of restrictive covenants and racially-restrictive deeds in many parts of San Diego limited their settlement to areas south of Market Street (Florido 2011a). Residences here vary from large, gated apartment complexes, to older and smaller single-family homes located on a traditional street grid, to larger and newer homes situated in cul-de-sacs set back from the major roads of Euclid Avenue and Imperial

Avenue. Because of the fluctuating commercial history of the neighborhood, large empty lots punctuate the community landscape, left over from now-defunct truck yards and small-scale manufacturing businesses that set up in the community during the 1970s and 1980s (Florido, 2011b).

While demographics in this neighborhood have been changing in the past decade (Florido, 2011a), the neighborhood has notably less of a presence of businesses owned by or targeted toward the neighborhood's growing immigrant communities. The community's major shopping center, Market Creek Plaza exists at the northern edge of the community on Euclid Avenue. It contains a Food 4 Less, which remains the only major grocery store to open in this area in the last thirty years (Market Creek Plaza 2002). Most of the neighborhoods' other smaller, independent stores are located near the intersections of the few major roads running through the community.

Table 3.1: Nativity and Income Statistics for Area of Study[1]

Area	Total Population	Total Foreign-born	% Foreign-born	% Latino	Median HH Income
San Diego MSA	2,813,833	606,254	21.55	26.69	$47,067
Lincoln Park	19,251	6,109	31.73	52.39	$30,989
Barrio Logan	10,918	4,278	39.18	75.31	$19,355
Linda Vista	17,735	7,550	42.57	35.77	$36,993

[1]Source: Census Bureau, 2000.

Table 3.1 above shows basic population and income statistics for the San Diego Metropolitan Statistical Area and the three neighborhoods in this study. While all three neighborhoods have a higher percentage of foreign-born residents than the average for San Diego County overall, both Barrio Logan and Linda Vista have percentages that are almost twice the county average. Despite the fact that Lincoln Park has a higher-than-

average percentage of foreign-born and Latino residents, the neighborhood does not yet have a specific immigrant identity or a noticeable presence of businesses targeting a particular immigrant group. With the exception of a few taco shops and two grocery stores directed toward Laotian and Mexican clientele, few stores in the neighborhood have a specific ethnic identity or promote themselves to a specific ethnic group.

Methods

The image of low-income neighborhoods promoted by previous academic research creates an expectation that these neighborhoods contain few to no supermarkets and possibly a large number of small grocery and convenience stores. The common conception that these smaller stores do not sell produce leads to the assumption that little-to-no produce is available for sale in these neighborhoods. To determine if this is actually the case, I traveled on every street in the three neighborhoods to note the presence of all food stores within the census tract boundaries (see Appendix A). I then entered every food store and recorded which stores offered produce for sale and the number of produce items in each selection.

This study will try to work within the categories used by a majority of the studies discussed in Chapter two in order to challenge the assumptions and conclusions drawn about the likelihood of produce in each category (see Chapter two for an explanation of these assumptions). A store is classified as a supermarket in this study if it is located in a shopping center, has multiple cash registers, and is a part of a chain with multiple locations. Examples of such supermarkets include Vons, Food 4 Less, Ralphs, and Albertsons. Three stores in this study met this definition. Lincoln Park

contains a Food 4 Less and an independent supermarket in a shopping center just across the city limits in National City. The Linda Vista Shopping Center has a supermarket named Thuan Phat that belongs to a chain owned by a Korean businessman out of Los Angeles.

Grocery stores will be defined as independent stores that fit the supermarket definition given by NAICS below. While some of the businesses classified as grocery stores in this study are family-owned and operate in multiple locations, these stores are not classified as supermarkets either because they are not located in a shopping center or because they operate only one cash register. Many of these stores are members of Independent Grocers Associations (e.g. Unified Grocers) that do not allow membership by supermarkets. They also tend to advertise through the PennySaver fliers, as opposed to supermarket chains that independently print and distribute their own advertisements.

Finally, convenience stores in this study include smaller stores that offer a limited or specialized selection of goods. This rather miscellaneous category encompasses mini-markets affiliated and not affiliated with gas stations, such as Seven-Eleven or independent corner stores, small storefronts located in shopping centers, liquor stores, and establishments selling a "specialized line of goods," such as tortillas or bread (NAICS 2007). Because one purpose of this project is to question the usefulness of this category, less emphasis will be placed on the specific classification of each store in the study than on the existence of fruits and vegetables within such a store.

By personally observing every store in these neighborhoods, I attempted to avoid data inaccuracies that stem from the methodologies and assumptions frequently used by prior food retail studies. Two main inaccuracies result from the methodology of

using government and industry sources of information to gather data for these studies and the problematic assumption made about the availability of produce among stores in particular industry-wide categories. Studies looking at stores and healthy food within a neighborhood frequently obtain store data from official (i.e. government) sources that may not include smaller, or more recently established stores. Few studies physically visit an area of study to gather data on all sources of food through direct observation in of a community. Rather than confirming the stores that currently operate in an area, researchers use government lists to establish the presence of a store and determine the classification of each store. For example, Zenk et al. (2005) gathered store data primarily from lists made by the Michigan Department of Agriculture, telephone directories, and company websites. Morland, Wing, and Diez Roux (2002) also rely on information from state departments of agriculture and local health departments in their four regions of study.

The pitfalls of relying on these databases have been confirmed by studies that examine the accuracy of data sources used in GIS studies about neighborhood food environments (Forsyth, Lytle and Van Riper, 2010). This use of government lists and commercial websites can preclude many small or recently-established stores from being included in neighborhood food studies. Specifically pertaining to this project, many of the smaller stores in this San Diego study do not have their own websites and have no online presence other than as a result from a Google online search. Some of the smallest convenience stores—at least one store in each neighborhood, and as many as three stores in one neighborhood—fail to appear online in any form. These stores, and the

produce that many of them offer, would not be counted if data collection had not included physical visits to the study neighborhoods.

This blind confidence in the accuracy of government databases seemingly eliminates the need for researchers to visit the stores in a study to determine whether a store sells produce. Instead, these studies rely on widely used industry-defined store categories created by the North American Industry Classification System (NAICS). However, some of these categories are vague and so broad that academic studies often create unique subdivisions within some NAICS categories when establishing independent variables. For example, Morland, Diez Roux and Wing (2006) intended to study the different health effects associated with the presence of a supermarket within a neighborhood versus the presence of a grocery store. But, the NAICS defines supermarkets as:

> […] *establishments generally known as supermarkets and grocery stores* primarily engaged in retailing a general line of food, such as canned and frozen foods; fresh fruits and vegetables; and fresh and prepared meats, fish, and poultry. Included in this industry are delicatessen-type establishments primarily engaged in retailing a general line of food. (NAICS 2007, emphasis added)

This definition lumps grocery stores into same NAICS category as supermarkets and results in the creation of rather arbitrary categories that can vary from study to study. Morland, Diez Roux, and Wing (2006) needed to create their own criteria for classifying grocery stores in order to put these establishments into a separate category when analyzing the effects of a store type on resident eating patterns. They separated the independent stores from chain stores, classifying independents as grocery stores without taking into account size, variety of products, or price of goods within the stores.

Ultimately, Morland, Diez Roux and Wing (2006), MacDonald and Nelson (1991), and Chung and Meyers (1999) defined a supermarket almost exclusively as a store that belongs to a nationally recognized corporate chain of stores. Because these researchers did not directly observe the stores in their samples, independent stores that offered the same variety of goods in an equally-large building at similar prices could not qualify as supermarkets because it was uncertain that they were part of a chain.

The category of convenience store also poses many problems for determining the existence of produce. While the NAICS definition says, "establishments known as convenience stores or food marts (except those with fuel pumps) [are] primarily engaged in retailing a limited line of goods that generally includes milk, bread, soda, and snacks," this would not, by definition, preclude stores that sell produce. Many small stores in this study sell fruits and vegetables but do not have the equipment to offer fresh or prepared meats or frozen foods and thus do not fit into the supermarket category. While the NAICS has a category set aside for markets that sell only fruits and vegetables, all stores with produce in this study offer food products in addition to fruits and vegetables. Liquor stores in this sample would also fit into this category, as these stores provide soda and snacks for sale, in addition to a wide variety of liquor and alcohol. Recognizing the pitfalls of these definitions, Horowitz et al. (2004) tries to work outside of these broad categories and classify businesses in a sample based on size (square feet) or the number of cash registers. However, the assumption often remains that smaller stores are less likely to have produce than larger stores (Horowitz et al., 2004).

Results

Stores that offer produce

Table 3.2: Type of Food Stores within Low-income Neighborhoods in San Diego Study

Neighborhood	Total	% Supermarket (n)	% Grocery (n)	% Convenience[1] (n)	% Other[2] (n)
Lincoln Park	15	13.33 (2)	46.67 (7)	40 (6)	0
Barrio Logan	20	0	30 (6)	70 (14)	0
Linda Vista	17	5.88 (1)	29.41 (5)	47.06 (8)	17.65 (3)

[1]Includes produce stands, bakeries, tortillerías, and liquor stores that offer a limited selection of food items for sale

[2]Includes drugstores and discount stores that offer food for sale, excluding produce

Table 3.2 above shows the total number of stores offering food for sale in each of the three neighborhoods of study. Lincoln Park contains the fewest number of stores in the neighborhood, including a supermarket and a Seven Eleven located just outside of the neighborhood within the city limits of National City. The inclusion of this National City supermarket into the Lincoln Park total, along with the Food 4 Less, gives the non-immigrant neighborhood the largest number and percentage of supermarkets of the three neighborhoods. The remaining stores include smaller grocery stores, and convenience stores such as gas stations, corner stores, and one liquor store.

Linda Vista contains a number of large discount stores, such as Joe's 99 Cents and Rite Aid, which reflects a lower level of density from the suburban layout of the neighborhood. One of these large establishments is Thuan Phat, which has been operating since late 2008. The other large stores sell canned and other processed foods but do not sell fresh produce. The remaining community businesses are smaller grocery stores and convenience stores that range from gas stations and liquor stores with a typical abundance of processed foods to corner stores offering a large selection of produce and other ethnically-Mexican staples.

Barrio Logan has the greatest number of stores of the three neighborhoods and the majority (70 percent) of these stores are convenience stores that offer a limited line of edible goods. In addition to the typical gas stations and corner stores, this neighborhood also contains many product-specific stores such as bakeries or tortillerías that do not have restaurant-style seating. Although the NAICS classifies tortillerías and bakeries as manufacturing establishments, this study classifies them as convenience stores because these stores have a retail space to sell food in addition to merely producing it. Thirty percent of stores in this neighborhood are grocery stores ranging in size from one storefront with a meat counter to a larger independent store that spans half of a city block.

Because it is difficult to predict which stores stock fresh produce based on their classification, each store was visited to determine if and how much produce was offered at that location. Stores with limited produce offered less than five produce items and the specific items varied by neighborhood and store type. Some stores offered a very limited selection of fruit with a long shelf life (such as apples or citrus fruits) while stores in Barrio Logan frequently offered a small mix of vegetables and fruit including onions, avocados, potatoes, or bananas. Other stores provided a great variety and number of items. Table 3.3 below details the number and percentage of stores offering produce for sale in each neighborhood.

Table 3.3: Percentage and distribution of neighborhood stores offering produce

Neighborhood	Population	# with some produce (% of total stores)	# with 5 or more items (% of total stores)	Ratio[1]
Lincoln Park	19,251	8 (53.33%)	6 (40%)	1 : 3209
Barrio Logan	10,918	11 (55%)	7 (35%)	1 : 1560
Linda Vista	17,735	10 (58.82%)	8 (47%)	1 : 2217

[1]Number of stores with at least five items divided by neighborhood population

More than half of food outlets in all neighborhoods offer at least some produce, while at least a third of stores in all neighborhoods contain a selection of at least five items of produce. Although Barrio Logan has the largest number of stores (11) offering produce for sale, fruits and vegetables are the most pervasive in Linda Vista, with almost two-thirds (59 percent) of stores offering at least some produce and almost half (47 percent) offering more than five items. Considering that only three stores in the entire sample can be classified as supermarkets, this high number of stores with produce begins to demonstrate that smaller stores do offer produce for sale in low-income neighborhoods.

However, disparities in access to produce appear when looking at the concentration of stores among the population and area of each neighborhood. I divided the population of the neighborhood by the number of stores offering produce to determine the ratio to the population in each community. Barrio Logan has the greatest concentration of stores with produce, containing one store for every 1500 residents. Linda Vista has a slightly lower concentration of stores per number of residents, a result of the fact that it has 7000 more residents than Barrio Logan. Finally, although Lincoln Park has almost the same number of stores with produce, the concentration of stores in this neighborhood is much lower than both Barrio Logan and Linda Vista. The ratio in Lincoln Park (one store for every 3209 residents) suggests that it has only half the number of stores needed to achieve the coverage that exists in Barrio Logan. This ratio of stores to residents indicates Barrio Logan has a much higher concentration of produce than in both Linda Vista and Lincoln Park.

Spatially, the distribution of stores differs greatly and reflects the general distribution of other businesses in each neighborhood. As seen in Figure 3.1 (see Appendix B for all figures in this chapter), each quadrant of the Barrio Logan area contains one store with a large selection of produce, although the two grocery stores with the largest line of products are located on Imperial Avenue, north of Interstate 5. The smaller stores with more-limited amounts of produce are scattered on both sides of the interstate. A dense grid of mostly tertiary streets and flat terrain allow for relatively easy walking to these stores.

The location of stores in Linda Vista and Lincoln Park contrasts starkly with those in Barrio Logan. As shown in Figure 3.2, most of the stores with produce are concentrated around the Linda Vista Shopping Center, where Thuan Phat sits. Along Linda Vista Road, a liquor store with a surprisingly large selection of fruit and vegetables is located about a half-mile north of this shopping center and a produce and flower stand operates about a mile south of the shopping center. Finally, a smaller grocery store with a small meat counter and produce section sits among the northwest residential area of the neighborhood, just off of Comstock Street. Despite the great number of stores offering produce in Linda Vista, the spatial concentration of these stores creates the need to travel greater distances to buy food than in Barrio Logan, especially for those who live on the edges of this neighborhood and might need to walk to the store. However, Linda Vista Road is the only street in the neighborhood that has heavy flows of traffic and is consistently four lanes wide. This limits the major obstacles to necessary to overcome when walking to any of the stores in this neighborhood.

Similar to Linda Vista, almost all of the stores in Lincoln Park (Figure 3.3) can be found on or near Euclid Avenue, the north-south axis that divides Lincoln Park and Valencia Park. While the five major roads in these communities lie on a grid (47th Street runs north-south, Market Street, Imperial Avenue and Logan Boulevard run west-east), the smaller streets among the residential areas do not follow a grid pattern and form numerous cul-de-sacs. This creates extra travel time to get to any neighborhood store, much less one with produce. All stores with produce, with the exception of the Laotian market, sit on or near Euclid Avenue. The two large supermarkets are situated in shopping centers at the northern and southern ends of this street. One medium-sized grocery store providing mostly Mexican cuisine operates on Logan Ave near Euclid. Finally, two smaller grocery stores that have the appearance of convenience stores (but also contain meat counters and frozen foods) sit west of the intersection of Imperial Avenue and Euclid. All five of the major streets are four lanes wide throughout the neighborhood and the community's proximity to Interstate 805 creates a highly trafficked area unfriendly to walking.

These three maps show that the residents of Barrio Logan seem to benefit from the density with which the neighborhood was designed when it was built in the late nineteenth century. Most of this community sits within a quarter of a mile of the four grocers offering a lot of produce. When a similar radius is placed around the stores that offer at least some produce, all of Barrio Logan fits within a quarter-mile radius of the stores in this community. This is very clearly not the case with Linda Vista and Lincoln Park. Although Linda Vista has a large number of stores, the extreme edges of the neighborhoods must travel more than a quarter of a mile to reach a food store. In

Lincoln Park, the western area has access to only one small store that sits on 47th Street and Imperial. Additionally, almost none of Valencia Park lies within a quarter of a mile of any food stores, with the closest store east of Euclid sitting in the neighborhood of Encanto (not shown on the map). Based solely on the number of stores within a neighborhood, it appears that Barrio Logan does not lack physical and geographical access to produce.

Produce selection

Methods

To survey the produce selection in stores in the neighborhoods of study, each store was visited between the dates of February 21 and March 5, 2011. Each produce item was recorded, with varieties of the same vegetable or fruit grouped into one category (e.g. all chiles counted as one item, all onions are grouped together, etc). In general, stores offering less than the median number of items did not offer more than one variety of any fruit or vegetable, so this method did not significantly underestimate the number of items in any given selection. Items were classified in the fruit and vegetable category based on their typical culinary use and not scientifically—i.e. a tomato is considered a vegetable, despite its characteristics as a fruit. While it is difficult to calculate the quantity or quality of each produce item without speaking with each store in the sample, basic estimates and observations were made from photos taken at each store.[1]

[1] I am indebted to Liz Bartz, who took the produce photos used for quality and quantity analysis in this thesis.

Table 3.4: Descriptive Statistics for Produce Selection in Neighborhood Stores (N=21)[1]				
	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Median
Type of store[2]	1	3	2.16	2
Total produce items	5	96	28.38	23
Total vegetable items	3	68	18.33	14
Total fruit items	1	28	10.10	9

[1]among stores with at least 5 items of produce for sale
[2]Supermarket = 1; Grocery Store = 2; Convenience Store = 3

Table 3.4 above details the descriptive statistics for the produce selection in the stores sampled. A mean store size of more than two indicates that most of the neighborhood stores with produce were either smaller grocery stores or convenience stores with a limited selection of items for sale. The supermarket Thuan Phat in Linda Vista recorded the highest number of both vegetables and fruits. A convenience store in Barrio Logan offered the smallest number of vegetables with three items (onions, avocados, and tomatoes) and the Laotian market in Lincoln Park offered the fewest fruit items in its produce selection, stocking only limes. The four- to five-item difference between the mean and median suggests that a few stores in the sample have a large section of produce, while many stores have more limited offerings.

Table 3.5: Size of produce selection in stores by neighborhood (N)				
Neighborhood	Median produce items[1]	Mean produce items[2]	Mean vegetable items[2]	Mean fruit items[2]
Lincoln Park	21.5 (6)	30.8 (5)	19.8 (5)	11 (5)
Linda Vista	25.5 (8)	32.1 (8)	21 (8)	11.1 (8)
Barrio Logan	23 (7)	40.5 (4)	26 (4)	14.5 (4)

[1]among stores with 5 or more items
[2]among stores with more than 10 items

Table 3.5 above shows the difference in the median and mean size of produce selections in stores among the three neighborhoods. With a median selection of 25.5 items among eight stores, Linda Vista has the most stores offering produce and a

consistently larger selection of produce as well. The entire room dedicated to the produce section at Thuan Phat is by far the largest of all the stores in the sample with the greatest number of fruit and vegetable items. The color green dominates the room, with a large number of Asian vegetables like choi, eggplant, chilis, peppers, broccoli, cabbage and root vegetables. The fruit section contains large quantities of apples, pears and bananas. Vegetables not frequently utilized in Asian cuisines, notably tomatoes, squash or carrots, were not as visually appealing and were not stocked in as high quantities.

Gabi's Produce[2] represents a typical small store in Linda Vista. Small enough to be considered a convenience store, this business dedicates more than half of its floor space to more than twenty total types of fruits and vegetables. Tomatoes, onions, potatoes, pasilla peppers, jalapeños and other chiles, limes, mangos, a few kinds of apples and citrus, bananas, limes, pineapple and plantains line the shelves in compact, but highly-stacked pyramids. The produce is restocked two or three times a week, so most of the items appear to be very fresh. A slow but steady stream of Latino customers pass through the store to pick up a few items for the day.

Lincoln Park has the fewest stores that sell produce. These stores, despite including two supermarkets, also have the smallest average selection of the three communities. The Food 4 Less devotes a large space to its produce section, offering the second largest number of items of all the stores in this sample. The section stocked a large quantity of apples, potatoes, onions, bananas and other basic fruits and vegetables However, when this store was visited on a Tuesday morning, items such as tomatoes,

[2] All individuals and independent stores described in this thesis have been changed to pseudonyms.

bell peppers, and cabbage were almost empty and had not been restocked, leaving small and wrinkled items sitting on the shelves. Only a few customers, mostly older Latino and Asian women were seen shopping in this section during the thirty minutes spent gathering data for this project. The location of the produce within the store may have caused customers uninterested in purchasing produce to avoid the section completely. The fresh fruits and vegetables sit in an area in the back corner of the store and these items are not visible upon entering the store. Instead the produce section is hidden behind a large wall of discount detergent, cereal, and white bread that welcomes customers immediately upon walking through the door.

Ironically, the produce section in a typical small store, such as Euclid Foods is also located in a back corner of the store. The small refrigerated container and a couple of shelves offer items that have a long shelf life, such as carrots, potatoes, onions, cabbage, apples, oranges, limes and lemons, plus a few more fragile items like bananas, tomatoes, lettuce, avocados, and maybe some cilantro or green onions. The items that are offered are not stocked in large quantities (usually 5-10 for each item) and it is clear that the clientele does not visit the store intending to purchase this produce. The few, mostly male customers did not pass by to consider the produce section and instead conversed with the one cashier about the price of cigarettes or to purchase lottery tickets.

Finally, the stores in Barrio Logan fit into two distinct groups: convenience stores and larger independent grocery stores. The small stores offer a small number of fruits and vegetables that either have a long shelf life or seem to sell frequently, typically potatoes, onions, tomatoes, avocados, or bananas. At Fareway Market, one of

the four independent grocery stores in the neighborhood, the produce selection contains eight to ten more items than the average selection in Linda Vista and Lincoln Park. It also offers almost as many items as the Food 4 Less in Lincoln Park.

Two key characteristics distinguish the produce sections of Fareway Market and Food 4 Less. Almost every fruit and vegetable offered at Fareway Market was stocked in large quantities and painted the store with vibrant reds, greens, oranges, browns, and yellows. This is especially the case for items central to Mexican cuisine, such as onions, tomatoes, peppers and chiles, mangos, limes, cilantro, tomatillos, carrots, and potatoes. A large shelf was dedicated to melons, papaya, coconuts, and both summer and winter squash.[3] In stark contrast to the quiet and sparsely stocked Food 4 Less produce section on Tuesday morning, the produce section at Fareway Market was the most crowded section of that store on another Tuesday morning, as couples and mothers with small children discussed (mostly in Spanish) which vegetables to purchase and how much to buy for the week.

As this chapter illustrates, by virtue of its many small grocers and an older, dense street grid, Barrio Logan has the best produce selection and coverage of the three neighborhoods in this study. However, on a walk down Imperial Avenue or other streets in this neighborhood, the task of identifying these stores from the outside poses a challenge. Convenience stores that offer a few items of produce appear no differently on the outside from stores that offer none. Similarly, the aging concrete buildings along the street house liquor stores and convenience stores just as frequently as they do grocery

[3] I just had to include a footnote expressing my amazement that winter and summer squash can be sold at the same time in California!

stores. This leaves customers to search for some sign outside of a store indicating the sale of produce, or to enter a store at the risk of not encountering the anticipated shopping environment. The inability to distinguish stores with healthy options from less healthy stores demonstrates the difficulty with which a newcomer would be able to visually assess the location of produce for sale. It also suggests that these grocers rely on less superficial, more interpersonal methods to attract customers. Chapters four and five describe the ways that these stores create more profound connections with the residents of Barrio Logan and Linda Vista so as to create and sustain a customer base that keeps these stores in business and in the community.

4. Profiting from Cheap Produce

Supermarkets are praised for having the ability to offer lower average prices than can theoretically be offered at smaller independent stores. This is important because Latino immigrants tend to live in urban areas with a predominance of small stores. Understanding the disparity in produce prices of small stores in urban areas compared to a chain supermarket will help us to understand the disadvantage that these residents face when feeding their families. However, based on the prices in these three San Diego neighborhoods, stores in Barrio Logan more frequently have the cheapest options for produce on average, especially for onions, tomatoes, and green peppers, even without a chain supermarket in the community. Interviews with managers demonstrate that despite their relatively small retail space and clientele, these businesses use alternative methods to survive economically while selling cheap produce. Some managers significantly reduce mark-ups on produce and recoup lost profits through the sale of other goods with higher mark-ups. Others limit overhead costs that might cut into the profits made from uniformly low mark-ups on all items in a store. This suggests that residents in neighborhoods with many small stores may not necessarily pay higher prices than customers at a supermarket and challenges the assumption that a greater economy of scale is the only method that stores can use to profit from affordable produce.

Studies pricing fruits and vegetables

Since 2003, the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) has released multiple studies exploring the consumption of fruits and vegetables by Americans and

the price of these items in American stores. A study in 2004 concluded that a higher percentage (19 percent) of low-income households buy no fruit or vegetables compared to higher-income households (nine percent) (Blisard, Stewart, and Jolliffe 2004). Another USDA study by Leibtag and Kaufman (2003) argues that households on low incomes (less than $35,000/year) do purchase produce, but tend to purchase fewer pounds per person and tend to buy cheaper types of fruit and vegetables (e.g. cheap bananas instead of costly raspberries). However, the USDA has not yet studied the variation in prices of produce at different types of retail outlets. One study found that prices for milk, ready-to-eat cereal and bread were higher at convenience stores than at grocery stores, based on comparable item sizes (USDA 2009). Another recent study simply compares the prices of "commonly consumed" produce items to determine which fruits and vegetables cost more than others (Stewart et al. 2011). In addition to eliminating many ethnic items, such as guavas, non-bell peppers, choi, and tubers such as yucca and jicama, the study fails to discuss variations in the cost of these produce items when they are sold in different retail settings, similar to the effect found for milk, cereal, and bread.

Arguments for the superiority of supermarkets focus primarily on the financial benefits of the large size of these stores. Theoretically, these chain stores can offer lower prices because their superior size (in storage space and number of store locations) allows them to access greater economies of scale and spend less per unit when acquiring items. Thus, the stores can sell the items to consumers at lower prices than independent stores, which are assumed to have smaller storage and display space. MacDonald and Nelson (1991) paint a negative picture of small neighborhood convenience stores and

grocery stores, pointing to the fact that prices at the small markets in their study tended to be higher than at integrated (chain) supermarkets. They hypothesize that prices are higher at non-chain independent stores because they tend to be located in central city areas and therefore have limited space and capital to acquire large quantities of an item (356). Talukdar (2008) echoed this finding when analyzing market basket[1] prices at stores in 17 neighborhoods in the Buffalo area. He concluded that prices at chain stores are about six percent lower than at smaller corner stores and neighborhood stores. Because the poorer neighborhoods in Talukdar's study had a greater number of small stores, the study concluded that residents of poor neighborhoods pay more for food. Finally, Barratt (1997) asserts that residents of Derbyshire pay more at a small store than at a supermarket. Some goods in the study, such as whole wheat bread, yogurt, peanuts, and certain fresh vegetables, were at least twice as expensive on average at small stores than in supermarkets (65). The study explained that these higher prices at the small stores stem from the fact that they are less likely to have sales, to offer economies of scale through larger sizes of products, or to be able to offer a cheaper generic store brand.

However these studies are based on the total price of a market basket of items as opposed to a direct price comparison for specific items. Market baskets are not standardized and include a varied number of items (between 15 and 622 items), and sometimes include only one fruit and vegetable, or non-food items such as toothpaste or shampoo, as in the case of Talukdar (2008). Barratt (1997) created a hypothetical

[1] A market basket is a fixed list of items sold by a store. This list is used by a researcher to gather data (typically price data) to conduct a comparison among a sample of stores in a study.

weekly shopping list of 52 food items supposedly based on a typical British diet to simulate an average diet for residents of Derbyshire. MacDonald and Nelson (1991), like many researchers, use only items in the Thrifty Food Plan, the USDA's list for Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) participants. In addition to this "plan" being 64 pages long with no instructions useful to a parent with limited income, time, and education, this "typical" market basket does not take into account cultural influences on food purchases, as pointed out by Block and Kuoba (2006).

Such market basket studies assume uniformity in price setting for all items sold by a store and do not explain if or how certain products might be priced differently in certain areas compared to others. Block and Kuoba (2006) try to examine this in a comparison of grocery prices in an affluent Chicago suburb and a low-income African American neighborhood in Chicago. They found that produce prices are cheaper at independent stores, but do not explain how the prices among independent stores might differ by each neighborhood. However, they qualify this finding by pointing out that mean prices were higher overall in the suburb than in the city neighborhood. This finding suggests that stores in wealthier neighborhoods, including chain supermarkets, may inflate their prices according to the income levels of the neighborhood, expecting that clientele with more disposable income will be willing to pay more for their groceries.

Chung and Meyers (1999) is one of the few studies to compare the prices of individual items at different types of retail outlets. In exploring the difference between chain and non-chain stores in the Minneapolis-St. Paul metropolitan area, their study examined the prices of a "typical" diet (eaten by a supposedly homogeneous group of

individuals and households) at a sample of stores. They conclude that the type of store in which people shop affects the amount of money that residents spend on food purchases, calculating that a customer would spend $16.62 more at a non-chain than at a chain store for the same items (290). This disparity in prices was especially the case for dry goods such as flour and oatmeal, which were 10 to 40 percent less expensive than in non-chain stores. The results showed how the type of store affected the price of individual fruits and vegetables in the sample. For produce, apples, cabbage, onions and green peppers were higher at non-chain stores than at chain stores. Only tomatoes were cheaper at non-chain stores. However, Chung and Meyers failed to examine the variation in price of these items by neighborhoods within the metropolitan area. Comparing prices only by the type of store selling the produce ignores the possibility of variation by neighborhood found by Block and Kuoba (2006) and Andreyeva et al. (2008).

This chapter examines the variations in average price for specific items by neighborhood and also by store size. Comparisons of individual items will allow for observations of those items that are similarly prices and which items have large disparities among the variable categories. This will also allow for a comparison of the small stores with the three large supermarkets, which are expected to have the most affordable produce among these communities.

San Diego Price Comparison

This chapter will conduct a price comparison in 15 stores based on neighborhood and store size (large supermarkets versus independent businesses). The

analysis will examine the prices of six produce items from a sample of stores in Linda Vista, Barrio Logan, and Lincoln Park to determine if, in fact, produce costs more at smaller grocery stores and convenience stores. This examination will illustrate whether residents of Barrio Logan and Linda Vista are at a disadvantage due to a lack of chain supermarkets in their communities. These two communities contain many independent grocery stores and smaller convenience stores that offer a large selection of produce for sale. Only Linda Vista contains a supermarket, which has a visible emphasis on pan-Asian cuisine. Barrio Logan contains only independent stores and no supermarket locations. Since the previously-discussed literature supposes that grocery and convenience stores lack the ability to create or benefit from the economies of scale afforded to supermarkets, determining the difference in average price for these three types of stores will help illustrate how much this economy of scale benefits supermarket consumers.

Lincoln Park serves as a unique control neighborhood because it reflects the literature in two ways. First, Food 4 Less, one of the supermarkets located in the community, is classified as a discount supermarket, defined by Kroger's website as a "price-impact warehouse store" that "offer[s] budget-conscious shoppers everyday low prices, superior quality, and a wide selection of national brand groceries, health and beauty care items, meat, dairy products, baked goods and fresh produce" (Kroger Co. n.d.). Because Food 4 Less has established a location in Lincoln Park, an area characterized by low-income households (though some areas contain the same median household income as the San Diego median), it seems unlikely that this location has inflated the prices of its products. Thus this store serves as an example of a large store

that can provide the lowest prices possible, based on all previous conclusions made by the literature. It also reflects the literature in that the smaller stores in the neighborhood have fewer items of produce, or no produce at all. These few stores with limited produce selections can potentially demonstrate the high price of produce at small grocery stores in a low-income neighborhood.

This analysis compares the prices of tomatoes, onions, bell peppers, potatoes, cabbage and apples in each store that has ten or more items in its produce selection. The one fruit and five vegetables were chosen to represent a variety of nutritional categories and cuisines. Tomatoes fit into the red/orange vegetable category and, according to multiple managers, is very important in Mexican cuisine. Onions are also a staple in Mexican cuisine, in which peppers also frequently appear. Cabbage serves as a common green vegetable that is used more frequently in Southeast Asian cuisines but was available at all but one store in the sample. Potatoes and apples, common components of American cuisine, are two types of produce that have a long shelf life and are often sold at very low prices. By recording the prices of produce from a variety of cuisines, we can explore whether any particular store might have lower prices because of overall lower mark-ups or due to the presence of an ethnic group that favors that particular produce item.

The six items were also the most likely to be found at both large and small stores with produce in all three neighborhoods. In the event that a store did not offer one of the items in the sample, the price was imputed by giving it the average price of that category. This occurred in just three instances: one store in Linda Vista did not sell apples, one store in Lincoln Park did not offer bell peppers and another Lincoln Park

store did not stock cabbage. A particular store was not included if it did not contain more than one of the items on this list. This eliminated only two stores (in Linda Vista) from the original, 17-store sample.

To standardize prices, all prices were converted to price per pound. If a store priced an item on a per item basis (as was frequently seen with bell peppers), this item was weighed to determine how many items equaled one pound and then the per-pound price was multiplied by that number to create the per-pound price. The prices for each item were for loose items exclusively. Bagged items, such as three-, five-, or ten-pound bags of potatoes or apples, were avoided because these might not be attractive to customers who have limited carrying capacity due to a reliance on public transportation, lack of a personal vehicle, or limited storage space in smaller, less-expensive homes. This tendency to avoid purchasing large packages has been discussed in academic literature[2] on spending practices by low-income households and is also a common practice mentioned by managers interviewed for this study.

Results

Table 4.1 below shows the descriptive statistics for the prices in this sample. Each of the items was available for less than one dollar per pound in at least one store in the three neighborhoods, with the exception of the green bell peppers that were priced at just over one dollar.

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[2] Leibtag and Kaufman (2003) found that households making less than $25,000 buy large-sized packages of cereal and cheese less frequently than households with higher incomes. They posit that these households avoid large packages due to 1) inability to transport larger quantities from the store to the home, 2) inability to afford to "stock up" with larger quantities, or 3) a lack of space to store such large quantities in the home (5)

Table 4.1: Descriptive Statistics for Items in Price Sample (N=15)					
Price per pound	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Median	Std. Deviation
Potatoes	.33	1.00	.63	.59	.20
Onions	.25	1.98	.66	.66	.42
Tomatoes	.50	1.79	1.22	1.00	.36
Apples	.39	1.29	.86	.79	.21
Cabbage	.39	.99	.76	.69	.16
Bell Peppers	1.09	1.99	1.62	1.69	.23

All of the minimum prices were found in an immigrant neighborhood, except for the tomatoes, which were on sale (presumably due to their visible near-rottenness) at the independent Mercado Jalisco grocery store in Lincoln Park. Thuan Phat's price for potatoes was the only minimum price found at a supermarket. The independent grocery Fareway Market in Barrio Logan had the lowest prices for onions, apples, and cabbage. One convenience store in Linda Vista had the lowest price for bell peppers. The highest price for tomatoes, apples, and peppers existed at small stores in Linda Vista, while Lincoln Park contains the highest price for potatoes, onions, and cabbage. Tomatoes and peppers have the highest average prices per pound, possibly indicating the extra costs and care associated with transportation and storage for these vegetables, or the high demand for each that exists in these neighborhoods.

Table 4.2: Mean price per pound of select items by neighborhood							
	N	Potatoes	**Onions**	**Tomatoes**	B. Peppers	Apples	Cabbage
Lincoln Park	5	0.64	**0.84**	**1.05**	1.60	0.85	0.79
Barrio Logan	4	0.62	**0.49**	**1.11**	1.62	0.84	0.76
Linda Vista	6	0.63	**0.63**	**1.42**	1.64	0.89	0.72

Separating the prices by community in Table 4.2 shows that, overall, not much of a difference exists in prices by neighborhood. The range in price for potatoes, bell peppers and apples is less than five cents and the variation for cabbage is less than a

dime. However, there seems to be a large range in price for onions and tomatoes. Onions in Barrio Logan grocers are almost 35 cents per pound less than in Lincoln Park and tomatoes in Lincoln Park are almost 40 cents less expensive than in Linda Vista. While this wide disparity for tomatoes might be due to the temporary sale price of tomatoes at a grocer in Lincoln Park, the price of onions in Barrio Logan did not appear to be a sale price at any of the four establishments in that neighborhood. The price of tomatoes in Linda Vista could indicate either that tomatoes are not eaten as frequently in this neighborhood, or that the many small stores in this community are not able to purchase tomatoes in a quantity large enough to offer lower prices for their customers.

It is also important to note that the average prices of the independent grocers in Barrio Logan were either similar to or lower than the prices in Lincoln Park, despite the presence of two supermarkets in Lincoln Park. Table 4.3 below shows the difference in prices for the six items based on the type of store, to see if supermarkets do, indeed, offer lower prices to their customers.

Table 4.3: Mean price per pound for select items by store classification

Classification of Store	N	Potatoes	**Onions**	**Tomatoes**	**Peppers**	Apples	Cabbage
Supermarket	3	.54	**.94**	**1.42**	**1.78**	.75	.65
Independent Grocery Store	9	.66	**.58**	**1.08**	**1.62**	.88	.78
Convenience Store	3	.62	**.62**	**1.42**	**1.45**	.92	.79

The results show that independent grocery stores offered the lowest prices for tomatoes, onions, and bell peppers—the three vegetables in this study that are most common to Mexican cuisine. Convenience stores also offer prices at or lower than supermarkets for these vegetables as well. Thus, contrary to vast literature declaring that supermarkets are the most affordable option for purchasing fresh produce, this comparison illustrates

that smaller independent grocers and convenience stores can compete with supermarkets in providing produce on a restricted budget.

Price Setting at Immigrant Neighborhood Stores

To understand how and why these small businesses are able to offer their produce at prices similar to a discount supermarket, interviews were conducted with store managers at stores in both Barrio Logan and Linda Vista. The establishments range from small to large, as do their produce selections, and represent both independent grocery stores and convenience stores. All of the businesses cater to what the managers describe as the Mexican(o)/Hispanic community in each of the neighborhoods.[3] Each manager purchases their produce from local distributors, either in Barrio Logan or in Chula Vista. Baja Produce in Barrio Logan serves as a common distributor of produce for most of these stores, especially the smaller stores.

Despite the similarity in produce distributors, the variety in prices stems from a number of factors, including the mark-up percentage that each store adds to the original wholesale price. Among the five stores, the average overall mark-up was 31 percent, with a range of 20 percent between the lowest and highest mark-ups. In some cases, certain items had less of a mark up because of limited shelf life or because of their high popularity among customers. Fareway Market, the store with the lowest prices among the three neighborhoods, marks up its produce only 20 percent, the lowest percentage of the five stores interviewed. In contrast, Tiendita del Barrio typically marks up its prices 40 percent. However, this store's emphasis on selling large quantities of produce seems

[3] Due to the Latin American focus of this thesis and the limited number of stores catering specifically to the Southeast Asian community in Linda Vista, managers at these stores were not interviewed.

to allow it to purchase in larger quantities and at lower prices than the smaller stores, likely benefitting from a greater economy of scale.

The methods and tactics employed by managers at these stores vary depending on the role that produce plays in creating revenue for the particular store. The larger grocery stores in Barrio Logan use produce as a cheap promotional item to lure customers to the store and buy more profitable merchandise. In contrast, smaller stores that focus more exclusively on selling produce keep their prices low by cutting back on the operating costs that cut into their small price mark-ups. Both strategies illustrate how independent neighborhood stores sustain themselves in an area of households with low levels of disposable income.

For El Arbolito and Fareway Market, the larger stores in Barrio Logan, cheap produce serves as one way to attract customers to their stores to buy other higher-priced items on the shelves. Both businesses have operated on Imperial Avenue in Logan Heights since the late 1990s. Although Fareway Market is larger than El Arbolito, both are fully operating grocery stores with meat departments, their own tortilla manufacturing facilities that produce tortillas daily, and full dairy and frozen foods sections. While the owner of El Arbolito co-owns a second store, Fareway Market is the sole location owned by the family that started the business in Logan Heights 46 years ago.

Each store pays to be a member of an association of independent grocers called Unified Grocers, through which they can stock their shelves at rates similar to prices obtained by chain supermarkets. This membership includes a weekly advertisement in the Penny Saver, a collection of advertisements for local stores that is distributed to

residents throughout the zip code. This flier advertises a collection of items that have been marked down from their normal prices as a way of attracting customers to the store. Both of these stores include certain fruit and vegetable items in their weekly advertisements, hoping that the low price of such produce will convince customers to come to the store to buy other items. As Omar at El Arbolito explained:

> Like tomatoes you can only mark up 25% but you're moving much faster. Avocado, we have it 4 for a dollar, 3 for a dollar, I mean where can you get nice, California avocados for that price? But we move them fast. We buy them lower and then sell them much cheaper, much faster. They turn around. […] People like the deals, so it brings people in. And then you're hoping when they come in and buy your tomato, they'll buy the meat, and here they'll buy something else, and then buy the cereal, and then buy the detergent, blahblahblah [He actually said this].

If the sale item in the flier has not been marked up from the wholesale price, selling this item results in a lack of profit for the store. Sometimes these items can be priced below the wholesale cost, losing money for the store. Even when the store marks up the price, the business can lose money if the mark up is too low to cover overhead costs. However, because of the fleeting nature of produce and the great demand for it from customers, these managers view fruits and vegetables (especially tomatoes) as a gateway item worth selling at a loss so that it can move faster and stimulate the sale of other, more profitable goods, like meat, tortillas, processed foods, and toiletries. The result is that Fareway Market, overall, offers the lowest prices on produce among all the stores in the sample and at prices consistently similar to or lower than both Food 4 Less in Lincoln Park and Thuan Phat in Linda Vista.

At the heart of Barrio Logan lies a large produce market and grocery store called Tiendita del Barrio. It offers the largest selection and quantity of produce in the

neighborhood and closely matches the number of offerings and prices found at Food 4 Less. The store is designed to look like a large replica of an open-air market, with an open patio at the front that leads into an interior floor space, lit with mostly natural light. The colorful fruit and vegetables carefully stacked on wooden shelves dominate the interior of the store, partially obscuring the small meat counter in the back corner and distracting from the even smaller refrigerated section at the front, which displays juices; dairy products such as milk, crema mexicana, yoghurt, and queso fresco; and containers of prepared salsas and guacamole. A slow but steady stream of Latino customers come and go, exchanging friendly greetings with the cashier in Spanish and English as they fill their baskets with the fruits and vegetables for the day's meal.[4]

A conversation with Jim, the store manager of six years, indicates that this store tries to keep prices low and turn a profit by minimizing overhead costs and catering to only neighborhood residents. The store, one of three in the county under the same ownership, employs just eight workers, which are all paid the minimum wage, except the manager. Ron explained that this is one way that the store can keep their expenses low compared to larger stores:

> Jim: But, I know about 12 years ago, there was a Smith store out in El Cajon. And they didn't last very long, because their overhead, they had to do 600,000 [dollars] a week just to break even.
>
> EP: Because they have more employees?
>
> Jim: More employees, a bigger store, more refrigeration. All their employees are, like, union, so they make a lot more money than our people here. The refrigeration bill and the electric bill and all that stuff is a

[4] The manager of Tiendita del Barrio stated that most of the stores customers shop there either every day or every other day, due to low or unpredictable wages from service jobs.

> lot higher and their lease was a lot higher. But, they had to do, like 600,000 a week. That was their break-even point.

In contrast to the high refrigeration bills of the supermarket mentioned by Jim, the open-air design of Tiendita del Barrio's building allows Jim to avoid refrigerating any of the produce in his display area.[5] This minimization of refrigeration costs allows the store to keep prices low for customers, limiting the need to mark up prices to cover those items that would require refrigeration in a typical enclosed store layout.

Tiendita also caters only to the clientele that lives within walking distance of the store, which eliminates the cost of purchasing advertising space in the PennySaver. Jim explained that these advertisements, while promising to increase the store's customers, had almost the opposite effect on his store's profit margin:

> The reason we quit [running an ad in the PennySaver] is, if you run an 8x11 sheet of paper in the ad, in the PennySaver, it's a thousand dollars. To pay for that $1000, you have to do $5000 worth of business to cover that ad. We quit it and business didn't change a bit. So, all they did, people saw what you had on sale, they come to buy those items, and that's all they would buy. Ideally, if you do, if you run an ad like that, being small like us, we only ran, like, four items. But we always run them at zero cost and made zero on it. So we just ended up giving away $1000 not making anything, and you don't gain nothing. So we just quit it and we didn't lose any business over it.

By eliminating this category of operating cost common to most independent grocery stores, Jim can avoid higher mark-ups on other products to make up for the loss of revenue on the sale items and avoid the potential inability to sell those marked-up items. Also as a result of not advertising, the store focuses on providing products that

[5] The store still refrigerates the produce in its storage area. Ron explained that the health department no longer allows such open-air facilities to operate and has grandfathered in this building because this policy was put in place after the store was bought in 1998.

neighborhood residents will purchase, ensuring a selection of produce that is affordable to this low-income community.

In addition to minimizing overhead costs, the store sells items in smaller quantities than supermarkets, such that they are small enough for a low-income customer to afford and for the store to profit from the sale. As Jim explained:

> The thing that might affect our business is that they're going to open a Northgate [Market] store over there across the street […] But their prices are high, so it may not affect us. That would be the only thing that would be a [benefit] to us, is that our prices are not near as high as theirs. Plus they sell a lot of stuff like the Costco packs, like the big deal with the strawberries, the two-pound, four-pound box of strawberries and the same thing on the grapes. And so, that would be a whole lot more expensive than buying it by the pound, because they don't break their containers. You have to buy the whole container and they're usually like freakin' $5.99 a piece. A lot of people are not going to spend six dollars for grapes, especially right now when they don't have the money to do it. Same thing with the strawberries.

Although larger supermarkets, including those like Northgate Market, may cater to specific ethnic groups, these stores do not necessarily offer automatic savings for the consumer on an unpredictable budget. The economic benefit of supermarkets (i.e. offering larger quantities to provide more savings per unit) may not be an advantage to clients who, in that very moment, cannot spare extra income to buy such large quantities. Jim posits that Tiendita offers small quantities at lower prices to make its produce affordable to customers with low levels of disposable income.

Because, as Jim stated, neighborhood residents, "do shop [around] because they have to spend their money where it's most needed or what is most benefit to them," Tiendita del Barrio prioritizes offering produce at relatively-consistent prices so that residents will continue to shop at the store. In addition to understanding what customers

will buy and how much they will pay for it, this store sustains its business by lowering its operating costs to continue to profit from selling what might be considered a less-than-profitable commodity.

At the intersection of Linda Vista Road and Ulric Street in Linda Vista sit two commercial buildings that are occupied by small businesses including beauty salons, record stores, a drug store and a liquor store. A road with an entrance off Ulric Street runs between these two buildings, leading down a steep hill to an area behind both of the buildings. The road ends at the bottom of the hill, where a small parking lot and two stores lie completely hidden from the street above. One of these small stores is Gabi's Produce. The size and limited selection of this store might classify it as a convenience store, but it contains none of the food typical of convenience stores—no potato chips, no soda, no liquor. Through utilizing the same tactics employed by Jim at Tiendita del Barrio, this small store stays afloat while offering affordable produce to the community.

The store occupies one room inside of the strip mall and an open-air shed attached to the side of the building. Within the wooden, slatted shed, produce sits on metal utility shelves and in packing boxes, which line the floor in front of the shelves and just outside of the door. Inside the small, crowded room sit a wooden cabinet with pan dulce and tortillas, shelves of canned and dry goods, and two small double-door refrigerators to hold a small amount of cheese, milk, greens and herbs. The store is owned and run solely by Lupe, who has been operating a number of stores in Linda Vista (and, at times, in Clairemont, an area west of Linda Vista) for 14 years.

Lupe has sustained his business through employing the same cost-limiting tactics as Tiendita del Barrio, but to an even greater extreme. Lupe has no paid

employees, although his high-school-aged children and a family friend sometimes cover the store while he runs errands. The small space in the indoor room and the open air space for the produce minimize the cost of refrigeration. The open shed also allows Lupe to move larger boxes of produce such as melons or squash to the outside space when these items are cheaper, in season, or in higher demand. All items are sold loose, allowing the few-but-frequent clients to purchase as few or as many items as their budget permits. Finally, the store no longer advertises, even though it did use neighborhood fliers when Lupe's first business opened. Lupe explained that eliminating this expense is one way that he keeps prices low for his customers:

> Primeramente cuando inició mi tiendita, inicié con fliers. Empece a regar toda Linda Vista [con] fliers. Y la gente nos ayudó, porque venía. Subía muy poquito de ganancia, para mantenernos de hacer clientes. Y hasta la fecha, mi margen de utilidad, o la ganancia, me subió muy poquito. Cuando otras tiendas sube mucho, con la renta o los empleados, yo no. Yo siempre les trato de subirlo un poquito menos.
>
> [When I first started my store, I started with fliers. I littered all of Linda Vista with fliers. And the community helped us, because they came. My mark-ups were very low, so that we could keep gaining customers. And to this day, my mark-ups are very low. Other stores mark up a lot, with the rent and employees, but not me. I always try to mark up a little less.]

Lupe limits his expenses in such as way that, "No más gano para la renta, y para mis biles, nada más" ["I just profit to pay the rent and my bills, that's it."] and thus has few causes for raising his prices unexpectedly. By keeping his overhead low and his prices consistent, he can provide a reliable supply of affordable produce to his customers and maintain a consistent base of loyal patrons.

All managers interviewed for this project echoed this entrepreneurial plan of maintaining low produce prices so that customers return to shop at the store. They, like

Carlos at the small grocer Linda Casita, expressed the belief that customers are largely motivated by low prices:

> Well, we try to, of course, to make most of the customers to leave happy with the price, with the product. That would be our goal, you know, to bring them back. If they come in once, next time they need to buy something really quick and at an affordable price, they'll say, "ok, let's go to that place." Ok, that would be our goal, to make people come back […] not just to come once and just say, "Oh, ok. I got one today but I won't be back because it was too expensive, because it was a bad quality, because the service was really bad." So we don't want that. We want everything to be nice as possible.

However, examining the situation in Linda Vista suggests that this might not be the whole story. This community presents a paradox because the Vietnamese supermarket Thuan Phat sits at the center of the neighborhood. If supermarkets are the best option for purchasing groceries at low prices, why does Linda Vista contain so many small grocers and convenience stores with produce?

Interviews with Lupe and Carlos, in addition to informal interviews with a number of community residents, suggest that cultural factors may play as much of a role as price in affecting where people decide to shop for groceries. With the exception of the one aisle devoted to "Mexican Food," most of the products at Thuan Phat (including the large selection of meat and seafood) were not labeled in Spanish and were infrequently labeled in English. On a number of visits to this supermarket, no cashiers on duty seemed willing or able to speak Spanish and few seemed willing to speak English. This might have contributed to the general perception by Mexican residents that store employees are rude. Also contributing to this negative image is the fact that the supermarket closed down in 2008 for remodeling when new management bought the store. Regardless of the improvements made to the supermarket, it is possible that this

negative reputation has persisted for the new management. This general avoidance of Thuan Phat by Mexican residents due to cultural differences may explain the operation of multiple small businesses catering to Mexican cuisine, more than the generally low prices that these stores offer.

The findings of this chapter begin to challenge the superiority of supermarkets over small stores, namely, the ability of supermarkets to benefit from economies of scale when purchasing produce and then give lower prices to customers. Interviews with store managers in Barrio Logan and Linda Vista suggest that the low prices for their produce items result less from the wholesale cost at which they buy their produce and more from the importance that these managers place on offering affordable produce. Because managers understand that their customers want cheap produce, they either reduce the item's mark-up to use it as a promotional item or cut other operational costs in order to limit mark-ups on all produce items. These methods by small grocers show that a mark-up on every item is not guaranteed and may not be calculated with a uniform formula. These alternative pricing structures keep small store prices competitive with the economies of scale supposedly available only to chain supermarkets.

5. Mexican Cuisine in a Modern Enclave

Public health studies point to an adoption of an American diet as a primary reason for high rates of obesity and diabetes among Mexican immigrants in the United States. But, what exactly defines an American diet? And how does it differ from a Mexican diet? Who is qualified to create and impose such definitions?

One way to define a cuisine is to ask the people who eat it. In 2007, Peter Menzel and Faith D'Aluisio released their book *Hungry Planet: What the World Eats*. This book contains photographs of representative families from different countries with all of the food that they eat in a week. A comparison of the family photos taken in California and Mexico begins to reveal the difference in food that make up each family's diet. With the exception of a couple potatoes, bananas, apples, grapes and oranges, the family in California is surrounded mostly by packaged foods, including frozen pizza, corn dogs, French fries, pretzels, and even rice out of a box. In stark contrast, the family in Mexico dedicates more than a quarter of its table space to fruits and vegetables such as avocados, tomatoes, mangos, limes, guavas, chayote, melon, dried and fresh chiles, and onions. Alongside this produce sits other fresh items such as buñuelos, tortillas, rice and eggs. While this comparison is far from scientific, the visual contrast between the mostly fresh food in Mexico and mostly processed food in the United States begins to illustrate the disruption in culinary practices that Mexican immigrants might experience upon settling in the United States.

In the case of Mexican cuisine, this food is not only defined by the expansive geographical borders of Mexico, but also by the *place* in which the food is purchased, namely the *central de abastos*. With a *central de abastos* in every large town and city in

the country, the market is the place in which the fruits and vegetables (not to mention meat and tortillas, cheese, mole and spices) of a family's daily meals are purchased. The influence of this marketplace in Mexican culture and cuisine is seen in the environment of many of the stores in these two neighborhoods. In Barrio Logan and Linda Vista, two *mexicano* enclaves, the store managers also ask their customers what they eat to determine what to sell in their store. This sense of cultural normalcy of small stores and personal relationships with storeowners differs greatly from a supermarket, which, compared to smaller neighborhood stores, is illogical, sterile, and impersonal.

The history of ethnic enclaves in the United States shows that this environment is not unusual. European immigrants and other groups like the Chinese and earlier waves of Mexican immigrants all experienced enclave economies made up of small businesses like those in Barrio Logan and Linda Vista. However, these Mexican enclaves, like Asian communities, persist as an effect of two processes. First, immigrant replenishment reinforces cultural ideas of Mexican cuisine, hindering reinterpretations of this cuisine that might be influenced by life in the United States. Also, San Diego's historical connection with Baja California communities helps *mexicano* immigrants maintain ties with people still living in Mexico, despite incorporation of these immigrants into U.S. society. As a result, the persistence of these ethnic enclaves that place importance on the *mercado* as a place to purchase food create an alternative economic sphere in which small stores respond to the demands neighborhood residents for produce. This, as a result, provides access to healthy food for low-income households, allows immigrants to hold on to their own ideas of cuisine, and limits the assimilation of immigrants to the unhealthy diet of American society.

A Comparison of *Mexicano* Enclaves

Barrio Logan and Linda Vista can be considered *mexicano* enclaves because both have significant and visible communities of *mexicanos*, whether immigrants from Mexico or subsequent U.S.-born generations that have chosen to retain their Mexican identity. According to the 2000 Census, Barrio Logan's population was 75 percent Latino, with *Mexicanos* making up 93 percent of the foreign born. Individuals born in Mexico also form 37 percent of total neighborhood population. The result is that *mexicano* culture predominates as the non-U.S. culture influencing the daily life of neighborhood residents. Most of the churches focus on the Latino and Mexican residents in Barrio Logan and nearby communities. The stores lining the streets frequently have signs in Spanish or reference places in Mexico (e.g. Frutería Nayarit).

While Linda Vista is a more diverse community, it still has a significant Latino and Mexican population. Latinos make up 36 percent of the population, with Latin American immigrants forming 43.7 percent of the foreign-born population in the community. *Mexicanos* constitute 40 percent of the foreign-born population, so this group also functions as the predominant Latin American culture in the neighborhood. Additionally, immigrant groups from the Asian continent make up 21.7 percent of total population, more than a quarter (26 percent) of which are Vietnamese. This community can be considered an immigrant enclave with two large, distinct groups, which is visible in the types of stores that operate in the neighborhood.

This diversity in neighborhood residents creates the diverse food environment found in this neighborhood. In and around the main shopping center sit many Asian stores and restaurants, marketing jewelry, clothing, money transfers, and cuisines from

the Philippines, Vietnam and Thailand. The community also has a number of establishments either lacking a specific ethnicity or that are more associated with mainstream U.S. culture, such as George's Supermarket, Jack in the Box, and KFC. The many Mexican stores around Linda Vista are smaller and some are more hidden, possibly due to the smaller percentage that this group represents compared to the neighborhood as a whole. These are grocery stores, but also include a taquería on the corner of Ulric Ave and Linda Vista Road, as well as a food truck that sits on Linda Vista Road on Tuesday nights. Linda Vista's geographical isolation, created by its location on the edge of Kearney Mesa, produces an enclave-like environment that forces residents either to rely on the stores located in the neighborhood or to exert extra energy to drive or take the bus down through the surrounding canyons to reach other neighborhoods.

The difference in characteristics among the stores serving *mexicanos* in Barrio Logan and in Linda Vista reflects the degree in which these enclaves of *mexicanos* are isolated from or incorporated into the larger city of San Diego. Because Linda Vista is not widely known as a Mexican neighborhood (or at all), the businesses serving *mexicanos* are small in size with smaller quantities of items because the clientele live only in Linda Vista or occasionally come from nearby Clairemont Mesa. Carlos at Linda Casita explained that 95 percent of his customers live in Linda Vista and about half of them walk to the store. Lupe at Gabi's Produce stated that many of his customers come from Clairemont Mesa (in addition to the many that walk from their homes in Linda Vista) because they were customers of his when he ran another store in that neighborhood.

In contrast, the grocery stores in Barrio Logan are much bigger, with greater amounts of produce because, customers from around the city travel to Barrio Logan to buy from these stores, in addition to serving Latinos and *mexicanos* in the neighborhood. The store managers at Fareway Market and El Arbolito both stated that they attracted Hispanic and Mexican customers from outside the neighborhood partly because of their reputation for good Mexican products, but also because of the stores' proximity to Interstate 5 and to the trolley lines that run through the neighborhood. Omar at El Arbolito explained that, while 95 percent of his customers are Mexican, not all the clientele hails from the neighborhood:

> We've got people coming from, well, with us because we have a service meat counter, people come for our meat from San Ysidro, all the way to Crest, to, you know east, west, you know, south. Yeah they come from everywhere all the way for our meat. We're actually on the Internet. The really fresh carne asada.

The existence of "really fresh carne asada" in this Barrio Logan grocery store illustrates how a concentration of an ethnic group within a geographic area can build and sustain a demand for an ethnic cuisine. Omar explained that he established the store on the corner of 25th Street and Imperial Avenue because of the large Hispanic market in the neighborhood. When asked if this is the customer that he is trying to cater to, he responded, "It's just the barrio, it's just the area. Yeah, of course I try to cater to them, because this is where they live." This would suggest that the store sells carne asada because customers living in Barrio Logan and Logan Heights demand it.

However, Barrio Logan's reputation as a *mexicano* community throughout San Diego also creates a market for El Arbolito and its carne asada *outside* of the neighborhood. Customers seeking carne asada are more likely to focus their search on

this particular neighborhood because it is known as a neighborhood of *mexicanos* and will likely have the ingredients for this cuisine. In contrast, few *mexicanos* would travel long distances to a store in Lincoln Park or Linda Vista—both neighborhoods that are proximate to freeways and could have good sources of carne asada—because they are not typically associated with such a *mexicano* ethnicity.

Local Stores and Definitions of Mexican Cuisine

In addition to meat, produce plays a large role in Mexican cuisine, especially the fruits and vegetables that originate from that region of the world. When asked about the most profitable departments of El Arbolito, Omar explained:

> Meat and the produce next. Everything else sells, everything complements everything. But always—most people who come here, I would say about 80% of our customers who shop here, cook daily. They cook the food fresh. They want fresh produce and they want fresh meat. And that's why they come, because we offer that. It's not on canned food. We're not high, we're a little bit average of prices around. But there's companies—we used to buy deals and kinda give it away just to bring the customers but you don't really make money. But you make your money in the produce and meat.

The produce sold at El Arbolito includes many of the fruits and vegetables representative of Mexican cuisine: mangos, plantains, chayote, nopal, papaya, tomatillos, pasilla peppers and chiles, and yucca are all available in the produce section of this store.

Overall trends among stores in three neighborhoods indicate that Linda Vista and Barrio Logan have more sources for produce items common to Mexican cuisine. Cilantro was found at every store with a refrigerated section in Linda Vista and Barrio Logan and could not be found at half of the produce sections in Lincoln Park.

Tomatillos are also more frequently sold in the *mexicano* neighborhoods and sold in larger quantities in Barrio Logan. Chiles, poblanos, and pasilla peppers could be found at all stores in Linda Vista and Barrio Logan. Chayote and mango were more commonly found in Mexican neighborhoods than Lincoln Park. Finally, the presence of guayaba, nopales, jicama and epazote generally correlated with Mexican stores. The largest stores in the two Mexican neighborhoods sold jicama, but, in Lincoln Park, it existed only at Food 4 Less, which had only a couple for sale. Nopales and epazote were found only at *mexicano* stores and could not be found even in the large supermarkets.

These items, and other fruits and vegetables play a large role in the dishes that make up Mexican cuisine – the jugos, ensaladas, tamales, tacos, enchiladas, tortas, menudos and desayunos that represent that sustenance for the millions of *mexicanos* who live within and outside of the borders of the country of Mexico. The definition of "cuisine" or of Mexican cuisine is far from universally agreed upon, as the typical foods eaten within Mexico vary greatly by region. This study will work off of Sidney Mintz's definition of cuisine from his book *Tasting Food, Tasting Freedom* (1996), which places less emphasis on specific geography and more on the collective ideas of a social group. He explains that national cuisines are rare, since a cuisine is not merely a collection of dishes:

> But the foods of a country do not, by themselves, compose a cuisine. Cuisines, when seen from the perspective of a people who care about the *foods*, are never the foods of a country, but the foods of a *place*. The place may be quite large – Emilia Romagna, or Béarn, or Bavaria – but it is a geographically definable place with some sort of borders. Its size will be determined partly by social and not geographical considerations. The foods that compose its cuisine come from that place. (Mintz 1996: 95-96 emphasis original)

For Mintz, a food is not Mexican simply because it originated within the borders of Mexico or inside of a restaurant that labels itself "Mexican" (e.g. Taco Bell). More importantly than the origin of the food in the cuisine, the community that prepares and eats the food determines what constitutes a cuisine:

> I think a cuisine requires a population that eats that cuisine with sufficient frequency to consider themselves experts on it. They all believe, and *care* that they believe, that they know what it consists of, how it is made, and how it should taste. In short, a genuine cuisine has common social roots; it is the food of a community – albeit often a very large community. (Mintz 1996: 96 emphasis original)

In the case of Mexican cuisine, as with many other countries, the *place* defining the food is two-fold. For immigrants in the United States, Mexican cuisine is first the food of the collectively-imagined space within the geographical borders of Mexico, whether it is an acceptance of all regional cuisines or an emphasis on one particular region within this country. Secondly, in addition to the geographical origin of the recipes and ingredients, this cuisine can also be defined by the almost universal social *place* in which *mexicanos* typically obtain the ingredients for these Mexican dishes, namely the *tianguis, central de abastos, el mercado*.

With a *central de abastos* in every large town and city in Mexico, the market is the physical and social place in which the Mexican family typically purchases the fruits and vegetables (not to mention meat and tortillas, cheese, mole and spices) for their daily meals. It also provides source of the other non-edible products used by a household, such as kitchen appliances, shoes, clothing, and even party supplies. The appearance of one *central de abastos* is notably similar to most other markets throughout the region or country. The market either occupies long rows of temporary

outdoor tents or a permanent, expansive, open-air structure, usually lit by large florescent lights. Individual vendors selling out of small and large stalls fill their tables, counters, and shelves to the brim with pyramids of fresh fruit and vegetables, buckets of prepared mole or ground spices, baskets of dried chile, bags of nueces, or stacks of freshly-prepared tortillas. While the prices for these products are often predetermined, bargaining frequently occurs between customers and vendors. Such negotiations can lead to mutually-beneficial relationships between customers and vendors; when money is tight for both, this cultural capital helps in buying the food necessary to feed a family and necessary to make a sale to support a small business.

Jugo stands, taquerías, tamale vendors and torta stands provide meals and refreshment for shoppers and a gathering place that provides another social dimension to this economic environment. Indeed, the *tianguis* is social place for women to gather, families to shop and eat, and for children to play, either once a week on Sundays, or sometimes every day. This economic organization of individual vendors exists even in smaller towns without a central de abastos. Typically, a collection of smaller stores that specialize in certain goods, such as a panadería, tortillería, frutería, carnicería, ferretería or tienda de abarrotes, serves the needs of community members in a central location within the town. In both cases, common all around Mexico is the sale of culinary foods and ingredients by an independent vendor who has a relationship with the customers that patronize her or his store.

The influence of the *mercado* in Mexican culture and cuisine is seen in the many types of small stores in these two San Diego neighborhoods and the types of products that these stores provide. Barrio Logan has a great number of small businesses that

specialize in one just one line of products, as opposed to the presence of one or two large supermarket that try to provide all items under the same roof. These specialized stores include fruit and juice stores, tortillerías, dulcerías, panaderías, seafood markets, and carnicerías. Taquerías also dot the neighborhood, some with their own trucks to sell on the street after dark. In addition to selling food, independent stores that specialize in household and party supplies like piñatas abound on Logan Avenue and Imperial Avenue.

The grocery stores in both neighborhoods feel either like a large market or a small stall at a central de abastos. Tiendita del Barrio is an open-air structure illuminated by florescent lights. It has long wooden shelves with large amounts of produce, beans, nuts, dried chiles, and a deli, all organized in manner reminiscent of a *mercado* in Mexico. In Linda Vista, Gabi's Produce, Dulcería and Frutería Díaz, and the Flower and Produce Stand resemble individual vendors at a typical market. These businesses occupy small spaces (one or two small rooms) that are filled with shelves of produce, dried chiles, and other Mexican items like canned tomato sauce, tortillas, and pan dulce. Almost all of the stores in Barrio Logan and Linda Vista have only one employee to check out customers, which fosters a sense of personal connection between the store and its clientele. Dedicating one person to interacting with clientele creates an atmosphere more conducive to eliciting comments and suggestions from customers, and also makes bargaining more possible, which has been observed on occasion at the smaller stores.

These cultural norms of purchasing culinary ingredients in small stores and developing mutually-beneficial relationships with store employees differs greatly from

a supermarket, which, compared to smaller neighborhood stores, appears illogical, sterile, and impersonal. As opposed to visiting a carnicería to buy meat, a panadería for bread, or a ferretería for a household supply, a supermarket puts all of these under one roof. Based on my observations and experiences at the Food 4 Less in Lincoln Park, this seeming benefit to customers—eliminating the need for trips to multiple stores—creates a disorienting experience. Instead of feeling certain about where to find meat in a carnicería, for example, the shopping trip becomes scavenger hunt through the aisles to search for each necessity. Even following the signs (rarely written in Spanish) may or may not lead to the desired purchase. The best hope is to find one of the few employees around the store to ask about the location of the item. However, this employee can rarely speak to the quality of an item, or act on a request for something that the store does not carry.

The sterile, warehouse-like environment of a typical supermarket prohibits the possibility of a sensory experience similar to buying items in a *mercado*. Most items sold in a supermarket (including some produce) are placed in packaging, such as plastic wrap, cans, or cardboard boxes, so one cannot see the actual color of much of the non-produce items or feel its texture, which is very important for herbs and spices, cheeses, or baked goods. This also prevents customers from perceiving the odors of spices or meat sold in the deli. Finally, the general quiet of the expansive space within the supermarket contrasts greatly with the auditory environment associated with a Mercado—loud traditional or popular music, the sounds of families conversing, and the back and forth of bargaining between customers and vendors.

Once the desired items in the supermarket have been found, the process of purchasing goods from a supermarket is very different from paying at a *central de abastos* or an *abarrotes*. The supermarket contains multiple check-out lanes, almost always with lines of people waiting (usually impatiently) to be served by the checkers. The people working at the check-out lanes rarely work in the same lane at the same time of day, ensuring that customers will not recognize their check-out clerk when buying their groceries. This prevents the development of any personal relationship between a customer and employee and eliminates the possibility of bargaining for a more affordable price.

In fact, a situation observed at Food 4 Less in Lincoln Park demonstrates this effect almost perfectly. While waiting in a check out line, a customer ahead of me in line refused to finish purchasing the groceries that he had brought to the check-out line, commenting rather loudly that the "place was too expensive." No store employee offered to lower the cost for the customer in order to keep his business, so none of the items were sold. In addition to illustrating the lack of relationship between the customer and this supermarket, this situation demonstrates the fact that the supermarket, being a large corporation that can spread economic risk among multiple retail locations, has no need for responding to the demands of its clientele to ensure that each and every one of its customers is satisfied with a shopping experience.

This stark contrast between the environment of a *central de abastos* and a U.S. supermarket varies with the characteristics of the particular supermarket in which an immigrant chooses to shop. Many local and regional chain supermarkets in the United States target Latinos around the country, such as Food City and Ranch Market in

Arizona, Cermak Produce in Chicago, and González Northgate Market in Southern California. While the interiors of national, mainstream chain supermarkets like Food 4 Less and Albertsons can seem very disorienting (even for a native English speaker), these Latino supermarkets, such as the González Northgate Market located three miles east of Barrio Logan, often have a interior that is reminiscent of a large *tianguis* in a Mexican town. Mariachi music plays loudly over the speakers as customers travel through high stacks of produce, well-marked tortillería, panadería, carnicería sections, and other aisles of Mexican and American products. These markets are frequently just as large as mainstream supermarkets, but the layout of these Latino supermarkets feels more like a collection of small stores within one large building, rather than a large collection of products organized idiosyncratically on the shelves of long aisles.

This supermarket shopping experience also varies depending on the background of each particular immigrant. Individuals from larger towns and cities in Mexico will have previous experience shopping in supermarkets, as locations owned by Wal-Mart, Soriana, Costco, Safeway, and Grupo Chedraui have cropped up around the country in recent decades. However, immigrants from small towns in rural areas must go to much greater effort to reach a supermarket than to shop in a local abarrotes or *tianguis* and thus are less likely to be familiar with the expansive mazes of large chain supermarkets. This is especially the case among immigrants from Oaxaca, which is largely made up of small towns and has historically been more economically isolated from modernization projects taking place in other parts of the country. This contrast in store sizes between Barrio Logan and Linda Vista reflects the variation in shopping experiences of immigrants from Mexico. Many of the *mexicanos* who live in Linda Vista come from

Oaxaca, and might prefer shopping in small stores over large supermarkets. In contrast, many of the grocery stores in Barrio Logan are larger and have multiple departments, such as tortillerías and carnicerías. This suggests that the *mexicanos* who shop in Barrio Logan are likely to come from larger towns or to have spent more years in the United States and so feel comfortable shopping at these larger grocery stores.

Ethnic Enclaves and the Creation of Local Economies

The history of ethnic enclaves in the United States shows that this environment is not unusual. Earlier waves of immigrant groups, including the Irish, Italians, Jews, Germans, Greeks, Chinese and earlier waves of Mexican immigrants all supported enclave economies made up of small businesses that provided food to these communities. Donna Gabaccia in *We are What We Eat: Ethnic Food and the Making of Americans* (1998) argues that immigrant groups placed a high value on culinary traditions because of the symbolic importance of food. She states that, "To abandon immigrant food traditions for the foods of Americans was to abandon community, family and religion, at least in the minds of many immigrants" (54). Because a cuisine plays a large role in family, religious, and holiday celebrations, the dishes that form this cuisine represent more than simple sustenance. They represent one of the few aspects of the past that these groups were able to hold on to while settling into the United States.

Both economic and cultural factors compelled residents to purchase ethnic-specific ingredients from the small storeowners within their own neighborhood, rather than pursue more "American" foods from larger stores. Limited economic resources prevented immigrants from being able to afford many processed foods, even though the

late nineteenth century was a time when the modern food industry grew and processed foods spread throughout the country (Gabaccia 1998: 55). Religion also influenced the dietary and economic choices for some groups, like kosher laws for Jewish immigrants and customary dietary rules for Catholic days of observation (46-48). But Gabaccia argues that many residents continued the culinary traditions of their home countries as one of the few ways to retain their identity, which was eroded by many ways of living in the United States:

> New immigrants faced many changes over which they had relatively little control – where they would live, what kind of work they would do, which language they would be required to learn to speak. At least they could exercise control over their meals. This feeling of mastery may have initially overwhelmed any normal, counterbalancing interest in the varied foods of their new homeland. (Gabaccio 1998: 48)

Because of this desire for the cuisine of their homelands, a cultural demand existed within ethnic enclaves that could not be met by large corporations. Large companies could not meet this demand either because they either saw these communities as poor and unprofitable, or because they did not sufficiently understand the cuisines to provide the food that residents demanded (Gabaccio 1998: 63). As a result, ethnic businessmen predominated in the economy of these early enclaves, running small, family-based enterprises. These included direct sales from farmers, and enterprises by street-cart vendors, door-to-door salesmen (selling produce, milk, meat, or bread), and small grocers.

These businesses attracted customers and sustained their businesses in ways beyond offering low prices for their products. They used their cultural capital, such as a unique understanding of the community's culinary preferences, which allowed them to

offer residents what larger mass-produced food companies could not. The stores also attracted new customers, often the poorest, by offering credit that could be repaid at a later date. While this posed a risk for the store and those who depended on the income it brought in, it also provided a source of food for groups of people who often found themselves on the bottom of an unpredictable and unstable economic ladder. Finally, these businesses functioned as informal community centers, bringing in customers not only for low prices or highly sought after goods, but also to form and maintain relationships with other residents in the neighborhood.

The factors that compelled residents of ethnic enclaves to shop at local businesses are similar to the reasons mentioned by store managers and community residents for why residents of Barrio Logan and Linda Vista patronize their stores. Based on these interviews, these factors seem to develop a matrix that hinders people from shopping outside the neighborhood, and compels them to patronize local stores. First, a lack of access to personal transportation can prevent residents from leaving these neighborhoods. This could result either from insufficient income to purchase and maintain a private vehicle, or because a lack of documentation status eliminates the opportunity to obtain a drivers license. Since Linda Vista is very physically isolated from nearby neighborhoods, a lack of car or inability to drive turns leaving the neighborhood into a long and possibly arduous trip by bus, and not one to be taken on foot. This lack of access to a car, plus low levels of disposable income keeps low-income residents from going traveling many miles to Costco or Wal-Mart to purchase and transport food in large quantities.

Second, based on informal conversations with community members, a lack of documentation status may lead to a sense of insecurity about leaving familiar surroundings. Staying within the neighborhood and frequenting stores where all the employees look and sound like they are from Mexico can make grocery shopping a significantly less stressful experience, especially when stories abound of Immigration and Customs Enforcement raids in public places, such as elementary schools and Wal-Mart (Immigration Prof Blog 2010). General cultural differences between ethnic groups can also affect shopping practices within a neighborhood. This is especially apparent in the case of Latino residents avoiding shopping at the Vietnamese supermarket in the center of Linda Vista because of perceived language and cultural differences, which are discussed in the previous chapter.

The managers interviewed for this project explained that these factors convinced them to establish a store in Barrio Logan and Linda Vista. The stores cater to clientele who live in the neighborhood and who are Mexican or Hispanic. Jim at Tiendita del Barrio in Barrio Logan explained that most of his customers walk to the store:

> We opened the store down here in, like, 1998. And, we decided to build a little store for the Hispanic people down in this neighborhood. Most of the trade is here all walk-in trade. And, so we expressed a few items to find out what would sell and wouldn't sell here. And, so we carry most of the products that the Hispanic people will buy.

Carlos at Casita Linda in Linda Vista echoed this characteristic of his customers, indicating that not all customers rely on a car to travel to his store:

> EP: What would you consider to be the typical customer of your store?
>
> Carlos: Well, the other store is a little more [mixed] between all the races, but over here is mostly Hispanic, Mexican customers. The other store, you

> know, it's a variety of more nationalities and everything. But this particular one, mostly Hispanic, Mexicans.
>
> EP: How do they normally get to the store?
>
> Carlos: Well, that's funny because in this neighborhood people walk a lot to the store. A lot of people walk to the store. Sometimes you see the parking lot is empty but inside of the store you see there is a few people buying things. Fifty percent I would say is walking, other fifty percent is driving.
>
> EP: And they mostly live in this neighborhood?
>
> Carlos: Most, yeah, for this location I would say like 95% of the customers are from this neighborhood.

All of these managers assert that they "carry most of the products that the Hispanic people will buy" because this is the community that lives in the neighborhood. When asked how they figure out what these specific products are, each manager gave the same answer: the customers tell them. Lupe, who runs Gabi's Produce as the owner and sole employee, explained, "Solito los clientes me lo van pidiendo. Si no tengo, lo apunto y lo compro. [The clients just ask for it. If I don't have it, I write it down and I buy it.]" At El Arbolito, a larger store in Barrio Logan, Omar explains that the store dedicates an employee to ascertaining what customers want:

> We have a floor manager, but he's pretty much familiar with what people want. He's always there and people ask him, "Where's that?" [and he'll say] "Oh, I don't have it but I'll order it for you next week." But, pretty much everything in this store is what most people that come in the store [buy]. We're familiar with it, we've been doing this for 14, 15 years.

Omar's comment expresses a common theme among all the stores: serving the Mexican or Hispanic community for many years has allowed them to understand what people will and won't buy. For some managers, this understanding comes from having lived either in Mexico or in these neighborhoods for many years. Lupe and Carlos in Linda

Vista are both from Mexico, but have been in San Diego for more than 15 years. The floor manager at Fareway Market is from San Diego and has been in Barrio Logan for 11 years. For other managers with fewer years in the community, like Jim at Tiendita del Barrio, the process of determining neighborhood tastes has been a process of trial and error to determine what will sell and what will not:

> We've tried some different ideas that we thought that might work which haven't worked. […] Like, down here [in Barrio Logan], if you try to sell artichokes, it's a losing battle. If you try to sell asparagus, you might sell two bunches out of a case within, like, a week, week and a half. So, they're basic normal food buyers, potatoes, meat, squash, jicama, and their kind of mangoes, watermelon, Mexican papaya, plantain bananas. So, they're just like everyday people that just eat their own kind of stuff, and that's it.

Providing the products that the community demands helps these businesses sustain relationships with their customers. Lupe explained that many factors bring customers to his store, including his long-term relationship with customers:

> No, [tambien viene] mucha gente de Clairemont, porque ya tenia una tienda en Clairemont. No tengo a todo pero vienen aqui por los precios, por la calidad, por lo fresco, como diario asunto.
>
> No, a lot of people [also come] from Clairemont, because I once had a store in Clairemont. I don't have everything but they come here for the prices, for the quality, for the freshness, as a daily errand.

These comments not only illustrate that these managers are very familiar with the culinary preferences of their customers. They also indicate a relative stability in the types of foods that *mexicanos* purchase when living in San Diego. All of the managers pointed to their long histories serving *mexicanos* in the neighborhood as an explanation for how they know what residents demand. However, if the preferences of community residents did change frequently, the store's catering to a specific group of people for 12

or 15 years would not yield a greater understanding of what people will buy. This suggests that living in an enclave helps a group of people resist change in dietary and culinary habits, or at the very least leads to the persistence of these culinary ideas.

Replenishment and Maintenance of Mexican Cuisine

Although ethnic enclaves were a common feature among past immigrant groups in the United States, many of the European enclaves that thrived in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century declined after World War II. This decline occurred partly because of low levels of new European immigrants and partly due to the socioeconomic integration of "white ethnics" into an American society that grew less immigrant in character (Jimenez 2008). Immigration to the United States from Southern and Eastern Europe practically ceased after 1920 as a result of restrictive immigration laws passed in the early 1920s, the economic devastation of the Great Depression in the 1930s, and the violence of World War II in European countries. Additionally, many of the residents of European enclaves in the United States prospered from the economic growth of the 1940s and 1950s, attended college, married "non-ethnic" whites, and moved to suburban areas that lacked a specific ethnic identity (Jimenez 2008: 1528). The outcome was a fading of ethnic boundaries among European immigrant groups and thus the fading of physical boundaries determining where ethnic groups live, what they eat, and where they buy their food.

In contrast, Mexican enclaves, like many communities of Asian immigrants, continue to persist in San Diego and many other cities around the United States. This persistence is an effect of two characteristics specific to migration from Mexico. First,

the constant process of new immigrants arriving from Mexico reinforces cultural ideas of Mexican ethnicity and traditions within U.S. society. It also hinders reinterpretations of this culture by subsequent U.S.-born generations. Fitgerald and Jiménez (2007) refer to this constant process of new arrivals as immigrant replenishment and argue that this continuous replenishment of immigrants renews the supply of "ethnic raw materials" that guide ethnic practices in the United States (348). Jiménez (2008) explains that these new immigrants define what it means to be "authentically" Mexican for later generations of Mexican Americans, preventing the development of variations by those who identify as a part of the ethnic group. Thus, this replenishment of ethnic identity reinforces aspects of Mexican culture and makes more salient the boundaries between Mexicans and other ethnic groups within the United States.

This theory has only recently been applied to studies of assimilation and integration among Mexican immigrants and Mexican-Americans. Jiménez (2008) uses the concept of immigrant replenishment to explain Mexican-Americans' identification with a *mexicano* ethnicity in their daily interactions with community members and in their political opinions. Jiménez and Fitzgerald (2007) turn to this phenomenon to explain why the educational attainment among Mexicans in the United States appears on the surface to be much lower than educational attainment among U.S. whites (which they show is not actually the case). However, this theory has not yet been used to explain the persistence of ethnic/immigrant enclaves and ethnic cuisine within the United States. As new immigrants are attracted toward living in *mexicano* neighborhoods for a familiar environment and culture, their ideas about the foods (and

places) of Mexican cuisine sustain demand for these ingredients in these enclaves, even as more prosperous residents might leave for more "integrated" neighborhoods.

In addition to this contemporary arrival of *mexicanos* to San Diego, the second factor influencing the culinary ideas of *mexicanos* in these neighborhoods is the city's location next to Mexico and historical ties with Baja California communities. The location of the border 15-20 miles away has historically strengthened immigrant connections with Mexico, regardless of an individual's incorporation into U.S. society. Many of the *mexicanos* who settled in San Diego in the early 1900s came from towns in Baja California, and a flexible U.S. border policy in this period allowed these *norteños* to travel back frequently to nearby hometowns (Alvarez 1987: 46-47, 99-100). These physical and familial connections increased the influence of Mexican customs, traditions, and cuisine because family and friends living in geographical areas within the borders of Mexico were incorporated into the socio-cultural definition of *mexicano* communities living in San Diego. Alvarez (1995) explains that this experience is common in border communities all through the southwestern United States (457).

This physical, emotional, and technological connection to Mexico also influences contemporary immigrants, who come from areas farther south in Mexico, such as Oaxaca. Large communities of Oaxacans live in both Baja California, Mexico and in Southern Californian communities in the United States like San Diego, Vista, and Los Angeles. Cota-Cabrera, et al. (2009) point out that Oaxacans were recruited to work in agricultural and tourist areas in Sinaloa and Baja California in the late 1970s and 1980s as a part of the expansion of U.S. agriculture into northern Mexico. With the migration of later generations of Oaxacans directly to the United States, familial links

formed immediately across the Mexico-U.S. border. This physical and familial connection to Baja California—which, for those with documents, is more accessible by automobile than traveling to Oaxaca—and the increased technological connection to communities in Oaxaca through the Internet allow Oaxacan immigrants to maintain emotional ties to Mexico and retain the customs, including cuisine, that form their ethnic identity.

Thus, the continuous arrival of *mexicanos* to Barrio Logan and Linda Vista encourages the sale of ethnic produce and other Mexican ingredients in neighborhood stores in two ways. For the owners of stores in these communities, new arrivals of *mexicanos* replenish demand for produce, carne asada, chile seco, tortillas and pan dulce in neighborhood stores, making up for the loss of residents who might choose to shop outside of the area for economic or cultural reasons. Secondly, for the neighborhood residents who have been in the United States for a longer period of time, the arrival of new immigrants (along with increased ease of communication with family in Mexico) renews cultural ideas of Mexican cuisine within these U.S. communities. While the opinions of newcomers do not prevent reinterpretations of Mexican cuisine by *mexicanos* or other groups in the United States, they provide a source of authority on the elements that make a culinary dish or a shopping experience "authentic" (Jiménez 2008: 1530).

As evidence of this maintenance of culinary preferences, all of the managers interviewed for this study stated that the products that they sell in their stores have not changed in the last five years. However, in this same five years, food companies released over 3700 new food and beverage products, according to the Food and

Beverage Industry. A relative lack of influence by food distributors provides one explanation as to why no change has occurred in the products that these stores sell. While the two larger grocery stores in Barrio Logan work with distributors, Tiendita del Barrio and Gabi's Produce do not work with distributors from the food industry and choose to work directly with smaller wholesalers, commenting that the products promoted by large distributors do not sell well in their stores. Carlos at Casita Linda explained that purchasing from and listening to the advice of food distributors has not historically helped his store:

> EP: How do you determine what products your customers want?
>
> Carlos: Well, like I mentioned before, it's a Mexican store, so most of our products are Hispanic, Mexican products. And also the customers keeps on telling you, whatever they see on TV, they ask you for it, and so that's how we decide to bring that product. The customer requests, when we hear more than two or three customers asking for such item, that's when we decide to bring it.
>
> EP: What role do distributors play in what you decide? Do they influence your decision?
>
> Carlos: Well, yeah, they try to. And sometimes it works. Sometimes you decide on your own what you bring in and what not to.
>
> EP: How do they try to influence you?
>
> Carlos: Well, they try to tell you, oh, this particular item is selling very good, I don't know, somewhere in Los Angeles. It's a new product. Or things like that. They try to tell you what is good or what is not. And then as our experience for a few years now, we decide what to bring, what to sell. This guy might be lying or might be just trying to sell an item that is not moving too good. Otherwise, such product sells by itself. If it's very good, ourselves would be asking for that product, not them offering you that product.

This influence of consumer demands over distributor demands is visible when comparing the interior of Casita Linda with the interior of a supermarket like Food 4

Less. The small, free-standing building of Casita Linda contains a small meat counter; a produce section; a bulk section of chiles secos, baking supplies, and spices; a cabinet of pan dulce; and two refrigerators with milk, cheese, eggs, and Coca-Cola made in Mexico. A 15-foot-long shelving unit sits in the middle of the store. Packed on one side are bags of tortillas and chips, cans of beans, El Pato tomato sauce, salsas and hot sauce, and Bimbo bread. The other side has kitchen supplies that seem to come straight from a *central de abastos*: serving dishes, tortilla presses, tortilleras, a few cazuelas, one or two molcajetes and cleaning supplies with Spanish-language instructions. All customers pay at the one cash register at the front of the store, where the same two employees work every day of the week.

While all of the aforementioned products might exist at a Food 4 Less or Wal-Mart, the shelves in these supermarkets contain a large presence of new inventions from the world of processed food. Among jars of peanut butter or jam are plastic squeezable packages of peanut butter and jelly mixed together. In the freezer next to bags of frozen vegetables are French toast sticks with syrup already injected into the middle. The refrigerated section contains whole milk, but also four or five varieties of milk from non-animal sources and in a dozen different flavors. The influence of American food companies on the selections at supermarkets is noticeably absent in the smaller grocers in Linda Vista and Barrio Logan, insulating residents from this onslaught of culinary mutation.

Sidney Mintz, in his essay "Food and Its Relationship to Concepts of Power" illustrates the power inherent in the position of those who manage these stores because of their control over supply. According to Mintz, the ability to "supply" things:

> […] is also a vital source of power, not only because it may include some ability to bestow meaning, but also because meaning coalesces around certain relationships. Objects, ideas, and persons take on a patterned structural unity in the creation of ritual, as happened, for example, when high tea became a working-class eating custom. But it was the purveyors of the foods, the givers of employment, the servants of the state who exercised the power that made foods available. (Mintz 1995: 12)

In Mexico, the ritual of shopping for cooking ingredients at the *central de abastos* creates meaning around not only the food bought for culinary dishes, but also the idea of shopping as a social experience and the relationships that are formed with the persons who supply and sell these ingredients. As the key intermediary between distributors who want to promote ever evolving ideas of so-called American "cuisine[1]" and customers who may have limited retail options for purchasing food, these store managers have the power either to give in to the demands of economically powerful distributors or to those of low-income neighborhood residents.

The persistence of these ethnic enclaves that value the ingredients of their cuisine and the space in which they purchase this food creates an alternative economic sphere where small stores exist to respond to the demands of neighborhood residents, as opposed to the demands of large food distributors. The willingness of these stores to provide healthy culturally appropriate food allows low-income immigrants to hold on to their own ideas of cuisine. These communities illustrate one of the ways in which low-income immigrant communities can exert human agency to resist the process of coerced assimilation to the unhealthy diet and lifestyle of American society.

[1] See Chapter eight of Mintz (1996) for a discussion of the existence or absence of cuisine in the United States.

6. Conclusion

This thesis presents an alternative depiction of low-income neighborhoods in San Diego, one that challenges the description promoted in the academic literature. This literature equates the absence of a chain supermarket with a lack of affordable produce and, thus, declares areas without supermarkets to be "food deserts." Rather than finding low-income neighborhoods in San Diego to be spaces devoid of stores with healthy options, the predominantly immigrant neighborhoods of Linda Vista and Barrio Logan contain many stores with much affordable produce to offer.

Linda Vista and Barrio Logan have more stores with produce than Lincoln Park, both in raw total numbers and in the percentage of neighborhood stores with produce. The stores in these immigrant neighborhoods have more items of produce on average than in Lincoln Park, despite the presence of two supermarkets in this non-immigrant neighborhood. The selections at the independent stores contain more culturally appropriate items for both Mexican and Southeast Asian cuisines, and are almost as large as the supermarket in Lincoln Park, both in number of items and in the quantity of each item. The large selection of produce found at these independent grocers and small convenience stores challenges assumptions held by the academic literature, which claims that small grocers and convenience stores provide little-to-no produce and at typically higher prices.

In fact, the prices of produce items at smaller stores are either just as cheap as the prices at Food 4 Less in Lincoln Park or are not significantly more expensive than this discount supermarket. This finding begins to challenge the superiority of

supermarkets over small stores, namely, the ability of supermarkets to benefit from economies of scale in purchasing produce and give lower prices to customers. Interviews with store managers in Barrio Logan and Linda Vista show that the low prices for their produce items result less from the wholesale cost of the produce and more from the importance that store managers place on offering affordable produce. Because managers understand that their customers want cheap produce, they either mark it at or below cost to use it as promotional items or cut other operational costs in order to limit their mark-ups on produce items. These methods by small grocers show that they are able to take alternative measures to keep their prices competitive with the economies of scale supposedly available only to chain supermarkets.

Support for these stores stems from the importance of Mexican cuisine among residents of the communities of Linda Vista and Barrio Logan. Mexican cuisine not only emphasizes the fruits and vegetables that are grown around Mexico and used in traditional dishes, but also places great importance on customer relationships with those who supply these culinary ingredients—the small, independent vendors at local stores and the *central de abastos*. The store managers in these *mexicano* neighborhoods understand and respond to these culinary demands by providing ingredients at prices affordable for their low-income clientele. As new immigrants from Mexico settle in Barrio Logan and Linda Vista, these stores provide one source of support for immigrants and their children, who try to retain their ethnic identity by eating the traditional foods that come from this region.

Finally, the overall retail environment in Lincoln Park suggests that a supermarket location in a community does not equal real food access for neighborhood

residents. Because Barrio Logan and Linda Vista have no chain supermarkets within a mile of these neighborhoods, they would fall into the definition of a "food desert." However, the presence of a Food 4 Less on the edge of Lincoln Park would disqualify the community from this category. While this thesis and many others argue that the definition and use of this food desert category is misleading, the fact remains that the food environment in Lincoln Park does appear to be more like a "food desert," but would not receive any attention from policy makers who rely on the absence of a supermarket to determine which neighborhoods lack access to fresh food. The many efforts by community groups to start community gardens and farmers markets in Lincoln Park indicate a lack of satisfaction with current neighborhood retail options and point to both the future research directions and policy implications suggested by this project.

Future Research Directions

Within the area of Latin American Studies, this thesis shows that the persistence and concentration of Mexican cuisine in *mexicano* neighborhoods can support the sale of cheap and culturally-appropriate produce within these low-income neighborhoods. However, these communities in San Diego have the benefit of sitting within an established immigrant destination and lying within 25 miles of the border with Mexico. San Diego, overall, also contains more distinctive neighborhoods than other towns and cities in the United States, mostly due to its varied physical terrain, which geographically separates neighborhoods from one another. This physical separation may

hinder residents in attempting to shop outside of their neighborhood, thus creating a certain segment of the community that will opt to purchase food close to home.

Finally, the long history of *mexicano* communities in and around San Diego creates a climate more accepting of immigrants and non-Anglo ethnic groups than areas in the United States with shorter or less-welcoming histories of *mexicano* settlement (Phoenix, Arizona or small, Midwestern meat-packing towns such as Postville, Iowa come to mind). Future research should examine the neighborhoods in these newer or less-welcoming communities to determine if 1) immigrants from Mexico tend to form similarly concentrated communities and 2) if these newer communities in less-tolerant environments also foster an economy of small businesses to provide cheap produce. Or, if like many communities in Southern California, larger ethnic supermarkets, such as Northgate Market, tend to fill this "void" of produce.

Absent from this study are structured interviews with residents of these communities about their shopping habits, including where people shop and what they buy. Having gathered information about the location of stores and the produce offered within them, future studies are needed to learn about the perceptions of these stores among neighborhood residents and their priorities when deciding where to purchase their food. This information will help researchers, planners, and policy writers understand the ways in which residents interact with the stores in their community and how they decide when to shop near their home and when to leave the neighborhood.

Recent developments in Barrio Logan suggest that not all community residents perceive or are satisfied with the presence of produce. After twenty years of neighborhood lobbying for a supermarket in Barrio Logan, construction began at the

end of March 2011 to build a shopping center that will contain the Latino supermarket Northgate Gonzalez Market. The shopping center, named Mercado del Barrio, will sit in the middle of the neighborhood, where it is predicted that hundreds of residents will be able to walk to the store. While many of the current grocery stores in Barrio Logan have opened up during the twenty years since the creation of the Plan de Mercado del Barrio, there still appears to be visible community support for the construction of the supermarket. Another Northgate Market location on the south side of San Diego has been well received and some report that Logan Heights residents walk three miles to this location for much of their shopping (Florido 2011c).

Future research should be conducted into the perceptions and meanings of supermarkets across ethnic groups in the United States and within countries around the world. As discussed in early chapters of this thesis, a common narrative replays throughout academic and government literature, which promotes the benefits of supermarkets and connects them to the prosperity and integration implied by a suburban lifestyle. If, as one store manager argues, supermarkets like Northgate Market are not as affordable for low-income consumers as many would claim, are there other perceived benefits to having a supermarket in one's community, beyond low prices? Do supermarkets bring tangible benefits, like an increase in property values, or more abstract benefits, like a feeling of being socially and economically accepted into the mainstream U.S. society? More focus also needs to be directed toward this growing segment of ethnic supermarkets, including how they complicate ideas of assimilation, which historically have advocated for the fading of all cultures toward a predominantly

Anglo society. These ethnic supermarkets may represent the beginnings of a possible economic muliculturalism within the United States.

Policy Implications

The purpose of this thesis is not to argue that demand for produce does not exist in Lincoln Park, or that the retail environment of Lincoln Park represents all non-immigrant low-income neighborhoods in the United States. A number of factors that seem to foster the demand for small grocers in Barrio Logan and Linda Vista can provide insight into the obstacles preventing small grocers in Lincoln Park. While some of these obstacles may be cultural, a number of policy changes can remedy these problems as well.

One of the primary reasons for a lack of small businesses in Lincoln Park is a lack of small retail spaces for these stores. Other than a couple of shopping centers along Euclid Avenue, no available retail space exists in Lincoln Park for a small store to set up shop. Market Creek Plaza, the new shopping center where the Food 4 Less sits demands rent that has become too high to be supported by the limited clientele of a local neighborhood store (Florido 2010a). This financial barrier to establishing small grocery stores could be overcome by easing access to small-business loans for neighborhood residents and by reinstating a loan-assistance program that was previously carried out to assist with high rents at Market Creek Plaza.

A lack of older buildings (which are present and are utilized by many grocers in Barrio Logan and Linda Vista) results from the history of zoning on the southeast side of the city. Much of the land in Lincoln Park is zoned for residential use, leaving very

little mixed-use space for small stores. Also, in previous decades much of the non-residential area was zoned for industrial use, and many empty lots sit where truckyards and manufacturers used to operate (Florido 2011b). In fact, zoning issues still plague this area of San Diego, as the commercial zoning of many lots has prevented the establishment of community gardens on the southeast side of the city (Florido 2010b). Attention needs to be given to the ways in which local government can rezone this area and implement programs to support the creation of more affordable retail and gardening space within the community.

Finally, low-income communities are labeled "food deserts" and lack outside investment by large chain supermarkets because of the perception that poor consumers will not provide the large profits needed or wanted by food corporations. The fact remains that economic and political policies on the local and federal level have created a situation in which the food retail and production industries have been dominated by an ever-decreasing number of companies (Eisenhauer 2001). Political focus must be directed toward changing the policies and economic incentives that promote the construction of large chain supermarkets over smaller, independent businesses, which causes all consumers (rich, poor and in-between) to increasingly depend on a small number of retailers to supply the food that sustains us.

Appendix A: Neighborhoods of Study by Census Tract

Appendix A: Census Tracts Located within Study Neighborhoods	
Linda Vista	Census Tract 86, San Diego County, California Census Tract 88, San Diego County, California Census Tract 90, San Diego County, California
Barrio Logan	Census Tract 49, San Diego County, California Census Tract 50, San Diego County, California Census Tract 51, San Diego County, California
Lincoln Park	Census Tract 31.01, San Diego County, California Census Tract 31.11, San Diego County, California Census Tract 33.02, San Diego County, California
Source: U.S. Census Bureau Census 2000	

Appendix B: Maps of Neighborhoods of Study

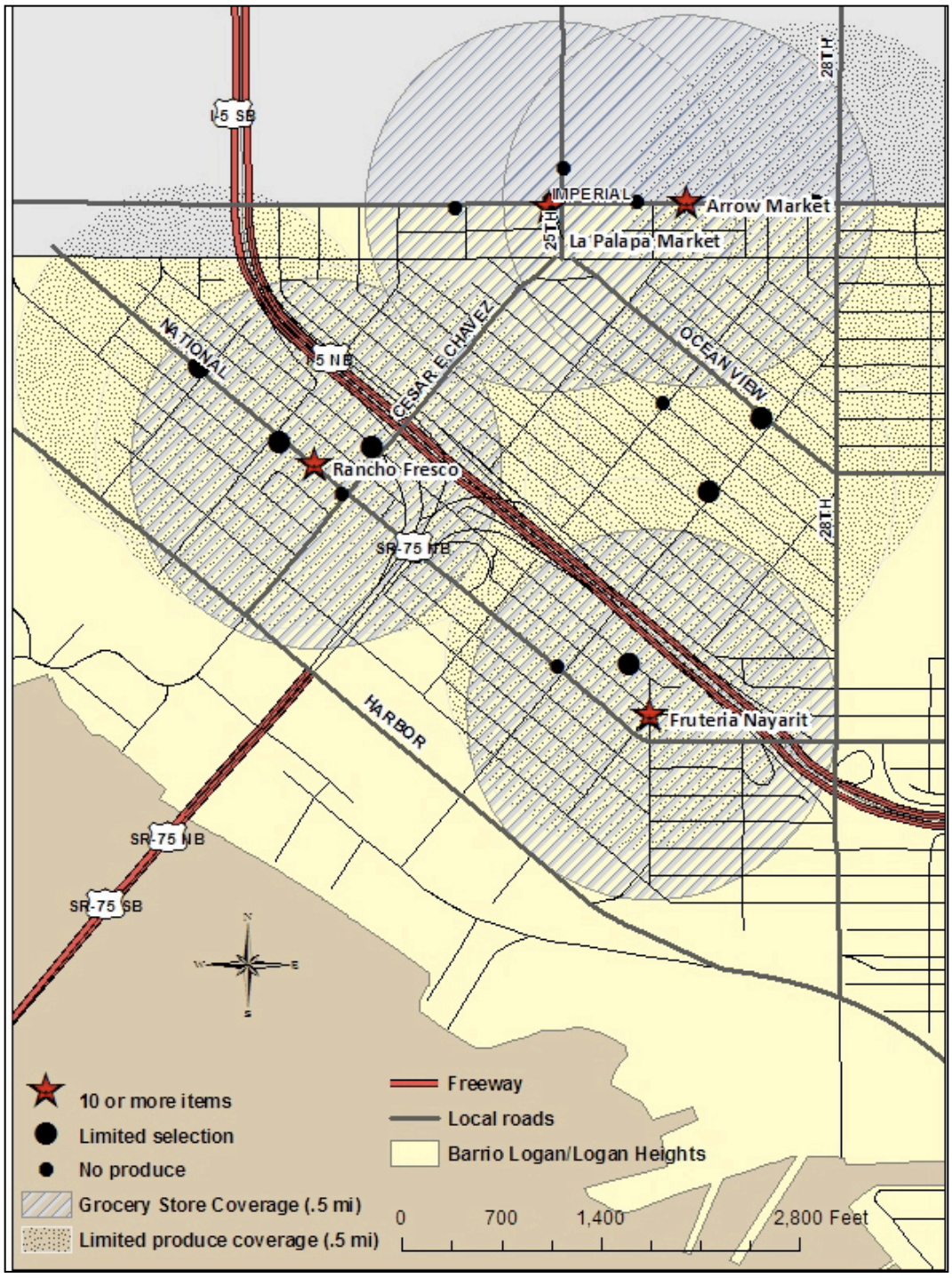

Figure 3.1 Location of Produce in Barrio Logan/Logan Heights

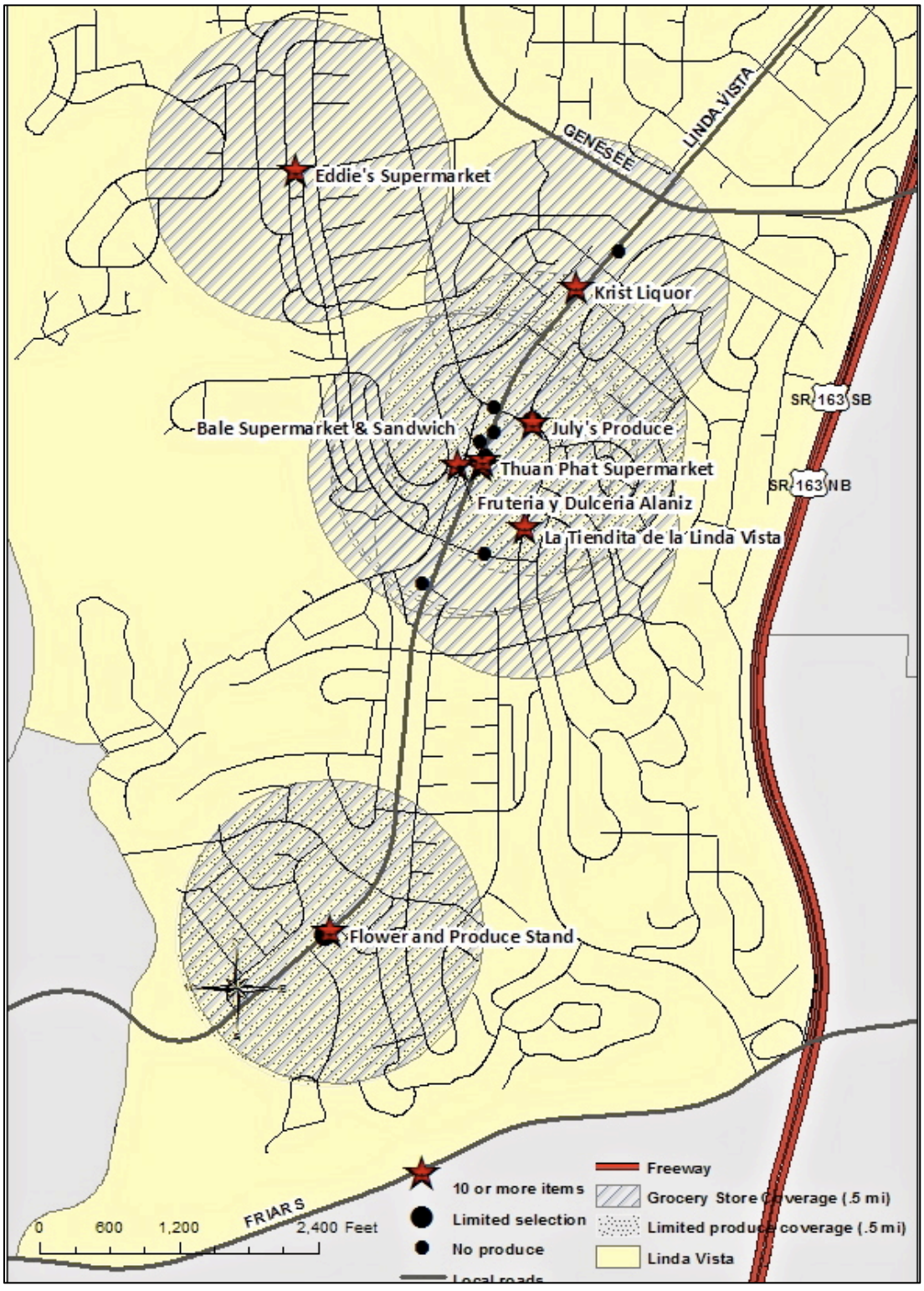

Figure 3.2 Location of Produce in Linda Vista

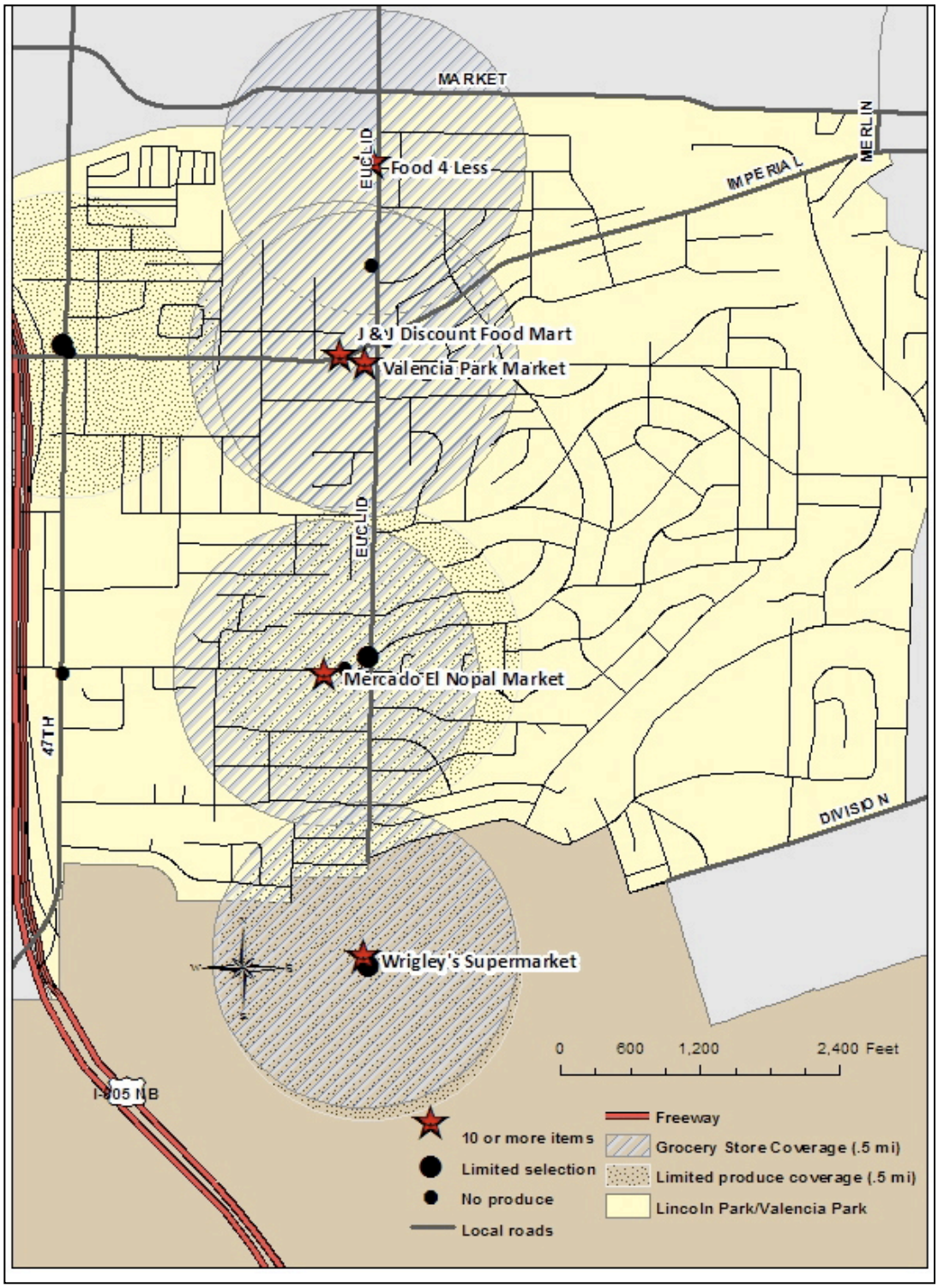

Figure 3.3 Location of Produce in Lincoln Park/Valencia Park

Appendix C: List of Semi-Structured Interviews Referenced

Interview Number	Interviewee (pseudonym)	Interviewee's Place of Work	Interviewee's Documentation and Immigration Status
1	Omar	Barrio Logan, San Diego, CA	migrant
2	Jim	Barrio Logan, San Diego, CA	US born citizen
3	Manuel	Barrio Logan, San Diego, CA	US born citizen
4	Lupe	Linda Vista, San Diego, CA	migrant
5	Carlos	Linda Vista, San Diego, CA	migrant

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