

“They’ve helped make a lot available to these low-income communities.”

FOOD FOR A DOLLAR

When I’ve meandered through a local dollar store, I rarely stopped to focus on the food — but after recognizing that many communities are shopping here as their grocery store of choice, the last time I went, I did.

Candy, soda, quick and easy snacks, instant ramen, packaged dinner mixes and canned veggies lined the colorful aisles. Nothing seemed to be sold in very large quantity and, as at the local Dollar Tree, it still had to cost \$1.

In Racine’s research, she looked closely at the food that dollar stores are selling, knowing that many low-income communities are going to them rather than a general grocery store for food.

Through her research, she found it was clear that while many dollar stores are SNAP authorized, the variety of healthy food options is often limited.

Racine found that no dollar stores sold fresh produce, although some did have frozen vegetables and fruit. For the most part, “What they appear to have is shelf staples, some frozen food and a little bit of refrigerated food,” she says.

Creswell lost its main grocery store, Ray’s Food Place, in 2014. Aside from a small local grocery, Farmlands Market, the availability of fresh foods is low. Creswell has two dollar stores, two Dari Marts and a BiMart, but the nearest grocery stores are in Eugene and Cottage Grove.

“You can’t buy a gallon of milk at Dollar Tree,” Racine says. “It’s interesting when you look at the foods that you can buy for a \$1 — for example, a big 2- or 3-liter bottle

of soda can be sold at Dollar Tree, but only 16 ounces of milk.”

To be SNAP authorized, stores must sell items that fall under three out of the four categories: meat, poultry or fish; bread or cereal; vegetables or fruits; or dairy products. What a lot of dollar stores do, Racine explains, is sell breads, frozen vegetables or fruits, and small amounts of dairy such as milk and butter. Racine rarely found frozen meats.

“Because dollar stores appeal to lower-income shoppers and because they are often located in lower-income areas, their role in food access should be taken into account,” Racine says.

The dollar stores phenomenon will continue multiplying and expanding to reach more of rural Oregon and across the country — because this “boom” doesn’t seem to be slowing down. ■

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