



HEALTH IN ALL POLICIES: FOOD

Enable Access to Healthy Food Choices

Collaborative, multi-sector approaches like Health in All Policies (HiAP) may help improve nutrition and reduce the risk of chronic disease. Improved access to healthy food is a goal that partners can share across sectors and at all levels of government. Many policies and programs that enable access to healthy food choices focus on increasing the availability, affordability, and awareness of healthy foods and nutrition. Examples of policy and programs that improve access through cross-sectoral collaboration are shared here.

Eliminating Food Deserts

Neighborhoods and communities that offer limited opportunities to purchase high quality healthy and affordable food are called food deserts. The Food, Conservation, and Energy Act of 2008 defines a food desert as “an area with limited access to affordable and nutritious food, particularly such an area composed of predominantly lower-income neighborhoods and communities.” According to a U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) study, “more than 23 million Americans live in low-income urban and rural neighborhoods that are more than a mile from a supermarket.”¹

Living in a food desert may be one of the reasons why many children are not consuming the recommended amount of fresh fruits and vegetables. Food insecurity and hunger impacts a staggering number of children in the United States. A 2008 USDA report estimated that 17 million children were living in households that experienced hunger multiple times per year.²

While residents living in rural, low-income, and minority communities often lack access to supermarkets, many have easy access to convenience stores and corner stores. These small neighborhood stores generally sell snacks, sodas, and alcoholic beverages.³ If healthier foods such as fresh fruits and vegetables and low-fat items are offered in these stores, they are often more expensive than unhealthier items like salty and sugary snacks.⁴

There are many ways to connect food insecure communities with healthy foods. Some

opportunities to increase access to healthy food include: providing financial incentives to build new grocery stores, creating or modifying zoning rules to increase food access, and incentivizing the sale of affordable and healthy foods.⁵

Some states have passed legislation that entice grocery stores and supermarkets to move into food insecure communities.⁶ When a new grocery store moves into a community, it also brings jobs and may also improve the area’s economic health.⁶

Opportunities to Eliminate Food Deserts

- Incentivize supermarkets, farmers’ markets, and other healthy food retailers to operate in low-income, food-insecure communities.
- Expand healthy food offerings in corner stores.
- Support the use of food assistance benefits and electronic benefit transfer purchases at farmers’ markets.
- Promote the establishment of community gardens, food policy councils, and community-supported agriculture.
- Offer transportation routes to existing retailers.

“Food retail outlets, such as grocery stores and supermarkets, can serve as ‘anchors’ to other types of commercial development and may increase retail activity, employment rates, and property values in surrounding neighborhoods.”⁷

Healthy Food Financing Initiatives (HFFIs)

In 2009, the U.S. Treasury Department's Community Development Financial Institutions (CDFI) Fund, USDA, and HHS created the Healthy Food Financing Initiative (HFFI) to improve access to healthy food in low-income communities.⁸ Examples of these initiatives include encouraging corner stores to increase the amount of healthy foods they offer and supporting the use of nutrition assistance benefits provided to low-income consumers at farmers' markets.⁹ At the state and local level, HFFI includes a variety of financing strategies like tax credits, zoning incentives, financial, legal, or technical assistance, and equipment to promote healthy food retail in food insecure areas.⁹

Pennsylvania

Establishing the Pennsylvania Fresh Food Financing Initiative (PFFFI) in 2004 created the first statewide program to help bring supermarkets to underserved communities. Through grants and loans, the program funded 88 projects in Pennsylvania between 2006 and 2010. These projects increased access to healthy foods, as well as created or preserved more than 5,000 jobs. It is estimated that the PFFFI, which ended in 2010, improved access to healthy foods for 500,000 state residents.¹⁰ Error! Bookmark not defined.

California, Illinois, and Louisiana have established their own HFFIs that are similar to Pennsylvania's program.

New York

In May 2009, New York state launched a multifaceted effort to place food markets in underserved communities. New York supported new or improved healthy food retail through:¹⁰

- Allocating a \$30 million revolving loan fund to finance efforts to increase access to fresh foods in underserved communities directed by the Empire State Development Corporation and state Department of Agriculture and Markets, and administered by a community development financing institution.

- Prioritizing mixed-use projects that include grocery stores in the New York State Housing Finance Agency's All Affordable Housing Program.
- Matching grants of up to \$25,000 for permanent farmers' market infrastructure through the Department of Agriculture and Markets.

New York City

In 2009, the New York City (NYC) Office of the Mayor, the NYC Departments of Health and City Planning, and the NYC Economic Development Corporation developed the Food Retail Expansion to Support Health (FRESH) program. The program offers financial and zoning incentives to bring developers and grocery store operators to low-income, food-insecure communities of color.¹¹ As of spring 2012, 11 FRESH projects had been approved, with four more expected to be approved.^{12,13} It is anticipated that FRESH will lead to establishing 15 new grocery stores and creating 1,100 new jobs.¹⁴

Joint Use Agreements

Joint use agreements establish terms and conditions for the shared use of resources between groups or entities.¹⁵ Some states have established joint use agreements to share public property, other facilities, and staff or training resources.¹⁵ Joint use agreements can also help improve access to healthy foods and increase opportunities for physical activity. For example, many places in Washington State have established joint use agreements to create community gardens, with the hope of improving access to healthy food, improving physical activity, and increasing social capital. Washington's community garden agreements establish terms for how the public can access land, use the land, and use the water in the area.¹⁶

Community Gardens

Linking communities with local farmers increases access to fresh foods and helps promote regional food systems. One way to connect farmers with communities is by establishing community gardens. Creating community gardens may also help communities

take advantage of vacant, blighted, and unused land, leasing the land for agricultural purposes.¹⁰

One example of this is Chicago's NeighborSpace, a city-funded land trust that preserves community gardens and green space.¹⁷ NeighborSpace was founded by the City of Chicago, Chicago Park District, and Forest Preserve District of Cook County to protect community developed gardens from redevelopment. NeighborSpace currently oversees more than 80 communal vegetable and flower gardens throughout the city.¹⁷

New York

Healthy Kingston for Kids aims to eliminate the barriers that prevent youth from getting enough exercise, reduce unhealthy snacks in after-school programs, and increase the availability of healthy foods by promoting the establishment of farmers markets and community gardens.¹⁸

Healthy Kingston for Kids is led by the Cornell Cooperative Extension of Ulster County in collaboration with the City of Kingston Parks and Recreation Department, the Kingston Land Trust, the Community Heart Health Coalition of Ulster County, Gilmour Planning, the Kingston City School District, the Ulster County Department of Health, and county Planning Department.¹⁸ The collaborative has led to the establishment of gardens at 10 of 14 schools in the Kingston City School District, which may be used during afterschool hours.¹⁹ Another accomplishment of the collaborative is the adoption of a healthy snacks policy as part of the Kingston City School District's Health and Wellness policy.¹⁸

Florida

The Healthy Kids, Healthy Communities partnership in Lake Worth, Greenacres, and Palm Springs, Florida, developed a joint use agreement with the Scottish Rite Masonic Center in Lake Worth to facilitate a garden project on the center's property. Every week, children from an aftercare program participate in planting, growing, and harvesting the food. The partnership also reached out to Palm Beach Harvest, a local food distribution organization, to oversee the garden. This

additional partnership also helped to link low-income and food-insecure communities with extra food from the garden.¹⁹

Food Policy Councils

Food policy councils are emerging in various jurisdictions around the country. Comprised of a wide range of stakeholders from organizations, the private sector, and government agencies, the councils aim to better coordinate the local food system at all stages of the farm-to-fork process.

Alaska

In January 2013, Alaska passed the House Concurrent Resolution 1, which calls on the governor to establish a state food resource development working group with the primary goal of producing more locally grown and harvested food items to be consumed in Alaska.²⁰ The resolution calls on the governor to request collaboration across multiple departments of his administration, as well as communicate closely with the working group and the independent state food policy council. The resolution aims to increase local food products and create a healthier Alaska, while simultaneously boosting its economy.

Community Supported Agriculture

Community supported agriculture typically refers to the creation of "farm shares," whereby individuals pay for a share of the farm's harvest.¹⁰ The advance payment helps cover the cost the farm's operation thereby helping smaller farmers remain in business.²¹

Let's Move offers some additional ways that decision makers can help improve access to healthy foods and beverages:²

- Increase enrollment in nutrition assistance programs.
- Support farmers' markets and other opportunities that encourage the sale of local foods.
- Require access to free and safe drinking water in public places.
- Ensure that residents can access healthy food via public transportation.

¹ United States Department of Agriculture. "Creating Access to Healthy, Affordable Food." Available at: <http://apps.ams.usda.gov/fooddeserts/AccessHealthyFood.pdf>. Accessed 1-8-2014.

² Let's Move. "Make Healthy Food Affordable and Accessible." Available at: <http://www.letsmove.gov/make-healthy-food-affordable-and-accessible>. Accessed 1-8-2014.

³ Food Research and Action Center. "Why Low-Income and Food Insecure People are Vulnerable to Overweight and Obesity." Available at: <http://frac.org/initiatives/hunger-and-obesity/why-are-low-income-and-food-insecure-people-vulnerable-to-obesity/>. Accessed 1-8-2014.

⁴ Parker-Pope T. "A High Price for Healthy Food." *New York Times*. December 5, 2007. Available at: http://well.blogs.nytimes.com/2007/12/05/a-high-price-for-healthy-food/?_r=0. Accessed 1-8-2014.

⁵ PolicyLink. "Grocery Store Attraction Strategies: A Resource Guide for Community Activists and Local Governments." Available at: http://www.policylink.org/atf/cf/%7B97C6D565-BB43-406D-A6D5-ECA3BBF35AF0%7D/groceryattraction_final.pdf. Accessed 1-8-2014.

⁶ CDC. "State Initiatives Supporting Healthier Food Retail: An Overview of the National Landscape." Available at: http://www.cdc.gov/obesity/downloads/Healthier_Food_Retail.pdf. Accessed 1-8-2014.

⁷ Treuhaft S, Karpyn A. "The Grocery Gap: Who Has Access to Healthy Food and Why It Matters." PolicyLink. 2010. Available at: http://www.policylink.org/site/c.lkIXLbMNjRE/b.5860321/k.A5BD/The_Grocery_Gap.htm. Accessed 1-8-2014.

⁸ Healthy Food Access Portal. "Healthy Food Financing Initiative: Federal Government." Available at: <http://healthyfoodaccess.org/find-money/hffi/federal>. Accessed 1-8-2014.

⁹ Robert Wood Johnson Foundation. "Food Retail and Financing Initiatives to Address Obesity in Latino Communities." June 2013. Available at: http://www.rwjf.org/content/dam/farm/reports/issue_briefs/2013/rwjf406414. Accessed 1-8-2014.

¹⁰ PolicyLink. "Healthy Food, Healthy Communities." 2011. Available at: <http://www.policylink.org/site/apps/nlnet/content2.aspx?c=lkIXLbMNjRE&b=5136581&ct=10958405>. Accessed 1-8-2014.

¹¹ New York City. "Food Retail Expansion to Support Health." Available at: <http://www.nyc.gov/html/misc/html/2009/fresh.shtml>. Accessed 1-8-2014.

¹² New York City Economic Development Corporation. "NYCIDA Approves Assistance for New

Fine Fare Supermarket in the Bronx." March 13, 2012. Available at: <http://www.nycedc.com/press-release/nycida-approves-assistance-new-fine-fare-supermarket-bronx>. Accessed 1-8-2014.

¹³ New York City. "Mayor Bloomberg Breaks Ground on New Key Food, First Supermarket in Staten Island to Use FRESH Program, Which Has Created and Retained 1,000 Jobs." Nov. 21, 2011. Available at: http://home.nyc.gov/portal/site/nycgov/index.jsp?epi-content=GENERIC&wcproxyurl=http%253A%252F%252Fwww.nyc.gov%252Fhtml%252Fom%252Fhtml%252F2011b%252Fpr417-11.html&beanID=1173395690&viewID=proxy_view_secondary. Accessed 1-8-2014.

¹⁴ New York City Department of City Planning. "Mayor Bloomberg, Governor Paterson And Speaker Quinn Announce Comprehensive Strategies To Increase and Retain Grocery Stores In New York City." May 16, 2009. Available at: <http://www.nyc.gov/html/dcp/html/about/pr051609.shtml>. Accessed 1-8-2014.

¹⁵ ChangeLab Solutions. "Model Joint Use Agreement Resources." Available at: <http://changelabsolutions.org/publications/model-JUAs-national>. Accessed 1-8-2014.

¹⁶ Washington State Department of Health. "Partners of the Plan News: Access to Healthy Food through Joint Use Agreements." December 2011. Available at: <http://depts.washington.edu/waaction/action/n1/a15.html>. Accessed 1-8-2014.

¹⁷ NeighborSpace. "History of NeighborSpace." Available at: <http://neighbor-space.org/about/history-of-neighbor-space/>. Accessed 1-8-2014.

¹⁸ Robert Wood Johnson Foundation. "Healthy Kids, Healthy Communities: Kingston, NY." Available at: <http://www.healthykidshealthycommunities.org/communities/kingston-ny>. Accessed 1-8-2014.

¹⁹ Robert Wood Johnson Foundation. "Healthy Kids, Healthy Communities Case Examples: Joint Use Agreements." April 2011. Available at: <http://www.healthykidshealthycommunities.org/hkhc-case-examples-jointuse>. Accessed 1-8-2014.

²⁰ Alaska House Concurrent Resolution No. 1. 2013. Available at: http://www.legis.state.ak.us/basis/get_bill_text.asp?hsid=HCR001B&session=28. Accessed 1-8-2014.

²¹ Center for a Livable Future. "Community Supported Agriculture at JHSPH." Available at: <http://www.jhsph.edu/research/centers-and-institutes/johns-hopkins-center-for-a-livable-future/projects/csa/>. Accessed 1-8-2014.