Financial Accessibility of Lancaster Central Market

Amber May, Class of 2019
Franklin and Marshall College
Funded by the Multi-disciplinary Student-Faculty College Project in the Humanities

Abstract

What is the financial accessibility of Lancaster Central Market (LCM) compared to other Lancaster grocers for Lancaster’s food-insecure population? LCM is physically accessible; it is within walking distance in the city. But are food prices equally accessible? LCM’s 2005 Master Plan states that “[it is] the responsibility of local government to ensure access to food by all of its citizens” (p. 7). That is, as a municipally-owned market, LCM should provide physical as well as financial access to food. This study compared prices of LCM to seven local grocery stores’ to determine the cheapest options. LCM was the cheapest for produce but among the most expensive in all other categories. Aldi was the cheapest seller overall.

Introduction

• Is LCM financially accessible to Lancaster’s food insecure population?
• About 1% of Lancaster City residents live below the poverty line (U.S. Census Bureau, 2014), many more could be food insecure
• Common perception that farmers’ markets have premium prices (McGuirt et al., 2014) (Wetherill & Gray, 2015)
• Which Lancaster grocers are the cheapest?
  • Prediction: Walmart cheapest, LCM most expensive

Methods and Materials

• Literature Review
  • Gathered information about price perceptions at farmers’ markets in general
• Price Comparison
  • 7 grocery stores and LCM (Weis, Giant, Stauffer’s, Walmart, Aldi, Save-A-Lot, C-Town)
  • Used market basket of 54 items in 6 food categories (grains, vegetables, fruits, dairy, meat, other)
  • Created a Total and Partial Market Basket
  • Gathered cheapest prices at each place
  • Quality was not considered due to subjectivity
  • Converted all item prices to common units
• Interviews
  • Sat in on group interviews of people involved with LCM
  • Asked about price perception in general
  • Asked standholders how they set prices
  • Asked past/present CMT board members about LCM’s responsibility to be financially accessible

Price Comparison Results

• LCM was most expensive in 3/6 categories (grains, dairy, other)
  • 2nd most expensive in meats, after Stauffer’s
• LCM was cheapest option for vegetables
  • 2nd cheapest for fruits, after Aldi
• Aldi was cheapest in 5/6 categories and overall
• Stauffer’s was most expensive overall
• Partial Market Basket totals for LCM, Weis, and Giant were the same
• LCM was only slightly more expensive than Weis and Giant for Total Market Basket ($5 and $10 respectively)

Interview Results

• Perceptions of prices were generally moderate
  • More than grocery store but worth it for the quality
  • Price setting is an individual business decision, not necessarily to be more accessible
• LCM can/should do its part to help with food security without changing the essence of market
• Food security is a larger issue than LCM
  • It can do its part to help, but cannot solve it on its own
  • Can’t do things like enforce price controls over vendors
• Obesity is a large concern in Lancaster City according to Brenda Buescher, Health Promotion Specialist at LGH

Conclusions

• LCM is an affordable option for produce but might not be for other categories
  • Valuable fresh food resource for city residents, many of whom are obese
• Food security is a much larger issue than LCM
  • Can help as much as possible, but food access is not its primary function
  • Can do things like encourage more vendors to take Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits, create a welcoming atmosphere, and continue to offer cheap, fresh produce
• Can’t do things like enforce price controls over vendors despite public nature of market

References


Figure 1. Prices at an LCM produce stand.

Figure 2. Prices at Weis.

Figure 3. Historic Central Market House

Chart 1. Partial Market Basket Totals.

Chart 2. Partial Produce Totals.

Contact

Amber May
Franklin and Marshall College
Email: amay@fandm.edu