

MOTION BY SUPERVISOR HILDA L. SOLIS

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Improving Supermarket Quality in Los Angeles County

According to the Department of Public Health (DPH), more than half a million households in Los Angeles County earning less than 300% of the federal poverty level (FPL) are food insecure and face barriers purchasing fresh and quality foods. Food insecurity is a complex social condition that often includes limited access to grocery stores and supermarkets that offer fresh and high-quality food choices. A recent analysis suggests that the more affluent community of West Los Angeles has twice as many grocery stores than lower income areas of Los Angeles. In addition to lack of access to grocery stores, many families shopping in lower-income communities have also shared that food quality is an issue, and that some stores sell spoiled, moldy, and expired foods.

DPH Environmental Health inspects grocery stores and supermarkets across Los Angeles County, conducting assessments based on factors set forth in the California Retail Food Code during each visit. The focus is on food safety and prevention of foodborne illness, including temperature controls for hot and cold foods, sanitation to prevent cross-contamination, and practices to prevent pests and vermin. Food quality issues such as produce quality and freshness, presence of expired foods on shelves, and general store appearance cannot be included in inspections, as they are not directly

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related to protecting public health. For expired foods, this is because “best by” or “use by” dates are determined by manufacturers and don’t necessarily relate to food safety.

While DPH Environmental Health must focus on enforcing State law when inspecting grocery stores, it is also critical to find opportunities to respond to community concern and need related to supermarket quality to address access to healthy food and equity issues. The County needs to act to promote availability of high quality food for everyone, regardless of socio-economic status.

I, THEREFORE, MOVE that the Board of Supervisors direct the Department of Public Health to:

1. Assess grocery store inspection practices within the purview of DPH Environmental Health Division and set by the California Retail Food Code, and provide recommendations on how to address food quality issues that also overlap with food safety issues;
2. Work with the County Counsel and other relevant County departments to identify innovative strategies that respond to issues related to food quality that fall outside the purview of DPH Environmental Health, such as expiration dates;
3. Identify opportunities for partnerships that can help improve access to high quality, fresh foods in underserved communities, with a focus on partnerships that address chronic disease; and
4. Report back to the Board with the findings in 60 days.

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