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Dr. Zenk's research focuses on the social determinants of obesity, diet, and physical activity. Her goal is to identify effective policy and environmental approaches to eliminate racial/ethnic and socioeconomic inequities.

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**LINK UP ILLINOIS: ACCESS TO FRESH PRODUCE
IN BLACK & LATINO COMMUNITIES**
Introduction

The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP or "LINK" in Illinois) provides low-income households with financial assistance to obtain food at retail stores. Although blacks and Latinxs comprise 37.9% of SNAP recipients, many neighborhoods where they reside have limited access to healthy foods such as fruits and vegetables and an overabundance of ultra-processed foods (i.e. sugary drinks, chips, cookies, etc.). These neighborhoods tend to have fewer supermarkets, higher prices for fresh produce, and lower availability of culturally specific produce when compared to higher income and white neighborhoods. These food disparities are linked to lower dietary quality, higher rates of obesity, and diet-related chronic diseases. Farmers' markets are a promising strategy to increase access to fruits and vegetables in these communities. Furthermore, policies that incentivize SNAP benefits spending at farmers' markets may improve SNAP participants' access to fresh produce. LINK Up Illinois is one such program that seeks to increase the affordability and accessibility of nutritious foods sold at farmer's markets for SNAP participants by providing matching coupons (up to \$25) that increase their purchasing power.

This project was conducted in collaboration with Ana Clara Duran, a post-doctoral fellow from Sao Paulo Brazil. The purpose was to determine 1) the impact of financial incentives or matching coupons on sales utilizing SNAP benefits in Chicago farmers' markets; 2) if the impact of the program differs by neighborhood poverty level and racial/ethnic composition; and 3) if and how characteristics of farmers' markets vary across neighborhoods. Data are from 2011-2015.

Findings

- Farmers' markets tend to be located outside of black and Latinx neighborhoods. Of the farmers' markets in the city, 27% of these were in black neighborhoods and less than 8% were in Latinx neighborhoods.
- Farmers' markets in black and Latinx neighborhoods were generally smaller and offered fewer options, including fewer varieties of fruit. However, fruit and vegetable prices were similar or lower in black and Latinx neighborhoods when compared to prices in white neighborhoods.
- SNAP benefits were accepted in 84.3% of Chicago's farmers' markets, however only 68.6% of farmers' markets participated in the LINK Up Illinois Program.
- Financial incentives of \$25 had a positive effect on sales using SNAP benefits at farmers' markets. Lower financial incentives (\$10-15) did not raise SNAP spending. Stronger effects of the financial incentives were found in black neighborhoods.

Recommendations

Considering that over 48 million people in the US benefit from SNAP, LINK Up Illinois is a promising initiative to improve Illinois LINK participants' access to healthy foods at farmers' markets. To increase the currently low access and affordability of fruits and vegetables in black and Latinx neighborhoods, policy makers and local government officials should work to implement the following: more farmers' markets located in black and Latinx neighborhoods; 100% of farmers' markets accepting SNAP and participating in LINK Up Illinois; and \$25 financial incentives at farmer's markets as the norm.