

Wal-Mart Failing the Grade in Food Deserts

Community, Faith and Business Leaders rally to protect Neighborhoods

(Los Angeles, CA) – Community, faith and business leaders stood in support of Wal-Mart Associates with the Alliance for Healthy and Responsible Grocery Stores (“Alliance”) to address the neighborhood impacts of Wal-Mart’s efforts to enter the grocery market. Community leaders and business owners are particularly concerned with the city’s eagerness to expedite public planning protocol to attract retail development. Community organizations are mobilizing to ensure that zoning and neighborhood impacts are weighed in decisions that would allow the retail giant to dominate local markets.

“We are demanding guarantees that if Wal-Mart, the world’s largest retailer, comes into our neighborhoods, they do so with respect for our community standards,” said Rev. Norman Johnson. “Our community deserves more than just promises of jobs, we need high quality, full-time jobs that will lift our residents out of poverty and provide economic benefits to the city.”

Wal-Mart is expanding in the U.S. under the guise of being a good neighbor, but their record suggests that they do not live up to this promise. Because communities deserve a voice in the development of their communities, the Alliance calls upon cities to require Wal-Mart to include – in their expansion plans or through a conditional use permit – community standards that guarantees good jobs, environmental responsibility, high quality stores and healthy food.

“The community along the Crenshaw Corridor has worked hard to develop the South Central Area Planning Council that calls out the types of retail developments we want in our neighborhood. We believe good jobs come from good planning and development,” said Winnie Jackson of the Hyde Park Organizational Partnership for Empowerment. “We will not sacrifice our community standards for empty promises of more jobs. What we are demanding for our neighborhood are quality jobs that pay a living wage and provide health care benefits.”

After an extensive, first of its kind assessment, the Alliance issued a Grocery Report Card in November 2010 that graded the grocery chains on food access, store quality and job quality. Wal-Mart was not included in the Report Card because they did not have a sufficient number of stores serving the city of Los Angeles. The rally, part of a national day of action, brings into focus Wal-Mart’s poor record on a key criterion of the report card grading system – job quality, which rates the wages, benefits and employee relations of each grocery chain.

The Alliance for Healthy and Responsible Grocery Stores, a city-wide coalition of community, faith-based, labor, and environmental organizations, convened a Blue Ribbon Commission in early 2007 to address the chronic absence of quality grocery stores in underserved, “food desert” communities. In 2008, the Commission urged the city to create incentives for ensuring more major chains locate in underserved communities and establish community and jobs standards.