

# FOOD STORE SELECTION STUDY

Funded by the Arkansas Center for Health Disparities

VOLUME 1, ISSUE 1

APRIL 2012

**THANK YOU FOR THE SUCCESS OF THE FOOD STORE SELECTION STUDY**



## UAMS FOOD STORE SELECTION RESEARCH TEAM

- Rebecca Krukowski, PhD
- Delia Smith-West, PhD
- Jean McSweeney, PhD, RN, FAHA, FAAN
- Carla Sparks, BS
- Marisha DiCarlo, MPH
- Valerie Thomas, BA



### An Overview: Development and Pilot-testing of a Questionnaire to Examine Factors Influencing Food Store Choice

Questions have been asked, answers were given, and analyses have been completed!

The University of Arkansas for Medical Sciences College of Public Health Food Store Selection Research Team would like to thank everyone (over 160 people!) who took part in every stage of the study from the focus groups and questionnaire development, to filling out the new Food Store Selection Questionnaire, over the two years of this project.

The UAMS research team became interested in developing this questionnaire because research has focused on how

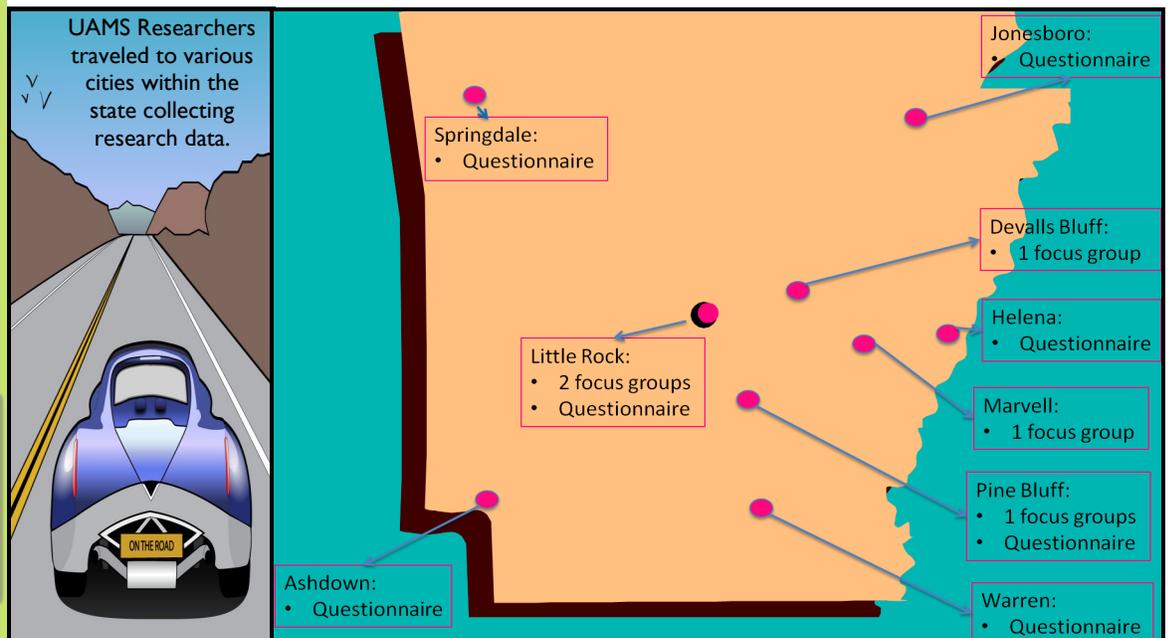
the closeness of food stores was linked with what foods people eat and how much they weigh; however, researchers were also noting that people rarely shop at the closest food store.



This led the UAMS researchers to wonder about the other reasons that lead people to choose a food store. They couldn't find a questionnaire that had been developed using community feedback and had been used in rural areas, so they decided to develop

this kind of questionnaire. Development of the questionnaire involved reviewing previous studies about food store choice, conducting 5 focus groups in both rural and more urban areas of Arkansas, and having 8 researchers and 12 community members review and suggest changes to the measure.

Finally the questionnaire was ready to be filled out to start to understand the reasons why people choose their primary food store! Initial testing of the 63-item questionnaire was done with 100 people from the community who did most of the food shopping for their family.



## Focus Groups Results: What Reasons are Important in Food Store Choice?



The project described was supported by Award Number P20MD002329 from the National Center on Minority Health and Health Disparities.



In the Food Store Selection Study, focus groups played an important role in providing the UAMS Research team with a better understanding of reasons for choosing a food store. A second goal was to use this information to develop a questionnaire for the next stage of the study.

The sites were chosen for the five focus groups to get a mix of urban and rural areas and a mix of focus groups consisting of Black and white participants. The 48 participants were recruited through established community ties across the state.

Four themes emerged from the focus groups as important reasons for the participants in choosing a food store:

1. Proximity to home or work
2. Prices
3. Availability and quality of fruits, vegetables, and meat

4. Store characteristics, specifically safety, cleanliness/smell, customer service, the availability of non-food items, and the availability of certain brands

These results shed light on key factors in food store choice in Arkansas. While there were urban/rural differences in reasons for food store choice, we did not find differences between Black and white participants. The urban/rural differences were largely driven by the lack of supermarkets in the rural areas sampled; rural residents reported that this resulted in spending more money in their small local store to obtain low quality items, or driving long distances to go to a supermarket in another community.

These findings may help inform future policies and programs to promote availability of healthier options, particularly in rural areas which often have few food stores.

In particular, store interventions may wish to focus on the availability and quality of fruits, vegetables and meat as well as the price of fruits and vegetables. This may improve satisfaction with the food store. Mainly in rural areas, where the stores tend to be small and have limited shelf-space, a focus on fresh foods such as fruits, vegetables, and meats may allow rural residents to make progress in healthy food choices.

In addition, it is possible that community-driven development of alternative sources of fruit and vegetables, such as fruit and vegetable stands, could be a lower-cost option for improving food access in rural areas.

## Results from the Questionnaire Administration: Why Do People Shop Where They Do?

One hundred participants completed the 63-item Food Store Selection Questionnaire to gather information about the importance of various reasons in choosing a food store. These individuals were recruited from seven communities in both rural and more urban areas in Arkansas, from May until August 2011. The participants rated the following items, on a scale from 1 (not important) to 5 (very important) as most important. The average scores on the following items were highest:

1. Freshness of meat
2. Store maintenance
3. Store cleanliness

4. Meat varieties
5. Store safety
6. Ease in finding items on one's list
7. Fruit/vegetable freshness
8. Hours of operation
9. Fruit/vegetable variety

Participants were also asked to indicate their top two reasons for choosing a food store.

The most common top reasons for their food store choice were:

- Low prices
- Proximity to home
- Fruit/vegetable freshness
- Fruit/vegetable variety
- Store cleanliness

In sum, although “closeness to home” was one reason that was important for participants, there are clearly other key factors in the choice of a food store. With the recent focus on food deserts (that is, areas without easy access to food stores), particularly in rural areas like Arkansas, it may be quite important to understand the other reasons for choosing a food store.

The results from this study may inform policies and programs to promote food environment changes designed to support healthy eating and obesity prevention.