

For Immediate Release: July 15, 2014

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Study: More than 500,000 Ohio children live in lower-income communities underserved by supermarkets

Lack of Access to Supermarkets Linked to Diet-Related Disease

COLUMBUS, OH – Nearly two million Ohio residents, including more than 500,000 children, live in lower-income communities underserved by supermarkets and other healthy food retailers. At the same time, a staggering 30.8 percent of Ohio children ages 10 to 17 are overweight or obese.

Finance Fund and The Food Trust, with support from the Ohio Regional Convergence Partnership, are releasing a new report, *Food for Every Child: The Need for Healthy Food Financing in Ohio* that documents the significant need for supermarkets and other healthy food retail in communities across the state. The report features a set of maps highlighting the connection between supermarket access, diet-related disease and neighborhood income levels at the state level and in multiple cities including: Akron, Cleveland, Columbus, Cincinnati, Toledo and Dayton.

Many Ohio communities have poor access to a supermarket and there are numerous neighborhoods where none exist. “This shortage of healthy food retail means that residents, particularly those in lower-income neighborhoods and rural areas, must travel out of their neighborhoods to reach the nearest store that sells fresh produce and other foods necessary to maintain a healthy diet,” said Finance Fund President and CEO James R. Klein.

The report finds that Ohio’s existing supermarkets are unevenly distributed, leaving a disproportionately high number of lower-income residents without access to healthy food. Lack of access to affordable and nutritious food has a negative impact on the health of children and families. Studies overwhelmingly indicate that people living in communities without a supermarket suffer from disproportionately high rates of obesity and diet-related diseases including diabetes, heart disease and hypertension, while

people living in communities with a supermarket are more likely to maintain a healthy weight. Supermarkets also serve as important economic anchors in communities, creating jobs and sparking community revitalization.

The study concludes that “Ohio must address the critical need for more healthy food retail in many communities.” *Food for Every Child* recommends that state and local governments in Ohio take the lead in developing a public-private response to this problem. City and state leaders, along with professionals from the supermarket industry, public health, economic development and civic sectors have met to identify the barriers to opening grocery stores in underserved areas and potential solutions.

The goal of this project is to ensure that all residents have access to the affordable, nutritious foods necessary to lead a healthy life. “Moreover, as supermarket development creates jobs and serves as a catalyst for additional investment and neighborhood revitalization, emphasis should also be placed on the economic benefits of such development,” Klein said. “This report is especially well-timed for public release, given the state’s other efforts to promote economic investment and reduce rates of diet-related disease.”

About Finance Fund (www.FinanceFund.org)

Finance Fund is a statewide, nonprofit financial intermediary. Since 1987, Finance Fund and its affiliates have invested more than \$296.4 million in housing, economic development, and community facility projects leveraging over \$1.2 billion. This investment was accomplished through 2,950 awards to community-based organizations throughout the state.

About the Food Trust (<http://thefoodtrust.org/>)

The Food Trust is a nationally recognized nonprofit dedicated to ensuring that everyone has access to affordable, nutritious food and information to make healthy decisions. Headquartered in Philadelphia, The Food Trust works with neighborhoods, schools, grocers, farmers and policymakers in the city and across the country to develop a comprehensive approach to improved food access that combines nutrition education and greater availability of affordable, healthy food.

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