

# Corner Stores in Rural Wisconsin Provide Residents with Fresh Produce

by: Kelli Stader, Nutrition Coordinator

## SUMMARY

Approximately 28,000 Wisconsin residents now have more access to fresh foods and healthier beverages at local corner stores. The Wisconsin Division of Public Health (DPH) partnered with the University of Wisconsin Extension and 11 coalition groups to expand the Wisconsin Corner Store Assessment (WCSA) tool. The tool helps corner stores identify the need for improvements through a series of questions related to healthy food choices. With improvements, corner stores can now make it easier for residents to choose healthier options.



## CHALLENGE

In 2013, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) showed that 37.8% of adults in Wisconsin ate fruit less than 1 time per day and 25.8% ate vegetables less than 1 time per day. Other research shows that residents in rural areas have less access to fresh, nutritious produce than residents who live in urban areas. Often, residents in rural communities do not have easy access to full-service grocery stores. For example, Lincoln County has only

3 full-service grocery stores for the county's more than 28,000 residents—making the county's 20 corner stores the more convenient option for purchasing food. In addition, elderly residents in rural areas are especially vulnerable. According to the Lincoln County Health Department, older residents purchase at least two premade meals per day from corner stores. However, most corner stores lack a variety of quality fruits and vegetables.

## YOUR INVOLVEMENT IS KEY

For more information about Wisconsin's healthy food initiatives, visit <http://bit.ly/2aA2BxU>. This project is supported by the State Public Health Actions to Prevent and Control Diabetes, Heart Disease, Obesity, and Associated Risk Factors and Promote School Health cooperative agreement (DP13-1305).

*"This tool has allowed us to provide healthy options for our customers and our community. We really need these options for our children to learn healthy habits. With help from our local health department, we learned the guidelines to do so."*

*- Tracey Brewer, store manager, Lotter's Merrill Mobil*

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## SOLUTION

In January 2015, DPH partnered with the University of Wisconsin Extension, and a coalition of community organizations to modify, promote, and expand the WCSA tool to corner stores across the state. The tool guides community team members through an assessment process and helps them define and prioritize possible areas of improvement. With this information, corner stores are able to create sustainable, community-based improvements that help address poor nutrition. The tool provides guidance on factors such as forms of payment accepted, shelf space dedicated to healthy eating options, and placement of healthy foods in the store.

## RESULTS

One coalition group, for example, in rural Lincoln County, Wisconsin, provided technical assistance and educational resources on healthier retail environments for four corner stores by using the WCSA tool to make store assessments. These corner stores now offer healthier food and drink options in their community. All four corner stores promoted healthier food options, created signage, and provided residents discount coupons to purchase dried fruits, and low calorie foods and drinks. Shelf toppers were also placed throughout all four stores to help residents easily locate healthy food options. An owner from 1 of the 4 stores placed bottled water closer to the register to make it more convenient for residents to buy healthy drinks.

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#### Contact CDC

<http://www.cdc.gov/cdc-info/requestform.html>

#### Web site

<http://nccd.cdc.gov/nccdsuccessstories/>

The findings and conclusions in this success story are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily represent the official position of the funding agencies or the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).

## SUSTAINING SUCCESS

DPH plans to collect evaluations from store owners and customers in target areas. The feedback will provide guidance on using the WCSA tool in other retail environments across the state. DPH is also working to improve healthy eating options at gas stations. With support from the coalitions, corner stores across Wisconsin now have stronger relationships with the community and are committed to providing healthier retail environments for the long haul.

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