

January 28, 2024

Creating Access to Fresh Produce in the Food Deserts Within Grays Harbor County Washington

A Problem Definition Argument by Athena Ortega BA,FNC

This is to bring attention to the lack of access to fresh fruits and vegetables in Oakville, Washington, and neighboring small towns in Greys Harbor County. Oakville, with a population of about 728 and an area of 353 acres, lacks establishments offering fresh produce. Existing local businesses, including an espresso stand, a gas station with fried foods, a restaurant/bar, and a Dollar General, do not provide access to fresh produce.

Currently, there is no food bank in the area, and the options to access a grocery store with fresh foods involves a personal vehicle, or the Grays Harbor Transit, which runs a limited bus service through Oakville five times each way per day, Monday through Friday. The nearest grocery stores are in Rochester (6.6 miles to the East) and Elma (15 miles to the West).

To address the issue, I propose implementing a mobile food bank that rotates between the cities without fresh grocery in Grays Harbor County. This mobile food bank would ensure that residents have the opportunity to access fresh foods weekly. Additionally, it should include nutrition information with emphasis on the importance of fresh food and its correlation with health, along with recipes on preparation, storage, and preservation.

In conjunction with the mobile food bank, I suggest introducing agricultural programs in local schools, funded through USDA grants. These programs would focus on teaching farming, husbandry, gardening, and food preservation techniques. Colleges and Universities with agricultural programs can contribute by utilizing their resources and interns to guide and teach these skills, including the establishment of a community garden where students can learn to grow, harvest, and feed their communities.

Areas where fresh fruits and vegetables are absent often experience a higher rate of obesity, cardiovascular disease, and diabetes. The food environment of a community and the correlation of the health of its residents is evident. By providing immediate access to fresh produce and simultaneously educating the community on nutrition and sustainable food practices, we can adopt a comprehensive approach that aims to tackle health issues associated with food deserts.