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By The Center For Consumer Freedom

Britain's leading business newspaper, the Financial Times, goes into the heart of America's most overweight state (Mississippi) to tell a story about one of the greatest mirages in food policy: the "food desert." In a poor, remote town in Mississippi, they claim it's hard to get fresh vegetables and many residents don't own cars to travel to other, larger towns with full supermarkets.

The FT claims that an inability to get nutritious food is widespread and a significant cause of obesity, and the paper gratuitously scolds Mississippi legislators for passing the "anti-Bloomberg" law that forbade local governments from meddling in citizens' food choices.

Unfortunately for the FT, the basic claim of the article just isn't true. Just last year, The New York Times noted that multiple studies have shown that living in a so-called "food desert" didn't affect what people ate.

Most people who live in food deserts have means of transportation to full-service supermarkets with produce sections, so what they choose to eat is their choice. (It must have pained the Times to debunk a favorite foodie myth.)

And as for the whether people can afford to buy foods when they get to the supermarket, multiple U.S. Department of Agriculture studies show that healthy food can be just as affordable as so-called "junk food." So while the struggles of the FT's remote town are unfortunate, they are limited. Fighting obesity is a complicated issue and the simple addition of a local produce section is unlikely to fix the problem.

The folks at FT apparently agree, but their solution is to just take choices away from people. The FT bashes the state legislature for listening to its constituents and forbidding local bureaucracies from enacting Bloomberg-like choice-restricting rules that roughly three-fourths of Americans oppose.

Kelly Brownell, now on his way from Yale to Duke, charges that new tax and zoning rules that will punish certain choices are needed. There isn't much evidence that either scheme will reduce obesity either.

Instead of decrying society and engaging in social engineering, people concerned about obesity need to empower people to be personally responsible and educate them about smart choices.

A recent article suggested that the whole anti-food approach needs a re-think; the FT's effort to restart it is far less persuasive.

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