

ORIGINAL RESEARCH COMMUNICATION

Assessment of the diet quality of US adults in the Lower Mississippi Delta^{1,2,3}

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Background: The Lower Mississippi Delta (LMD) is a region at high risk of nutritionally related diseases. Assessing LMD diet quality is important in policy making, monitoring service outcomes, and designing sustainable research interventions.

Objective: The purpose was to assess the diet quality of LMD adults by using the Healthy Eating Index (HEI) to 1) identify potential and needed interventions, 2) determine population subgroups needing special attention, and 3) compare regional intakes with national intakes.

Design: Data were obtained from a representative cross-sectional telephone survey ($n = 1699$), Foods of our Delta Study 2000, by using the US Department of Agriculture's multiple-pass 24-h recall methodology and random-digital-assisted dialing with selection of one adult per household. The diet quality of LMD adults was compared with that of white and African American adults in the National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey (NHANES), 1999–2000.

Results: Age, race, and income of LMD adults affected overall diet quality. African Americans had lower grain, vegetable, milk, and variety scores than did whites. The consumption of grains and vegetables was associated with lower odds ratios for being overweight. The LMD adults had a lower HEI score than did the adults in NHANES 1999–2000 (60.1 compared with 63.4), and more LMD adults ate a poor diet (24.8% compared with 18.3%).

Conclusion: Low-income and young-adult households in the LMD are in need of nutrition interventions with an emphasis on increasing grain, fruit, and vegetable intakes. Because socioeconomic factors affect diet quality, a multimodal, longitudinal approach appears needed to improve nutritional health.

Key Words: Lower Mississippi Delta • dietary assessment • diet quality • Healthy Eating Index • African American

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