

## EXTENSION SNAPSHOT

Fulton-Mason-Peoria-Tazewell



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Following recent grocery store closings in Peoria, work ramped up to address healthy food options to all areas of the city. The process to fill the gap is multi-faceted and being worked on by a variety of people. U of I Extension assisted in a recent grocery store survey, analyzed the survey data, and studied macro trends in the grocery industry to identify trends and highlight potential changes in the future.

## Extension Staff Involved in Filling the Grocery Gap in Peoria

When two more grocery stores closed in 2018 in Southside and East Bluff Peoria neighborhoods, University of Illinois Extension staff joined the team of policymakers, nongovernmental organizations, and activists working to eliminate disparities in equitable access to healthy food. The process to fill the gap in access to healthy food in the City of Peoria is a challenge that is multi-faceted but began with conducting a grocery store survey. Local Extension staff with expertise in community and economic development, nutrition, and horticulture have played a role in addressing the issue and finding solutions.

Following the closure of the Kroger stores, an action group developed a series of meetings led by State Senator Dave Koehler. As a result of these meetings, participants in the Regional Fresh Food Council (RFFC) embarked upon a study to examine the impact of the closure on local residents and reveal potential factors that led to the closures.

“Extension’s role is woven throughout the survey process,” explained Kathie Brown, Extension CED educator. “I have been involved in the survey design, implementation and analysis. Our nutrition staff helped with survey collection and my colleagues on campus completed the secondary data analysis. I worked in partnership with Greater Peoria Economic Development Council to look beyond primary and secondary data collection, for additional insights into the macro trends of the grocery industry, numerous industry websites and reports were reviewed to identify trends and highlight potential changes in the future. Together we developed recommendations with input from RFFC.”

The study findings have just been released in the report *Filling the Grocery Gap in Peoria*. The document is available online through the Regional Fresh Food Council and is being shared at a community meeting set for July 10 at Minority Business Development Center, Peoria. A few conclusions and recommendations include:

- Create a network map
- Support and incentivize small scale development
- Conduct retention visits for food-based businesses, services, and projects
- Biannual neighborhood reports
- Revisit and update 2015 Local Foods Landmarks Report
- Inclusion of a regional food systems strategy and implementation plan in the 2020 CEDS
- Establish a full-time Value Chain Coordinator Position

Increasing access to and consumption of fresh, healthy foods is no simple task given our complex and globalized food system. This report is just one of the first steps. It aims to bring the local challenge of filling the grocery gap in underserved neighborhoods into focus with regional and national factors and industry trends. It also aims to provide foundational market analysis for public and private organizations and individuals inter-ested in pursuing the development of new grocery stores in Peoria’s underserved neighborhoods.

