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&gt; Detroit Food Retailers Commit to Safety, Quality

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**DETROIT** — A spate of bad press has led this city's independent grocers to join forces in a new initiative to promote themselves.

Twenty-five stores and two wholesalers have established the Guaranteed Fresh Detroit Independent Grocers Initiative to drive business to their stores amid reports about out-of-date produce and unsanitary conditions at some supermarkets in the city.

Those operators that say they have more stringent standards are signing up with the Guaranteed Fresh initiative to support their claims. The program was recently launched with the backing of Mayor Ken Cockrel Jr.

“The No. 1 goal is to keep Detroit residents shopping in Detroit,” said John Loussia, owner of Value Wholesale in Oak Park, Mich., who supplies several area grocery stores. According to a recent report, Detroit residents spent about \$1 billion on groceries each year, but \$200 million of that is spent outside the city.

The initiative is a joint effort with the Detroit Economic Growth Corp., which also received a \$500,000 grant from the Kresge Foundation to help develop supermarkets in underserved neighborhoods, reports said.

Detroit is a city of independent stores. Some of the big chains started leaving after the riots of 1968, and they've had no luck coming back, according to Martin Manna, executive director of the Chaldean American Chamber of Commerce, Farmington Hills, Mich. “The chains don't do well here because they don't adapt to the neighborhoods they serve and are too cookie-cutter,” he said.

Now, most of the city's 80 supermarkets are run by Chaldeans, a group of Christians from northern Iraq and the largest such group outside the Middle East.

Grocery is a trade the Chaldeans know well, and those signing up for the Guaranteed Fresh initiative have pledged to operate clean, safe stores and to supply a variety of high-quality fresh and healthy food.

Descriptions of Detroit as a food desert — where consumers cannot find affordable everyday groceries — are incorrect, said Rick Farida, co-owner of Greenfield Market, a single-store operator in Detroit. “We wanted to change people's perceptions,” he said.

To help get the message out, every participating store features the Guaranteed Fresh logo at its entrance. Most also carry banners, and employees wear pins, while some have incorporated the logo into their uniforms. Several stores, such as Greenfield Market, are also running information in their circulars.

“It finally lets people know that these stores have been investing in the city for almost 70 years,” said Manna.

“We've already been operating under the pledge,” said Farida, who just two years ago remodeled the store that's been in his family since 1977. “We've always carried fresh foods, but the idea is to let our customers know that.”


The cost to participants is a one-time fee of \$1,000, which is used for public relations and charitable work the group will perform.

The goal is to have 50 to 60 of the city's grocery stores as members, said Loussia.

According to reports, the group plans to work with the local health department to make sure members are keeping up with sanitation issues.

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