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# Spatial Variations in the Food Environment of Manhattan, NY

*Carolyn Dimitri<sup>a</sup>, Jacqueline Geoghegan<sup>b</sup>, and Laura Hansen<sup>b</sup>*  
Department of Nutrition, Food Studies and Public Health, New York University<sup>a</sup>  
Department of Economics, Clark University<sup>b</sup>,

## Abstract

Organic food availability in stores presumably has expanded since the implementation of the USDA National Organic Standard in 2002. Research suggests that the likelihood of purchasing organic food depends on consumer characteristics, such as income, education, and ethnicity. However, few studies consider the impact of the availability of organic food when analyzing consumer demand. A recent paper exploring organic consumers incorporates a crude measure of access to organic food, which shows some promise at closing this research gap. This paper extends this research by making use of a unique in-store dataset of organic food availability, and presents (1) initial findings on spatial availability of organic food in Manhattan, NY, and (2) preliminary efforts towards an econometric analysis explaining the patterns of availability based on socioeconomic and spatial characteristics. The methods under development here can be readily extended to the healthy food access literature, by proposing a methodology which links actual food availability (rather than implicit food availability associated with store location) to socioeconomic characteristics. Thus future extensions of this research will have direct implications for diet-related public health issues, and can potentially add to the body of literature that informs local and federal policy decisions regarding food access.

## Introduction

To incorporate the availability of organic food, survey instrument developed and used in Manhattan, New York:  
23 square miles  
About 70K residents per square mile  
Median HH income: \$59K, mean \$98K  
35% of HH income < \$35K  
61% of children free lunch eligible



## Methods: Survey Instrument

Phase I: Food Systems I class – Fall 2010  
Phase II: Hired team – January 2011  
1260 Food Stores

Table with columns for Store ID, Name, Address, City, State, Zip, and various demographic and socioeconomic variables. Includes sections for 'Store Characteristics', 'Demographics', and 'Socioeconomics'.

## Summary Statistics

Table 1. Organic food availability, Manhattan, NY, January 2011

Organic product	Stores		Organic product	Stores	
	number	percent		number	percent
Apples	119	9	Potatoes – frozen	87	7
Baby carrots	111	9	Strawberries - frozen	57	5
Bananas	72	6	Grapes	2	0
Beef	38	3	Lettuce	40	3
Carrots	82	7	Milk	437	35
Cheese	135	11	Onions	50	4
Chicken	68	5	Packaged lettuce	137	11
Eggs	290	23	Pears	56	4
Broccoli - frozen	101	8	Potatoes	62	5
Corn - frozen	109	9	Strawberries	23	2
Mixed veg - frozen	100	8	Tomatoes	78	6
Peas - frozen	97	8	Yogurt	272	22

Source: Data collected by authors and research team.

$$\text{Availability Index: } \sum_{i=1}^{24} x_i * 100 / 24 \quad \text{where } x_i = 1 \text{ if organic product is available, and } x_i = 0 \text{ otherwise.}$$

$$\text{Depth Index: } \sum_{i=1}^{46} x_{i,p} * 100 / 46 \quad \text{where } x_{i,p} \text{ is an indicator variable reflecting the presence of organic product, more than one variety/brand, and private label, and } p \text{ varies by product line (dairy, produce, frozen produce, and meat)}$$

Table 2: Indices of organic food availability: Manhattan, NY January 2011

Product	Discrete availability index	Depth of availability index
	Mean (standard deviation)	Mean (standard deviation)
Dairy	26 (38)	11 (18)
Produce	6 (17)	7 (14)
Frozen produce	7 (22)	0 (1)
Meat	4 (17)	3 (12)
All products	9 (18)	7 (13)

## Results I: Econometrics

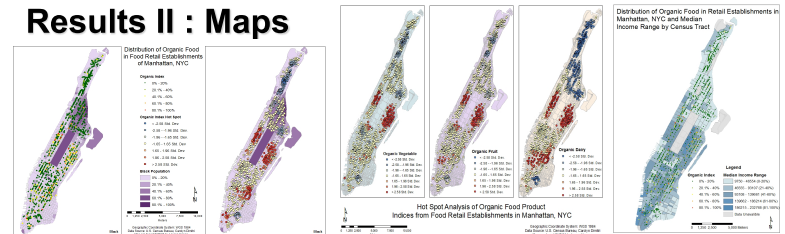
Availability of organic food = f (median income, median age, education, percent of black households, spatial factors, availability of healthy food, and interaction between median income and median age)

Tobit regression  
Log likelihood = -3623.1127  
Number of obs = 1089  
LR chi2(10) = 2139.73  
Prob > chi2 = 0.0000  
Pseudo R2 = 0.2280

OrgIndex	Coef.	Std. Err.	t	P> t	[95% Conf. Interval]
Median Inc	-.0000517	.00000315	-1.64	0.101	-.0001135 .0000102
Median Age	-.0337899	.0560669	0.60	0.547	-.0762226 .1438024
SomeCol	-.0560951	.0588053	-0.95	0.340	-.1714807 .0592906
CollegeGra	.0430713	.02752	1.57	0.118	-.019274 .09707
GradDeg	-.0749192	.0253018	-2.96	0.003	-.0252729 .1245654
Black_per	.0009586	.0129049	0.07	0.941	-.0243628 .0262801
1000 M buffer	.0364626	.015765	2.31	0.021	.0055291 .0673961
Int_Age Inc	1.37e-06	7.42e-07	1.84	0.066	-8.82e-08 2.82e-06
res_healthy	-1.167553	.019559	-59.69	0.000	-1.205931 -1.129175
healthy_index	1.287356	.0176064	73.12	0.000	1.252809 1.321902
_cons	-42.96174	2.45308	-17.51	0.000	-47.77509 -38.14839

1000 M buffer measures the number of stores within 1000 meters of each observation.

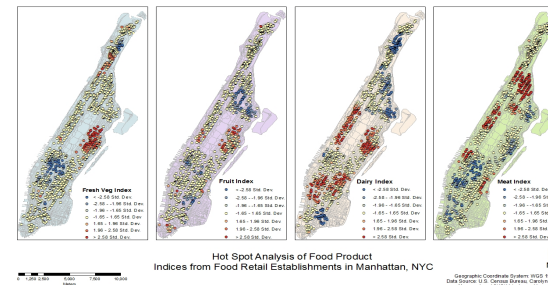
## Results II : Maps



**Spatial Location of Organic Food Availability:** Stores with no organic products are located throughout Manhattan, but are concentrated in the neighborhoods north of Central Park, many of which are lower income. Stores with a wide range of organic products are located throughout the city as well, but are concentrated in the areas on each side of Central Park, and in the downtown areas, which typically attract younger residents. The spatial distribution of organic products, by product category, reveals there is a greater amount of clustering in the availability of organic dairy products than of vegetables and fruit.

**Household Income:** Highest median income below the northern most edge of Central Park. The stores with the greatest number of organic food items, with the exception of a few store locations, are located in the census tracts with the highest median income.

## Results II : Maps



**Spatial Availability of Each Product Line, (Organic and Conventional):**

The availability of all healthy foods show a similar spatial distribution to the individual organic product line spatial distribution.

As the regression results suggest, all healthy food availability is likely to be highly endogenous to organic food availability, as stores that offer organic foods are likely to offer conventional versions of similar foods. This potential dependency will be investigated in future research.

## Conclusions and Future Research

This paper draft presents research currently in development; the initial phase of this research examines the availability of organic food in retail stores in Manhattan NY. To do so, the research makes use of a new, unique dataset collected by the author. While numerous technical difficulties are still present, the preliminary results are promising. The inclusion of availability of organic food logically strengthens the current body of literature that examines organic consumers and the retailing of organic products. One important finding is that organic food is available throughout Manhattan, although few stores carry a wide range of organic food. The most significant finding is that organic food is less available in census tracts with a high percent of black households in residence, which suggests that earlier findings of black households being less likely to buy organic food may be the result of availability and not preferences. Future work will ask the following questions: what are the spatial patterns of healthy food access? How, and to what degree, does the availability of healthy food depend on demographic variables? To what extent do restaurants crowd out healthy food availability in Manhattan? How does availability vary around Manhattan in stores accept federal nutrition benefits. Finally, are there policy instruments that can be adopted to increase the availability of healthy foods?