

Samantha Derrick

Decolonizing Diets

My current research involves understanding traditional, indigenous ways of eating in Mexico, and identifying current challenges in Mexican and Mexican-American dietary patterns. What we know now is that the rates of chronic disease in Mexico continue to rise, largely associated with the ever increasing presence of Western food and transnational food companies in the food system. The rates of diabetes and obesity are projected to rapidly increase in the next few decades. Approximately 40% of the entire population in Mexico are expected to meet the criteria for obesity by 2050, and rates of Type 2 diabetes are expected to double every 10 years. We see similar issues and high rates of dietary-related chronic disease in Mexican American communities in the US, and it is critical now more than ever to understand the dietary barriers Mexican communities face to address rapidly increasing rates of chronic disease.

My research is primarily focused on 3 components: understanding the cultural and economic barriers to eating plant based foods, understanding messaging techniques for healthier foods, and assessing the growing popularity of plant based diets that are representative of indigenous eating patterns and knowledge in Mexican and Mexican-American communities. I've done this through a combination of remote interviews and literature reviews. My primary challenges have been getting in touch with organizations based in Mexico that are working on promoting indigenous ways of eating. Several organizations have been impacted by the pandemic, and it has been difficult getting in touch with them. I have altered my approach and interviewed several key players in the growing Latinx vegan community, who have valuable insight into the dietary challenges faced by Mexican communities both in Mexico and in the US. I have also initiated literature reviews to understand the cultural and economic barriers to plant based eating in Mexican-American communities, and to understand the most effective messaging techniques that encourage behavioral shifts in food choices.

I hope to showcase my work in a journalistic expose, and intend to continue researching this topic beyond my time at Berkeley. This experience has allowed me to gain a better depth and appreciation for efforts currently underway that help bring plant based food and education to Latinx communities, and has motivated me to start my own company after graduation that will help make plant based eating more accessible to all communities.

The funding from CLAS has helped pay for my living expenses while conducting this research remotely, and has been largely supportive in reaching many of my milestones throughout the duration of my project. Thank you!