Lawmakers Propose Fresh Food Oases For North Carolina Food Deserts

By JORGE VALENCIA - MAR 18, 2015

A bipartisan group of North Carolina lawmakers is proposing a measure to get more fruits and vegetables to urban and rural areas devoid of grocery stores or healthful food options.

The plan, filed in separate bills in the House and Senate on Tuesday, would set aside $1 million for produce refrigerators and training for store owners in areas known as food deserts. There are more than 340 food deserts across 80 counties in the state, advocacy groups say.

Two lead sponsors—Rep. Yvonne Holly (D-Wake) and Sen. Don Davis (D-Pitt)—said their concern grew after grocery stores in their districts closed in recent years. Holly’s district covers urban Southeast Raleigh while Davis’ district covers mostly rural Pitt and Greene counties.

“Now, those who are maybe walking down the street or through a cut-cut path just to get to this convenience store, will have healthier options to choose from,” Davis said.

The sponsors’ goals with the proposal are three-fold, Davis said: To promote healthier eating, improve public health and help convenience stores in food deserts stay in business. The fund would be managed by the North Carolina Department of Commerce, and equipment and training would be prepared in collaboration with the Department of Agriculture, the Department of Health and Human Services and local health departments.

“We see this as a strong step forward for healthier eating, and in time positively influencing public health,” said Sarah Jacobson of the North Carolina Alliance for Health.