What is this Indicator?
The Retail Food Environment Index (RFEI) is a ratio describing the relative abundance of different types of retail food outlets in a given area. The RFEI is constructed by dividing the total number of fast-food restaurants and convenience stores by the total number of supermarkets and produce vendors (produce stores and farmers markets) in the area. The result is the ratio of retail food outlets that offer little in the way of fruits and vegetables and other healthy foods to those in which fruits and vegetables are readily available. This methodology was developed by the California Center for Public Health Advocacy.

Why this is important: Designed for Disease, The Link Between Local Food Environments and Obesity and Diabetes, a study published by the California Center for Public Health Advocacy, PolicyLink and the UCLA Center for Health Policy Research in April of 2008, found a relationship between the RFEI and the likelihood of being obese or having diabetes. A higher RFEI was associated with a higher prevalence of obesity and diabetes for people living in lower-income and higher-income communities alike. The highest rates of obesity and diabetes are among people who live in lower-income and higher RFEI communities. This relationship between RFEI and obesity and diabetes rates was found to hold true regardless of household income, race/ethnicity, age, gender, or physical activity levels of respondents.

The Community Target for this indicator was set to the study finding that California adults living in areas with an RFEI of 5.0 or higher had a 20% higher prevalence of obesity and a 23% higher prevalence of diabetes than their counterparts living in RFEI areas of 3.0 or lower.

Progress in the last year:
In the previous year, the retail food environment index score was 3.18 fast food or convenience stores per produce outlet. The RFEI for the current year has not yet been determined.

What is the current status?
To change the RFEI, it is key that efforts be made to ensure preservation or proliferation of healthy food retail (supermarkets and farmers markets) while unhealthy food retail (fast food and convenience stores) is decreased or kept constant. For example, if one new grocery store enters a neighborhood, but a fast food restaurant comes with it, the RFEI will not change. Efforts to increase the number of supermarkets in neighborhoods that are lacking in grocery stores as well as increasing produce stands and farmers markets will move the needle. Additionally, efforts to reduce the number of fast food outlets as well as convenience stores will also move the needle in the desired direction.

The SF Office of Economic and Workforce Development works to attract grocery stores to areas that experience a loss of grocery stores. Some of the areas that have lost grocery stores include the locations in which Delano’s IGA operated (South Van Ness, Castro, and Outer Richmond). Fresh and Easy will be moving into the South Van Ness location, and into an old Safeway location in the Outer Haight, and in another old grocery store located in Noe Valley. In Bayview Hunters Point, the SF Redevelopment Agency as well as community partners including the Southeast Food Access Working Group have worked to attract a Fresh and Easy to Third Street. There will also be a Fresh and Easy moving into an old grocery store located in the Portola.

What is needed to “move the needle”?
- Continue to support efforts that prevent the loss of grocery stores and attract establishment of new grocery stores, especially in neighborhoods with limited grocery store access.
- Support efforts to improve the selection and promotion of healthy foods in grocery stores, exemplified by the Southeast Food Access Workgroup's work in Bayview.
- Continue to support the proliferation of farmers’ markets throughout the City, and publicize Food Stamp and WIC benefit acceptance at farmers’ markets. (It is important to note that farmers' market access is probably not a critical indicator of food access since availability is periodic. Monitoring grocery store and produce outlet access would be preferred.)
- Promote examination of existing retail food access when development plans and projects are being formulated; advocate for the inclusion of new sources of healthy food retail in development plans and projects if the existing retail food environment does not meet standards set by the Department of Public Health.
It is also important to note that San Francisco currently has a moratorium on the issuance of new alcohol outlet licenses. In some parts of the city where the number of crimes is 20% greater than the city average, or where the number of alcohol outlet licenses per person is greater than the city average, existing licenses may not be sold or traded. The inability to sell alcohol may be a limiting factor in the establishment of new convenience stores, as alcohol might be expected to make up a significant percentage of expected revenue. San Francisco also possesses restrictions and moratoriums on the establishment of formula retail in some Neighborhood Commercial Districts, which may restrict the proliferation of large fast food chains like McDonald’s, KFC, etc. Thus, these moratoriums and restrictions may be assisting in decreasing or keeping constant the number of unhealthy food outlets in San Francisco.

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**Who are the Community Partners on this Indicator?**

- San Francisco Department of Public Health
- San Francisco Office of Workforce and Economic Development