

Food Sovereignty and Economic Policy in Charlotte, NC

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In this paper, I argue that community-wide strategies towards food sovereignty must be incorporated into discussions of economic policy in order to eliminate the problem of “food deserts.” In 2013, a Harvard University/UC Berkeley study ranked Charlotte #50 out of the 50 largest US cities for upward economic mobility. In 2015, Charlotte-Mecklenburg Food Policy Council’s State of the Plate research (for which I served as co-PI) revealed that despite focused attention to hunger relief, the number of Charlotte residents living in “food deserts” increased, even as the city’s median income increased. Within Charlotte and Mecklenburg County, multiple measures of food security map closely to race and poverty and, using the same measures as federal statistics, our rates of food insecurity for households with children are twice the national average. In order to change these persistent patterns around food security, I offer a case study analysis. First, I focus on examples from other metropolitan regions where government agencies, hunger relief agencies and food-related enterprises are incorporating economic development strategies into food sovereignty initiatives and the impacts of these strategies on food security measures. Next, I turn to examples from within Charlotte that offer the same potential and end with recommendations of specific policy measures that will support the expansion of successful food sovereignty initiatives that also drive economic development.