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“FOOD DESERTS” ARE NOT A CRISIS

Tulsa and OKC City Councils just don't like choices people make.

OKLAHOMA CITY, OK (March 2, 2020) – The 1889 Institute has published “Food Deserts’ – Health Crisis or Mere Inconvenience?” In it, 1889 Research Fellow, Mike Davis, makes the case that “food deserts” are not the crisis that they have been portrayed to be in Tulsa and Oklahoma City. This means recent zoning regulations limiting small-box “dollar” stores are detrimental. Nevertheless, recommendations are made in the paper that would better address concerns regarding access to full-line grocery stores.

“To the extent that there is reason to be genuinely concerned about the nutrition of some Tulsa and Oklahoma City residents, studies show that it is not about access to traditional grocery stores,” said Davis. “Private transportation options are readily available in addition to underutilized public ones, so the real issue is the preferences of residents as reflected by their buying habits. Besides, the non-perishable food items already available at small-box dollar stores in these neighborhoods are just as nutritious as their perishable counterparts,” he said.

In his paper, Davis points out that the new zoning restrictions create an opportunity for existing dollar stores to raise their prices, hurting the very people the regulations are purported to help. While the idea of the restrictions is to limit competition for full-line grocery stores and encourage their entry into an area, potential competition is only one of many reasons a grocery might not be located in the targeted areas.

“My recommendations are all about de-regulating rather than piling on more regulation. New regulation always involves unintended consequences,” Davis said. “Keeping regulations from getting in the way of private transportation solutions, having the cities pick up the tab for cleaning dilapidated buildings off land where a grocery store will be located, and getting out of the way of the development of community gardens would be more productive than the zoning regulations,” he said.

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About the 1889 Institute

The 1889 Institute is an Oklahoma think tank committed to independent, principled state policy fostering limited and responsible government, free enterprise and a robust civil society. The publication, “Food Deserts’ – Health Crisis or Mere Inconvenience?” can be found on the nonprofit’s website at <https://1889institute.org/corporate-welfare-1>.