COMMUNITY FOOD RETAIL ENVIRONMENT

COMMUNITY FOOD RETAIL STRATEGIES CAN INCREASE ACCESS TO HEALTHY FOOD OR DECREASE ACCESS TO UNHEALTHY FOODS IN LOCAL STORES, SUPERMARKETS, FARMERS' MARKETS, AND OTHER FOOD RETAIL OUTLETS. SUCH STRATEGIES MAY INCLUDE DEVELOPING FULL-SERVICE GROCERY STORES, IMPROVING OFFERINGS IN SMALL STORES, AND STARTING OR EXPANDING FARMERS' MARKETS.

MAKE THE CASE:

Why Is This A Health Equity Issue?

The issues below highlight the need for community food retail strategies that advance health equity:

- **Limited Access to Healthy Food in Underserved Communities:** Differences in geographic food access have been documented in several national studies.[100,101] For example, low-income communities, communities of color, and rural areas have been found to have fewer supermarkets than wealthier communities, predominantly white neighborhoods, and urban areas.[102,103]
- **Additional Barriers Exist for Many Underserved Communities in Accessing Healthy Food:** Barriers to accessing healthy foods may include dependence on public transit, difficulty transporting groceries due to lack of reliable transportation,[100] and lack of access to healthy options that reflect cultural food preferences. Additionally, higher costs of healthy foods,[100,104-106] and low-quality food selection in some communities,[107,108] may serve as barriers.
- **Improving Access to Healthful Food Can Provide Opportunities for Economic Development in Underserved Communities:** Strategies that increase access to healthy food in underserved communities can have positive effects beyond improved nutrition. Such strategies may create jobs, revitalize commercial areas, and provide tax revenues. For example, grocery stores may act as anchors for retail developments, spurring local economic development.[100]

Design and Implement with Health Equity in Mind

To maximize health impact and advance health equity, consider these factors and others when designing, implementing, and evaluating community food retail strategies:

KEY FACTORS	BARRIERS OR UNINTENDED CONSEQUENCES	OPPORTUNITIES TO MAXIMIZE IMPACT
COMMUNITY AWARENESS & INVOLVEMENT Ensure community engagement in and awareness of healthy food retail projects	Decisions about food availability may not reflect the needs and desires of community residents including perceptions of what is culturally appropriate.	• Engage populations experiencing health inequities in community food assessments, GIS mapping, and other efforts to assess food access. • Ensure those selected for food policy councils and other food initiatives designed to improve the food environment have an understanding and the capacity to address health disparities affecting certain population groups. • Increase residents' awareness of new healthy food retailers, incentives for purchasing healthy foods (e.g. Double Up Food Bucks program[109]), and healthy food preparation.
AFFORDABILITY Ensure affordable pricing for healthy food options and increase low-income residents' purchasing power	Low-income communities and communities of color may have higher food prices for healthy food than high-income and white communities.[105,108,110,111] Additionally, healthy food retailers may not accept SNAP and WIC as forms of payment.	• Promote the use of food assistance programs (e.g., Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) and the Women, Infant, and Children's Program (WIC)) at healthy food retailers.[112] • Lower retail costs by supporting efforts that encourage lower prices (e.g., streamlining distribution, facilitating bulk purchasing by multiple stores).[112,113] • Provide support to increase demand of healthy options (e.g., assist with marketing and displaying food) and reduce food waste due to spoilage (e.g., offer ways to store and refrigerate foods).[112,113] • Increase SNAP participant purchasing power by providing incentives for the purchase of healthy food (e.g., Double Up Food Bucks program[109]).
NEGATIVE PERCEPTIONS & LIMITED CAPACITY Provide support for bringing food options to underserved communities	A barrier to attracting healthy food retailers to underserved communities may include perceptions that businesses may suffer financially due to poor customer base, theft, or safety issues. Additionally, small stores may lack space, equipment, or staff expertise to carry fresh produce or to handle perishable foods.	• Find mechanisms to support healthy food retailers who locate in underserved communities (e.g., simplify applications and permit procedures, bundle land to encourage supermarkets to locate in both affluent and low-income areas). • Provide support to help stores sell healthier options (e.g., staff training in handling perishable items, free local advertising).

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ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT Support local economic development through healthy food retail	Retailers in underserved communities may not understand how they can support and enhance local economic development.	• Connect local agriculture and food production directly to local markets to help keep food dollars in the community. • Establish workforce development programs to train local residents for high-quality jobs in a variety of food retail settings.[114,115] • When making decisions about food retail, consider developing criteria to support businesses that contribute to local economic development (e.g., commitment to hire local residents).
TRANSPORTATION NEEDS Address transportation challenges to increase access to healthy food retail	Individuals who live in communities with poor access to healthy food retail and depend on public transit may have more difficulty transporting groceries—especially perishables and bulk packages. Even if affordable healthy food outlets are nearby, lack of transportation may prevent residents from accessing them.	• Increase connectivity between transit and healthy food retail by assessing and improving existing routes. • Develop safe pedestrian connectors that provide a direct link between food outlets and nearby transit. • In rural areas, and for populations with limited mobility (e.g., the elderly, people with disabilities), consider offering vanpools or shuttles to healthy food options. • Provide online ordering and home delivery of healthy options for customers with transportation limitations.
SAFETY & CONCERNS OF VIOLENCE Address concerns of violence which may serve as a barrier to healthy retail use	Community violence, real or perceived, may be a barrier to shopping at healthy food retail in low-income communities.	• Consider violence prevention strategies to create safe routes and/or reduce concerns of safety on the way to healthy food destinations. • See *Preventing Violence Strategy* in Active Living Section of this guide.

Build the Team: Partnership for Success

Successful efforts to implement community food retail strategies depend on bringing a diverse set of partners to the table early, consistently, and authentically. These partners may include the following:

- Area Agencies on Aging
- Community development, revitalization, and redevelopment agencies and organizations
- Community members (of diverse abilities, ages, cultures, gender, income levels, race/ethnicity, and sexual orientation)
- Developers
- Food banks
- Health care systems, hospitals, community clinics, and health care providers
- Housing agencies
- Industry leaders
- Leaders and community champions from multiple sectors
- Local farmers and regional food distributors
- Organizations serving populations experiencing health inequities
- Public health agencies
- Public Works Department
- Retailers and vendors
- Social service agencies
- Zoning and Planning organizations

Corner Store Initiative Supports Community Health and Local Store Owners

Philadelphia, PA

The driving force for a citywide healthy corner store effort came about when school leadership expressed concerns that healthy food policies in schools might drive students to purchase less healthy snacks at nearby corner stores. What started out as a small-scale initiative by The Food Trust to increase the availability of healthy foods, has grown from 10 corner stores near schools to over 600 corner stores in low-income neighborhoods. Results from the Healthy Corner Store Initiative have brought health benefits not only to students, but also community residents who depend primarily on corner stores for food. These efforts have been supported by CDC's *Communities Putting Prevention to Work* and *Community Transformation Grant* programs, as well as other non-federal funding.

Health equity is a central tenet of the corner store efforts. Using existing relationships with local grocers associations (including mom-and-pop store owners), community groups, and school advocates, The Food Trust succeeded in establishing credibility with local corner store owners, making it easier to cultivate new relationships and get buy-in and support. By having a constant presence in the community and working closely with store owners to figure out good solutions, The Food Trust staff created a program that was viable and profitable for the owners. For example, the menu approach taken includes whole foods (e.g., whole-grain tortillas, beans, tofu) and low-fat dairy products, in addition to fresh produce. This allows store owners to select options that fit the store's capacity, while being culturally appropriate for customers. Additionally, the program gave more stores a modest incentive to participate and allowed them to see the potential for increasing their profits. The process helped store owners see themselves as part of the community. The Food Trust is also focused on identifying sustainable solutions and offering additional supports for the most dedicated stores, such as cost-free training and technical assistance and larger infrastructure renovations (e.g., shelving, refrigeration) to accommodate more healthy food options.

Through this initiative, The Food Trust was able to build a meaningful program that continues to benefit store owners and increases availability of healthy food for many low-income neighborhoods throughout Philadelphia.

Improving Food Access and the Local Economy through Farmers' Markets

Southwest Georgia

The residents of Baker County in southwest Georgia (80% of whom are African American) live in a rural food desert. Over time, grocery store retailers abandoned the area, making it difficult for low-income residents with limited transportation to access healthy foods. The lack of grocery stores also impacted economic vitality in the community, leaving local farmers struggling to maintain their livelihood. To simultaneously address the resulting food access and economic issues, the East Baker Historic Society (EBHS) and the Southwest Georgia Project for Community Education began partnering with the Georgia StrikeForce Initiative and The Federation of Southern Cooperatives—organizations that assist African American and disadvantaged rural farmers—to repurpose unused public land for farmers' markets in all 22 counties of the southwest region in Georgia. These efforts were supported by the United States Department of Agriculture and CDC's *Communities Putting Prevention to Work: State and Territorial Initiative*.

The farmers' market development process began with identifying potential land. Next, community members, community-based organizations, local business owners, and government officials including commissioners and community development councils, participated in several strategic planning meetings, lending their input and getting approval to use public land. Disadvantaged farmers were identified and their needs were determined and addressed with training. When the market was ready to open, community activities, such as local high school band performances, were held to attract patrons. Residents with limited transportation now had access to nearby healthy food retail, African American and disadvantaged rural farmers gained customers to purchase their products, and town centers were revitalized with additional foot traffic from farmers' market customers.

By May 2012, four markets had opened. Southwest Georgia's food desert is being revived with fresh foods—one farmers' market at a time.