

Name _____

Date _____

Food Deserts

Many of the serious health concerns in modern America can be linked to poor diet. People who regularly consume foods high in sodium, sugar, and saturated fats not only increase their chances of obesity, but also increase their risks of developing heart disease, hypertension, diabetes, and several types of cancer. Although some people who regularly consume unhealthy foods do so knowingly, there is also a significant portion of the population that remains undereducated about proper nutrition. What is more, individuals who live in food deserts—areas in low-income neighborhoods that lack easy access to healthy, affordable food—may not even have the opportunity to obtain nutritious food. Although there have been some recent government efforts to reduce the number of food deserts, more community-based efforts should be encouraged and supported.



Food deserts are located in high-poverty areas, such as sparsely populated rural areas or densely populated, low-income urban centers. Food deserts most often develop when major supermarket chains either relocate out of these areas or simply refrain from building stores there in the first place. Major food retailer chains tend to limit their store locations to wealthier urban or suburban neighborhoods. This means that those who live in high-poverty areas often also live miles away from the fresh meats, dairy products, and produce available at supermarkets. Residents of these areas who do not have cars are thus forced to travel long distances on public transportation to do their grocery shopping, or else they are limited to the food available at local convenience stores and gas stations. These types of food retailers often only sell packaged, processed foods that offer little nutritional value.

Furthermore, fast food restaurants are disproportionately concentrated in low-income areas; recent estimates suggest that those living in the poorest areas of a city experience 2.5 times more exposure to fast food restaurants than the wealthiest inhabitants of the city. Because individuals who live in food deserts tend to get their meals from fast food restaurants or convenience stores, they often suffer from a variety of health issues. Research has found that individuals who live in

low-income neighborhoods are much more likely to develop problems with obesity, diabetes, and hypertension than those who live in more affluent neighborhoods.

A solution to the problem of food deserts seems obvious: more supermarkets should be built in low-income neighborhoods. The problem with this solution, of course, is that it is difficult to lure supermarket chains into poor areas. Because poorer people have less money to spend on food, supermarket chains do not consider them to be attractive customers. One way that the government can help to offset this issue is by offering tax breaks or other incentives for supermarkets in low-income areas. In 2010, the Obama administration implemented the Healthy Food Financing program, which is a set of initiatives designed to help bring grocery stores into areas currently designated as food desert.

While this federal program is a commendable effort to improve low-income residents' access to healthy food, local initiatives often have a stronger and more immediate impact. Community gardens, independent food stores, co-ops, and farmers' markets are all examples of local initiatives that can substitute for or supplement the opening of a major chain supermarket. Despite the time, dedication, and funds required for community members to initiate such programs, these efforts can be incredibly beneficial, not only in providing people with access to healthier foods, but also in instilling a sense of community in the residents of these neighborhoods.

- 1) Which of the following would be the best subtitle for this passage?
- A. Supermarkets' Contributions to Obesity in America
 - B. The Dangers of Fast Food
 - C. The Problem and the Solutions
 - D. Food Deserts and Rural America
 - E. Why Processed Food Will Kill You
- 2) Based on information in the passage, it can be inferred that if supermarkets opened locations in more low-income areas,
- A. members of low-income households would not be likely to go there because they are not concerned with eating healthy foods
 - B. the supermarkets would be unable to compete with the fast food chains located in low-income areas
 - C. the convenience stores in the area would likely be put out of business because of increased competition with grocery stores
 - D. the health of low-income residents would be more likely to improve, as residents would have easier access to healthy food
 - E. there would be an increase in community spirit among members of low-income neighborhoods
- 3) Which of the following pieces of evidence, if true and added to the passage, would support the author's argument in paragraph 3?
- A. A study completed in 2010 shows that the farther a low-income housing development is from a supermarket, the more likely residents of that development are to have a higher body mass index, which is linked to being overweight or obese.
 - B. On average, energy-dense "junk foods" cost \$1.76 per 1000 calories, while low-energy, but nutrient-dense foods like fresh produce cost \$18.16 per 1000 calories.
 - C. Access to healthy foods has become especially difficult for those living in the largely black and Latino neighborhoods of cities like Los Angeles, Memphis, Chicago, and Detroit. Some experts estimate that nearly 50% of Detroit's 900,000 residents live in a food desert.

D. Research shows that Americans who live in Appalachia and the South are the least likely to be physically active in their leisure time. In many counties in that region, more than 29% of adults report getting no physical activity other than at their regular job.

E. In the United States, 34% of the current adult population is overweight, another 34% is obese, and an additional 5.7% is extremely obese. That means almost three quarters of the adults in the United States are heavier than they should be.

4) As used in paragraph 3, which is the best synonym for **affluent**?

- A. healthy
- B. updated
- C. corrupt
- D. distant
- E. wealthy

5) Based on information in the passage, it can be inferred that the author considers major supermarkets to be

- I. profit-driven in decisions regarding locations of stores
- II. unwilling to build new stores in low-income neighborhoods despite incentives offered by the Healthy Food Financing program
- III. guiltier than fast food restaurants of contributing to the obesity epidemic

- A. I only
- B. II only
- C. I and II only
- D. II and III only
- E. I, II, and III

6) As used in the final paragraph, which is the best synonym for **commendable**?

- A. useless
- B. praiseworthy
- C. essential
- D. superficial
- E. unique

Answers and Explanations

1) C

Core Standard: **Integration of Knowledge**

A good subtitle captures the main idea of a passage and lets readers know what to expect should they continue reading. Paragraph 1 identifies food deserts as a contributing factor to America's health problems. Paragraph 2 describes how food deserts develop. Paragraph 3 links food deserts to health problems in low-income neighborhoods. Paragraph 4 addresses pitfalls of the obvious solution to food deserts. Paragraph 5 offers an alternate, community-based solution to the problem of access to healthy food. From this overview, we can understand that the main purpose of the passage is to identify the problem of food deserts and to discuss a few potential solutions. The subtitle "The Problem and the Solutions" captures this main idea. Therefore **(C)** is correct.

The topic of supermarkets' contributions to obesity in America is too narrow to capture the main idea of the passage, so **(A)** is incorrect.

The topic of the dangers of fast food is too narrow to capture the main idea of the passage, so **(B)** is incorrect.

The passage discusses food deserts not just in rural America but also in low-income urban areas, so **(D)** is incorrect.

The topic of convenience stores and processed food is too narrow to capture the main idea of the passage, so **(E)** is incorrect.

2) D

Core Standard: **Integration of Knowledge**

The author writes in paragraph 2 that food deserts in low-income areas are primarily the result of supermarket chain flight from these areas. Because supermarkets are located miles away from low-income neighborhoods, residents have to travel long distances to get healthy food, or else settle for food from fast food restaurants and convenience stores. In paragraph 3, the author explains that people who have a difficult time accessing supermarkets are more likely to suffer diet-related health problems. The author states, "Research has found that individuals who live in low-income neighborhoods are much more likely to develop problems with obesity, diabetes, and hypertension than those who live in more affluent neighborhoods." Based on this information we can infer that if supermarkets opened more locations in low-income areas, then the health of the residents would be more likely to improve because they would have easier access to healthy food. Therefore **(D)** is correct.

The author does not address whether members of low-income households would or would not be likely to go to supermarkets if more convenient locations opened. This means **(A)** is incorrect.

The author does not provide evidence to suggest that supermarkets would have a problem competing with fast food chains in these areas, so **(B)** is incorrect.

The author does not provide evidence to suggest that supermarkets would put convenience stores out of business, so **(C)** is incorrect.

In paragraph 5, the author states that community-based efforts to improve access to healthy food can increase community spirit, but a new supermarket location is not what the author defines as a community-based effort. This means **(E)** is incorrect.

3) A

Core Standard: **Integration of Knowledge**

In paragraph 3, the author states, “Because individuals who live in food deserts tend to get their meals from fast food restaurants or convenience stores, they often suffer from a variety of health issues.” Later in the paragraph the author adds, “Individuals who live in low-income neighborhoods are much more likely to develop problems with obesity, diabetes, and hypertension than those who live in more affluent neighborhoods.” From this we can understand that the author’s main argument in paragraph 3 is that people who live in food deserts have more health problems than people who have greater access to healthy foods. A study proving that living farther away from a supermarket is linked to a having a higher body mass index would provide supporting evidence for this idea. Therefore **(A)** is correct.

The author is not concerned with the cost of healthy food versus junk food, but the access to healthy food versus junk food. This means **(B)** is incorrect.

Data showing how many people in American cities live in food deserts provides support for the argument that food deserts are a problem. However, in paragraph 3, the author specifically argues that food deserts are linked to health problems. This means **(C)** is incorrect.

The author does not address physical activity as it relates to health problems in paragraph 3, so **(D)** is incorrect.

The number of people in the United States who are heavier than they should be is data to support the idea that obesity is a health problem. However, in paragraph 3, the author specifically argues that food deserts are linked to health problems. This means **(E)** is incorrect.

4) E

Core Standard: **Craft and Structure**

Affluent (*adjective*): prosperous, wealthy, or well-off.

In paragraph 3, the author writes: “Research has found that individuals who live in low-income neighborhoods are much more likely to develop problems with obesity, diabetes, and hypertension than those who live in more affluent neighborhoods.” Based on context, we can infer that affluent neighborhoods are not low-income neighborhoods. From this we can infer that a good synonym for *affluent* is *wealthy*. Therefore **(E)** is correct.

It would not make sense to claim that individuals in low-income neighborhoods are more likely to have certain health problems than those who live in more *healthy* neighborhoods. We know the word “affluent” is used in contrast to the word “low-income.” Therefore **(A)** is incorrect.

The author does not comment on whether the neighborhoods are outdated or *updated*, so **(B)** is incorrect.

The word “affluent” is used in contrast to “low-income,” so it does not indicate whether or not a neighborhood is *corrupt*. This makes **(C)** incorrect.

Although in other parts of the passage the author addresses the distance a neighborhood is from a supermarket, in this sentence the author only discusses income level and health problems. This means that affluent does not mean *distant*. Therefore **(D)** is incorrect.

5) A

Core Standard: **Integration of Knowledge**

In paragraph 2, the author states that supermarket chains relocate their stores from low-income neighborhoods or do not build stores there in the first place. In paragraph 4, the author states that it is “difficult to lure supermarket chains into poor areas” because poorer people do not spend as much money on food. From this we can infer that the author considers major supermarkets to make decisions regarding store locations based on profits. This information supports **option (I)**.

In paragraph 4, the author states that “the Healthy Food Financing program...is a set of initiatives designed to help bring grocery stores into areas currently designated as food deserts.” However, the author never discusses supermarket chains’ responses to incentives offered by the program. This eliminates **option (II)**.

The author does not make any judgments about supermarkets being guiltier than fast food restaurants of contributing to the obesity epidemic. This eliminates **option (III)**. Therefore **(A)** is correct.

6) B

Core Standard: **Craft and Structure**

Commendable (*adjective*): worthy of praise; laudable.

In paragraph 5, the author writes: “While this federal program is a commendable effort to improve low-income residents’ access to healthy food, local initiatives often have a stronger and more immediate impact.” From this information we can understand that author thinks the federal program is a good idea, but that community efforts could be even more effective. Based on this we can infer that *commendable* means something positive or *praiseworthy*. Therefore **(B)** is correct.

Useless means without worth or use, but the author thinks the federal program is worthwhile. This means **(A)** is incorrect.

Essential means necessary or crucial, but the author does not indicate that the federal program is crucial. Instead, the author suggests that community-based efforts may be more effective. This means **(C)** is incorrect.

Superficial is a negative word meaning shallow or not thorough, but the author is offering some praise of the federal program. Since commendable is a positive word, **(D)** is incorrect.

Unique means one-of-a-kind or original. However, the author does not offer information about whether the federal program is an original program, so **(E)** is incorrect.