Prince George's County Healthy Corner Store Initiative Guidance and Toolkit

December 2022

THE MARYLAND-NATIONAL CAPITAL PARK AND PLANNING COMMISSION
Prince George's County Planning Department

Abstract

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Prepared for the Institute for Public Health Innovation in coordination with the Prince George's County Health Department, this document consists of an in-depth profile of existing conditions for small corner stores in the Healthy Food Priority Areas of Prince George's County. Retail market conditions and data are analyzed, case studies are examined, and guidance and recommendations for the implementation of the Healthy Corner Store Initiative (HCSI) are provided. A user-friendly toolkit is included to help store owners offer fresh, healthy food items.

COVER PHOTO SOURCE: ISTOCK BY JACQUELINE NIX

Prince George's County
Healthy Corner Store Initiative
Guidance and Toolkit

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The Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission
Prince George's County Planning Department
14741 Governor Oden Bowie Drive
Upper Marlboro, MD 20772

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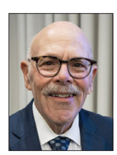
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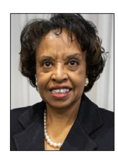
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Introduction

Seeking to increase access to and availability of quality healthy food options at corner stores mainly inside the Capital Beltway, the Prince George's County Health Department launched its Healthy Corner Store Initiative in Spring 2019. The Health Department's advisory committee convened to provide technical assistance and develop policies. The advisory committee membership included representatives from the Institute for Public Health Innovation, Kaiser Permanente of the Mid-Atlantic States, the Prince George's County Economic Development Corporation, The Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission, Prince George's Community College, the American Heart Association, the University of Maryland, Suitland Civic Association, Inc., and Taking Effective Action, Inc.

The initiative seeks to address food insecurity and healthy food access in Healthy Food Priority Areas (HFPA) of the County. In a Healthy Food Priority Area:

1. The ratio of healthy to unhealthy food retailers is low.
2. The median household income is below $67,553, the Maryland Self Sufficiency Standard for a family of four.[1]
3. More than 5.2 percent of households have no vehicle available.

Prince George's County residents who live in HFPAs may face more barriers, may travel farther to reach healthy food outlets, or may not have the economic means to afford healthy food options.[2] The initiative is timely given the COVID-19 pandemic that has exacerbated health disparities experienced by the County's most vulnerable residents. Adding healthier food options to more stores in these communities will improve the health and well-being of the residents and provide an economic benefit for participating businesses.

Addressing food security by increasing the number of local venues that carry fresh fruits and vegetables is not a new strategy. Since 1992, the Food Trust in Philadelphia has been a proponent of this approach and provides guidance to localities across the country. However, there is limited research on how to adapt this model to under-resourced areas to also spur economic development and community participation.

The consultant team gathered ideas and responses from people in all facets of the food economy to begin better coordination and improve understanding among communities. The analysis of independently owned stores in Prince George's County HFPAs and community store patrons resulted in two documents with two audiences: an analysis for County and nonprofit staff and an implementation guide and a user-friendly toolkit for store owners. The latter is meant to foster partnerships with the Healthy Corner Store Initiative.

Funding for this study was provided through the Planning Assistance to Municipalities and Communities (PAMC) program. Administered through the Prince George's County Planning Department, the PAMC program offers planning, design, technical, and financial assistance for planning-related projects to local municipalities and community organizations.

1 Healthy Food Priority Areas, Prince George's County, MD.

2 Johns Hopkins Center for a Livable Future, "Environmental Justice and the Food Environment in Prince George's County, Maryland: Assessment of Three Communities." https://www.frontiersin.org/articles/10.3389/fbuil.2019.00121/full

Existing Trends

Typically located in densely populated and economically stressed areas where a large grocery store may not be physically or financially feasible, corner and convenience stores can be critical food providers for residents. Usually, corner stores consist of less than 5,000 square feet of space, with limited parking and loading facilities.

Corner stores in HFPAs are most often owner-operated and food offerings are usually limited to those with extended shelf life such as snacks, dry groceries, beverages, and frozen foods. Single-serving items such as a cup of cereal, frozen pizza, or packages of snacks dominate the offerings.

Increased consumption of convenience foods and the rapid expansion of online grocery sales over the past five years have dramatically impacted small and independent retailers. Online grocery sales now account for more than $36 billion annually with 25.7 percent annual growth since 2016.[3] Online grocery sales give retailers such as Walmart, Kroger, and Amazon a way to compete where they have no physical stores. These three companies now account for more than 70 percent of all online grocery sales.

As shown in Table 1, the average corner store employs 2.41 workers and has annual revenues of $455,000. Corner stores lost 5.35 percent of their sales during the COVID-19 pandemic, with many failing to maintain a profit margin.[4]

Data for corner stores indicate a rebound, but not quite to pre-pandemic levels, and store infrastructure investment has diminished. (Store infrastructure typically includes coolers, freezers, shelving, cash registers, baskets, and shopping carts). Some corner store operators own their building and must spend money to maintain parking facilities (if available) and the building itself. Despite the overall economy adding new jobs at a faster pace, stores have had employment growth of less than one percent per year. During the height of the pandemic, a reduction in urban areas' foot traffic and a sharp drop in consumer confidence resulted in declining projected revenue for corner stores.

An indicator of corner stores' vitality (the health of the corner store segment) can be found in the IVA (Industry Value Added)-to-revenue ratio that measures the gross output of the sector. The contributions of the corner store segment to the overall economy include payroll, taxes on products and sales, and operating surplus reinvested. The decline in the IVA/revenue ratio from 14.4 in 2018 to 13.8 in 2022 indicates that the effects of the shifting consumer purchasing patterns during the COVID-19 pandemic may have caused a more permanent shift in buying patterns. In other words, the real market value of the goods sold at these stores is in decline.

The decline in the IVA ratio influences the Healthy Corner Store Initiative in two ways. First, it indicates that owners should focus on improving the market value of goods sold to ensure the continuity of their businesses. Second, it suggests that there will be limited capacity for these businesses to pay for upgrades and improvements that would result in higher sales. Many corner store operators turn to suppliers and others for financial support in the form of trade credits or capital equipment.

Similarly, declining revenue per employee limits the ability of corner stores to provide living wages and reduces the capital available to invest in store changes. Store owners will be less willing to take risks while focusing on an inventory of products that provide high margins and are known to bring customer traffic, but that may not be healthy.

3 IBISWorld, "Specialized Industry Report OD 5085" February 2022

4 Internal Revenue Service, SOI Integrated Business Datasheet

Table 2 highlights the challenges that corner store owners face in paying for store upgrades and changes to their business; for example, offering healthier foods. Of note is the “Days Payables Outstanding” figure which measures the time it takes for a business to pay off its operating credit. At 61.3 days on average, this indicates that stores are relying on suppliers to provide the credit they need to keep their doors open. Cash after Operations has declined by more than half from the 10-year average to the 3-year average. Corner stores have little cash to risk on change.

Accommodating financial realities is critical to the success of the Healthy Corner Store Initiative. The average store owner is currently taking home just 1.3 percent of revenue based on the three-year running average, or $5,915 ($455,000*0.013). Compare this to the average minimum purchase requirement of many produce wholesalers of $750 per delivery and the problem becomes clear. Helping business owners understand the potential for change to increase their store’s stability and profitability while reducing the financial risk will be crucial to the initiative’s outcome.

Table 1. Corner Store Key Financial Indicators

Corner Store Key Financial Indicators					
Indicators	**2018**	**2019**	**2020**	**2021**	**2022**
Revenue Growth	2.64%	4.07%	-5.35%	0.53%	1.31%
Firm Growth	0.77%	1.87%	-6.03%	2.91%	0.90%
Employment	-1.70%	2.72%	-4.40%	0.90%	0.98%
Average Employment	2.41	2.43	2.47	2.42	2.41
Revenue per Employee	$198,000	$191,000	$189,000	$188,000	$189,000
Average Wage	$19,416	$19,466	$19,430	$19,416	$19,429
IVA/Revenue	14.40%	13.90%	13.20%	13.80%	13.80%

SOURCE: IBIS WORLD; ACDS, 2021.

Table 2. Historical Performance Measures

Historical Performance Measures			
Industry	**3-Year Average**	**5-Year Average**	**10-Year Average**
Earnings Before Interest & Taxes (EBIT)	4.4	4.5	4.3
Contribution Margin/Revenue	23.6	23.5	24.0
Owner Compensation/Revenue	1.3	1.4	1.5
Days Payables Outstanding (DPO)	61.3	61.3	73.7
Days Inventory Outstanding (DIO)	78.8	78.9	76.5
Cash after Operations	8.1%	15.5%	21.7%
Return on Assets	4.7%	4.8%	4.5%

SOURCE: IBIS WORLD; ACDS, 2021.

Corner Store Supply

County entities with regulatory approval to sell food number more than 3,500. This number was narrowed to those within the HFPAs (based on 2020 legislation) and to CoStar and property data of building footprint, year built, and property adjacencies. This was augmented with field survey data: site conditions, floor layout, product mix, daily operations, exterior appearance, and assessed capacity to expand operations.

The final inventory totaled 67 stores (shown in Table 3 and Appendix C—Field Survey Stores).

Most of these (68.7 percent) are stores of less than 3,000 square feet. Larger stores (10,000 or more square feet) represent 9 percent of the inventory.

Categorizing the healthy corner store retail inventory based on store type (in a shopping center versus standalone) and property configuration, as shown in Table 4, provided insights on the potential to enhance grocery operations, vehicular, pedestrian, and bike accessibility, current market environment, and equitable consumer access.

Table 3. Store Inventory by Size

Inventory By Store Size				
Size (Square Feet)	**Count**	**Percent**	**Square Feet**	**Average SF**
Less than 3,000	46	68.7%	66,603	1,448
3,000 to 9,999	13	19.4%	63,368	3,804
10,000 to 24,999	6	9.0%	98,895	16,483
25,000 to 45,000	2	3.0%	79,823	39,912
	67	**100.0%**	**308,689**	

SOURCE: COSTAR, 2021; PRINCE GEORGE'S COUNTY DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, 2021.

Table 4. Store Inventory by Layout

Inventory By Store Layout				
Layout	**Count**	**Square Feet**	**Percent**	**Average SF**
Shopping Center	32	113,343	36.7%	3,542
Standalone	16	39,441	12.8%	2,465
Mixed-Use	2	900	0.3%	450
Existing Grocer	17	155,005	50.2%	9,118
	67	**308,689**	**100.0%**	

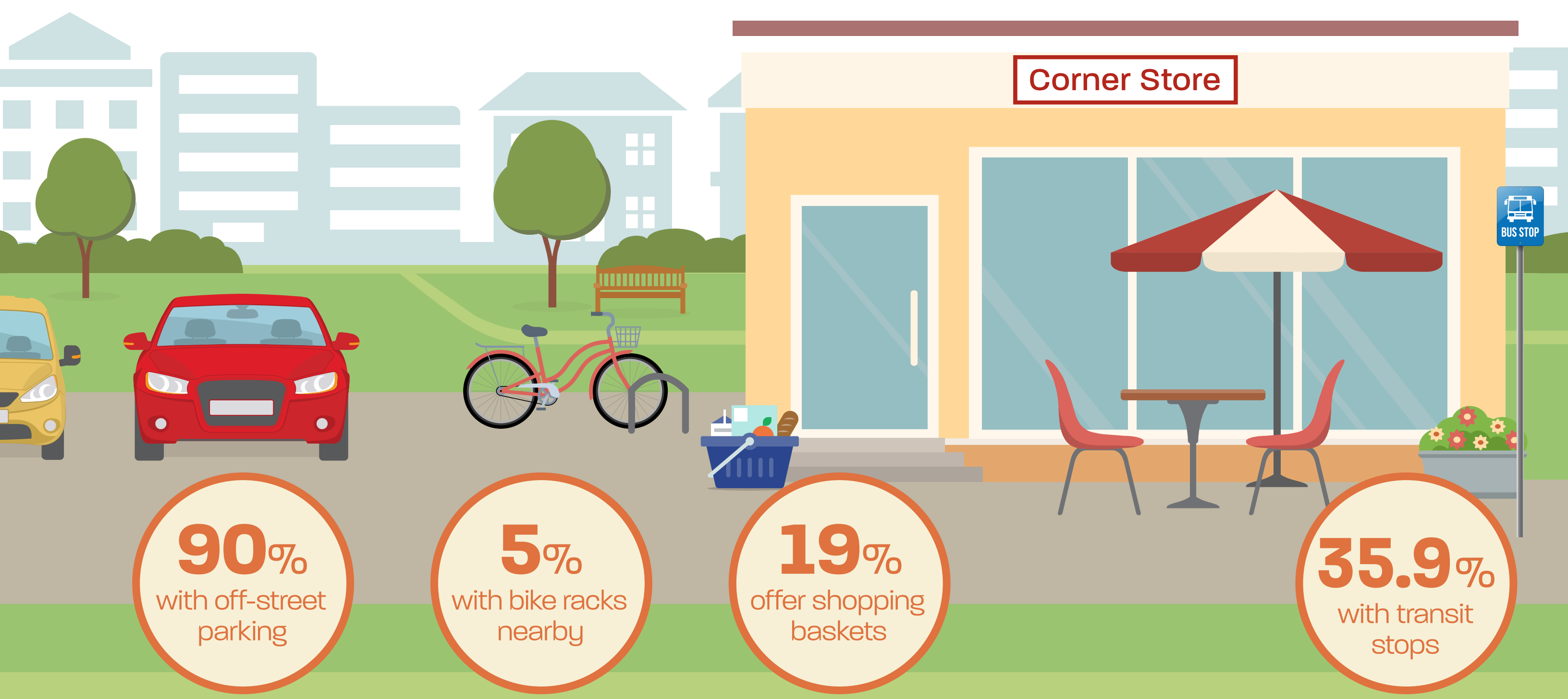
SOURCE: COSTAR, 2021; PRINCE GEORGE'S COUNTY DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, 2021.

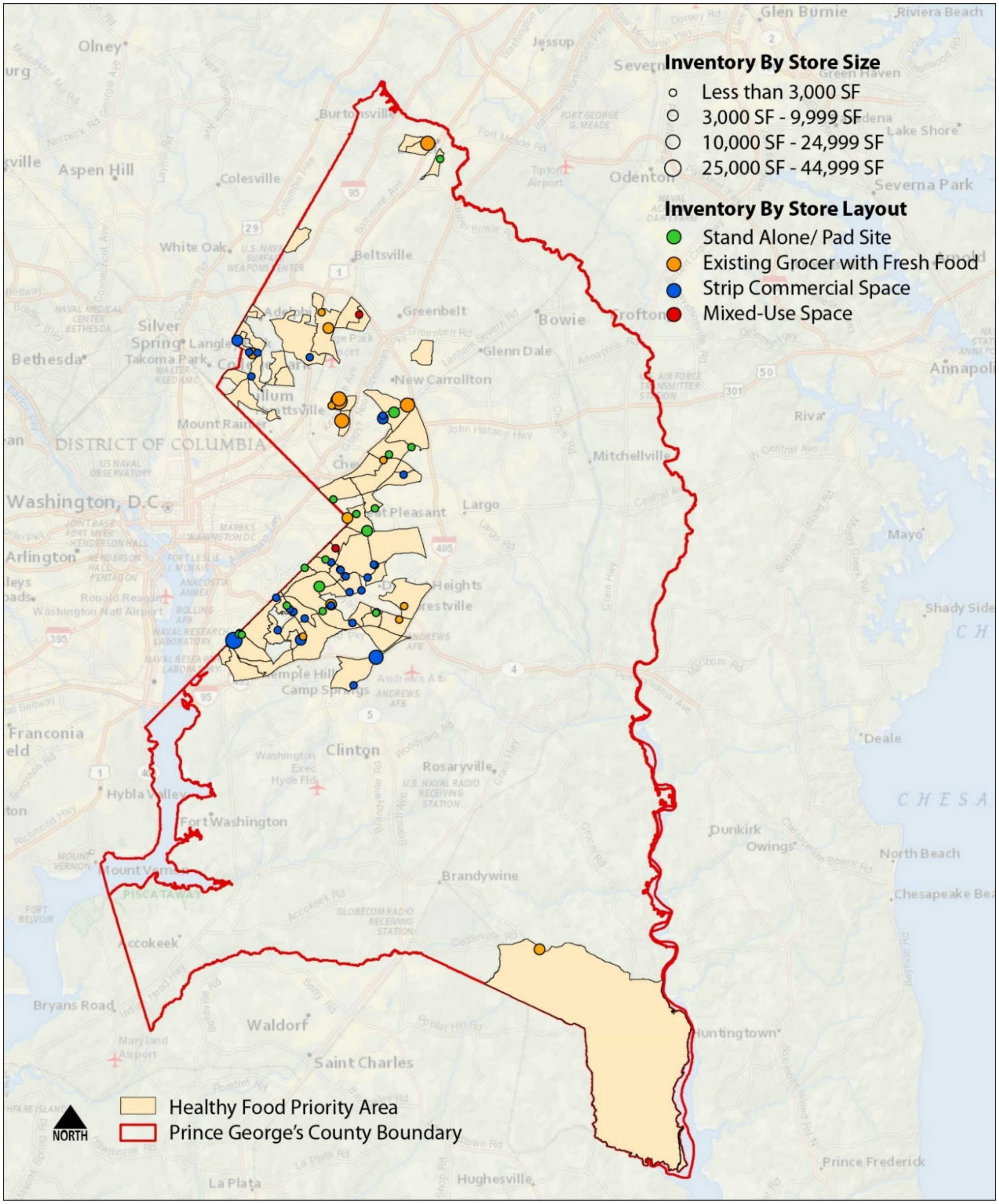
Field Survey

In fall 2021, the consultant team conducted a field survey of 46 stores throughout the Healthy Food Priority Areas. Surveys were conducted discreetly and provided information on the store conditions and the typical consumers of each store. See Appendix D—Field Survey Results.

In terms of location and accessibility, most corner stores were in commercial districts with parking: 90 percent off-street and 97.5 percent unmetered. More than one-third (35.9 percent) had transit (bus/train) stops visible from the store entrance, and 5 percent had a bike rack nearby. Over 83 percent of stores had ramps to allow customers easy access to the entrance.

One store had an outdoor seating area and three offered indoor seating. At corner stores, many patrons simply grab a handful of items: only 19 percent of stores offered shopping baskets. Not surprisingly, none of the stores had restrooms for customers. Sixty-one percent of stores had little or no visible pricing. Twelve had in-store cameras, and ten stores had plexiglass or security grates protecting cashiers.





Map 1. Existing Corner Stores in Prince George's County Healthy Food Priority Areas
SOURCE: ESRI, PRINCE GEORGE'S COUNTY GIS

Case Studies

The following case studies offer the best practices guidance for the Prince George's County Healthy Corner Store Initiative.

THE FOOD TRUST

Case Study One

The Problem

In 2004, The Food Trust in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania launched the Healthy Corner Store Initiative (HCSI) as a solution to the lack of awareness about and access to healthy foods in city corner stores. The program eventually expanded to other areas after it was recognized as a national model for improving access to healthy foods. Their program adhered to the following tenets:

- Stores have various levels of readiness for change.
- Building relationships with store owners is vital.
- Simple steps and training will encourage gradual, achievable results.
- Low-income ZIP codes are identified using U.S. Census data.
- Collaboration with community partners is essential.

The Solution

The Philadelphia HSCI model has five phases that correspond to the continuum of store readiness. Basic levels of change include:

- **Phase 1:** Introducing a few healthy products into the inventory.
- **Phase 2:** Using marketing materials to promote healthy food.

During these first two phases, monetary incentives can be given to the stores at the completion of these activities.

When the store is ready, it can move to increased levels of change:

- **Phase 3:** Business management training for the profitable sale of perishable healthy foods.
- **Phase 4:** Pursuing a store conversion to expand inventory of healthy foods.
- **Phase 5:** Obtaining a certification.

Certification as an official Food Trust Healthy Food store lets customers know it is a place to buy healthy food. A significant amount of free technical assistance is provided by the Food Trust with these phases, and stores receive equipment such as refrigeration, shelving, and display materials.

The Outcome

As a result of the program, store owners added an average of four new healthy items to their inventory and health in the communities improved. According to a 2014 Food Trust report, store owners reported higher profits and increased customer demand for healthy products. The report also indicated that property values increased in neighborhoods with healthy corner stores (revealed though an analysis of real estate market conditions conducted as part of the project.)[5]

SOURCE: ISTOCK BY MAJAPHOTO

Challenges and Solutions

Challenge	Solution
It can be difficult to identify corner stores that would be a good fit.	Use a list of Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) and Women, Infants & Children (WIC)-certified corner stores as a guide along with street canvassing to locate corner stores throughout the city.
Language and cultural barriers can prevent the formation of relationships with corner stores.	Hire staff with knowledge of the primary language used by store owners and the community. Provide training and resources in the appropriate language(s). Provide multilingual signage and marketing materials (usually English and Spanish).
Owners often have limited availability due to busy schedules.	Provide one-on-one training with the owners in their store and remain flexible to accommodate their schedules.
In some areas, there is a high ownership turnover which complicates partnerships and can hinder program success.	Visit or communicate with stores once every six weeks to three months. If a store changes ownership, the new owners can be enrolled in the program and provided with training to make sure they can continue to successfully sell healthy products.
Corner stores are not seen as part of a healthy shopping culture (people visit for convenience, not for quality products).	Develop marketing and community outreach that reframe the role of the corner store in the community.
Where to start?	Start small and phase in activities, which allows time for building relationships with store owners to gain trust. This will also help with gauging their level of commitment to the program.

5 Healthy Corner Store initiative: Philadelphia 2013-2014, The Food Trust, 2014, 7.

Figure 1.

THE FOOD TRUST'S **PROCESS**

SOURCE: USED WITH PERMISSION OF ACDS.

CITY OF MADISON HEALTHY RETAIL ACCESS PROGRAM (HRAP)

Case Study Two

The Problem

The City of Madison, Wisconsin recognized they had under-resourced areas with limited access to affordable, healthy food and developed a program to achieve the following goals:

- Increase healthy food access to low-income individuals and families.
- Support food enterprise development and entrepreneurship.
- Increase healthy food choice and improve health outcomes.
- Increase availability of foods corresponding to cultural preferences.

The Solution

To achieve HRAP's goals, the city created a grant program that funds food retailers (grocery stores, large convenience stores, cooperatives) with projects that improve food access in communities identified in their Food Access Improvement Map. The retailer is eligible if it is in a priority area or demonstrates that it serves residents from those census tracts.

The program also funds organizations that partner with food retailers to coordinate food access projects or provide technical assistance. The funding of both food retailers and collaborative partnerships allows for creative solutions.

Funding includes purchases of equipment or retail infrastructure, which help with stock improvement for SNAP/WIC certification. It includes community outreach, marketing/ merchandising assistance. It also includes more creative strategies such as mobile groceries and transportation services to connect customers to retailers with healthy food options.

The Outcome

The program does not dictate the specifics of projects but allows food retailers to develop projects that best suit a community's needs.

Challenges and Solutions

Challenge	Solution
Applying and qualifying for grant funding can often restrict programming. (Restrictive grant funding programming requires a feedback loop to assure adherence to community needs.)	Adopt a flexible approach that allows retailers to adapt their goods and services to best meet the needs they identify in the communities they serve.
Perceived inflexibility of traditional retail methods (lack of internet presence or limited cold storage).	Provide refrigerated lockers that allow retailers to offer online sales and deliver food closer to consumers at a lower cost. This can effectively increase retail service hours.
Resources are underutilized by local retailers and nonprofit organizers.	Hire more staff to identify and develop programs and engage store owners.
The program lacked measurable goals and was perceived by store owners as aimless at times.	Create benchmarks for success and schedule meetings at intervals to review progress, reach out to collaborators, and reflect on existing resources and connections.
Receiving too few applicants to the program.	Offer a simplified, two-step application. The first round will eliminate anyone who does not qualify, and then the second can ask for more complex information.
Grocery store owners have trouble stocking stores with healthy food.	Work with a cash-and-carry distributor or with a fresh wholesale market and negotiate purchases of smaller quantities.

ERIE COUNTY'S HEALTHY CORNER STORE INITIATIVE

Case Study Three

The Problem

Buffalo, in Erie County, New York is one of the poorest cities in the United States. Over the period 2011-2013, Black and Hispanic-Latino residents in Erie County experienced hospital admission rates (356.6 and 274.4 per 10,000, respectively) disproportionate to that of the overall population (156.1).[6] The city, in partnership with Cornell Cooperative Extension of Erie County (CCE Erie), decided to implement a "food-as-pharmacy" program that provides healthy food access to residents who live in areas with limited resources (the case for much of the city's East Side). The program seeks, in part, to prevent chronic conditions caused by diet-related disease and improve health outcomes without the need for hospitalization, which is expensive and stresses the healthcare system.

The Solution

The Buffalo HCSI, a program of CCE Erie, has three foci:

- Farm-to-Store Relationships
- Business Support
- Nutrition Education

The HCSI uses surveys to help stores discover what produce customers prefer. Next, it educates store owners about seasonal fruit and vegetables and provides price guidelines. Finally, it provides locally grown, pesticide-free produce for the stores to sell. Store owners have a choice of local distributors. The HCSI helps stores integrate the new products into their business plan. It then provides marketing strategies and facilitates community outreach, including promoting and coordinating healthy food-related events. The HCSI provides equipment (such as coolers) free-of-charge and continued support through communication and information.

6 "Department of Health." Erie County Health Indicators by Race/Ethnicity, 2011-2013, https://www.health.ny.gov/statistics/community/minority/county/erie.htm.

The HCSI educates the community on stretching a food budget to include fruits and vegetables, maintaining healthy weight, and reducing the risk of nutrition-related illness. It hosts cooking classes and taste-testings for quick, easy, and healthy meals.

The Outcome

The Erie County HCSI initially met resistance from store owners who saw the program as intrusive and representing a point of view that did not fit the culture or needs of their communities. HCSI staff efforts were perceived to be those of an outsider. Disagreements arose about the types of stocking and inventory decisions the stores were making, and communication became difficult or impossible.

To address these issues, the HCSI began to employ staff from the local community. Building and maintaining relationships became the best means to achieve store and HSCI program goals. The CCE Erie Director indicated that was the most significant and positive move made by HCSI since its inception.

Once trust was established, the HCSI program became aware that a customized approach to each store and community would be necessary. For example, assistance with inventory management, properly programmed point-of-sale (POS) systems and sales floor planning could have a powerful impact on the availability of healthy foods. Given the limited resources at the store level, introducing such changes had to be undertaken incrementally.

The HCSI staff supported local entrepreneurs and distributors who were interested in increasing healthy food options. CCE Erie supported a local food startup that delivers customized, prepared meals for distribution and sale. The HCSI worked with FeedMore Western NY and the Western New York Food Bank and local food distributors to increase sales calls and order frequency of fresh fruits, vegetables, and dairy products that meet demographic and cultural demands.

Challenges and Solutions

Program direction continues to be based on the priorities of both the stores and the program. The mechanics are being refined through a collaborative process involving representatives from the entire food supply chain.

Challenge	Solution
Barriers between the store owners and staff for implementing HCSI.	Incorporate community feedback into planning and implementation.
Cultural and language barriers between customers and store owners.	Create community events hosted by stores that foster goodwill.
Consumers have trouble identifying healthy food and making product choices.	Identify healthy food with shelf tags and other signage that explains what makes one choice healthier than another.
There can be a barrier to healthy food education, and customers may be hesitant to buy healthy food if they do not know how to prepare it.	Create a free guide to healthy eating that includes simple recipes made with ingredients sourced from healthy corner stores (Erie Grown Recipes). Program may expand to allow for nutritional education classes such as Cornell Cooperative Extension of Erie County's SNAP-Ed.

Figure 2.

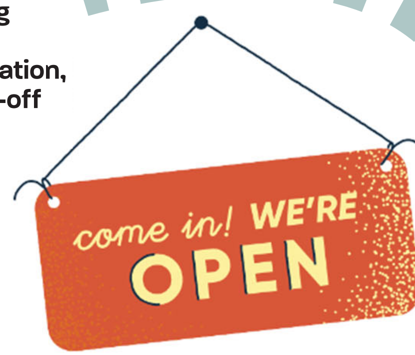
ERIE COUNTY'S HCSI **PROCESS**

1. Conduct surveys to determine customer needs for healthy foods

2. Educate store owners on seasonal fruits and vegetables and provide price guidelines

3. Offer locally-grown produce through store owner's choice of retailer and help integrate product into business plan

4. Provide marketing strategies and outreach coordination, including for kick-off events



5. Run community programming on food health, budgeting, and affordable cooking

SOURCE: USED WITH PERMISSION OF ACDS.

Best Practices

The following potentially successful strategies emerged from examining the case studies:

Identifying Stores and Ensuring Buy-in

- Use a food access organization to build relationships with potential applicants.
- Start with small changes, such as a hashtag like "#eatwithapurpose" used in Erie County.
- Perform a thorough assessment to understand all stakeholder needs. Is more training on the handling and storage of fresh produce needed? Is offering equipment such as refrigeration? Is technical assistance on sourcing, displaying, and marketing?
- Use strategies that address the specific needs of a store.
- Let retailers decide what works and allow for flexibility.

Local Partnerships

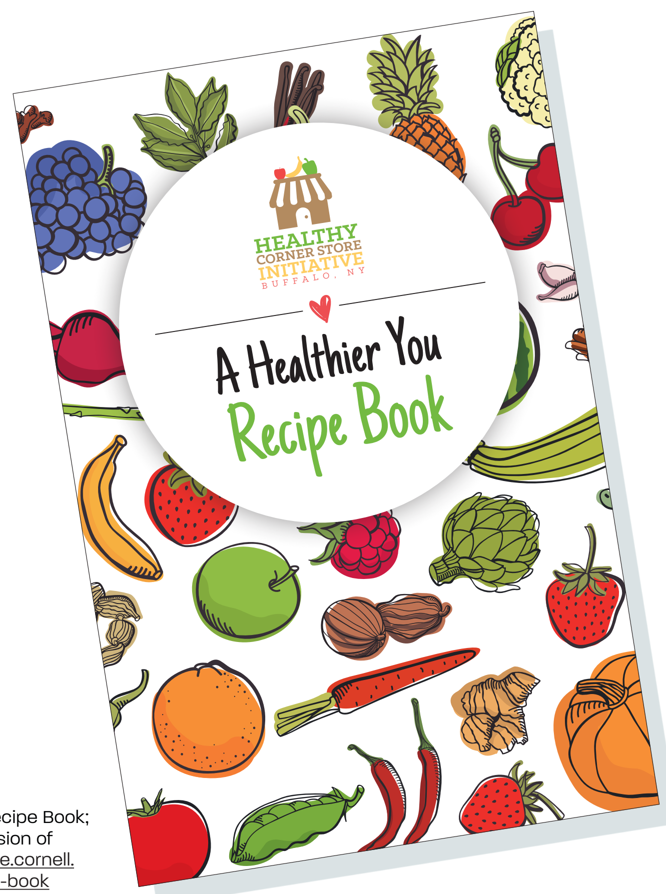
- Work with local partners (governmental, NGOs, community organizers) from the beginning so their expertise molds program creation.
- Explore healthcare partnerships. The Food Insecurity Toolkit offers physicians and health care organizations a booklet to learn more about food insecurity.
- Promote locally grown foods and partner with their producers.
- Strengthen wholesaler and manufacturer partnerships.

Innovation and Flexibility

- Explore alternative ways to offer fresh food; for example, explore hosting a farmers' market if there is available space.
- Increase the use of point-of-sale systems for better inventory management.

Administering the Program

- Identify a coordinating entity, such as the Food Trust, that has enough staff capacity and funding.
- Support programs that increase consumer demand, such as Buffalo's Go Green Fresh Take meals or Erie County HCSI's A Healthier You Recipe Book.



Source: A Healthier You Recipe Book; Cornell Cooperative Extension of Erie County, https://erie.cce.cornell.edu/resources/hcsi-recipe-book

SOURCE: A HEALTHIER YOU RECIPE BOOK; CORNELL COOPERATIVE EXTENSION OF ERIE COUNTY, HTTPS://ERIE.CCE.CORNELL.EDU/RESOURCES/HCSI-RECIPE-BOOK

Marketing and Branding Actions

This section provides recommendations to enhance marketing and branding opportunities for corner stores. It will serve as a roadmap when laying the foundation for long-term healthy corner store vitality.

The lessons learned during the discovery phase of the project are threefold:

Any program must **improve the overall financial health** of corner stores. Owners faced with declining revenues will be reluctant to make changes that risk further declines.

Establish a trusted relationship with store owners and local communities before seeking changes in behavior.

Community demographics and store competition will dictate a workable product mix.

With these three factors in mind, marketing and branding should focus on:

- Identifying and building shared values with the community.
- Enhancing the responsiveness of the local food system to local demand.
- Increasing the capacity of shoppers to use healthy foods.
- Assisting small store owners in improving their bottom line.
- Enhancing technology utilization and innovation at the store level.
- Building local capacity in the supply chain. Incentivizing positive changes in behavior.

The strategies address key sectors of the healthy corner store ecosystem—owners, operators, customers, and public agencies. The strategies are not sequential and some will take longer to accomplish; many relate to processes that must be repeated as businesses move in and out of the economy. The need will depend on the variety of players working together or independently. Where possible, actions should build upon and reinforce each other.

As the Healthy Corner Store Initiative develops over time, less public investment will be needed to spur healthy food activity. Initial public investment from County and state government should include financial support for the initiative and participating stores.

Marketing and Branding Strategies

1

Identifying and building shared values with the community

Case study analysis and interviews make it clear that values alignment is a critical element of success for any healthy corner store initiative. Achieving values alignment starts with recognizing the uniqueness of each community and understanding that rapport will form the foundation for success. Marketing strategies that can be employed to assist with this include:

- Using existing networks, engage with the community to understand their needs and concerns regarding food availability, affordability, access, and preparation. Networks such as faith-based organizations can provide a foundation of trust from which additional relationships may be built. These networks should be used for:
  - » Conducting surveys
  - » Training events
  - » Sampling foods
  - » Engaging food entrepreneurs
  - » Reaching youth audiences
- Learn from store owners and food access providers about the purchasing, lifestyles, and consumption patterns of the neighborhood.
- Recognize that healthy corner stores must be profitable to serve the community and respect that the changes must help them stay in business.
- Create a neighborhood-based action strategy that is simple and implementable with the resources on hand. This may be simply educational material for customers and better labeling of healthy food options.

2

Enhancing the responsiveness of the local food system to meet local demand

When trusted relationships are in place, then marketing and branding can begin. This effort should start with making the corner store system responsive to the consumers' ever-changing demand for healthy foods.

- Use kiosk-based surveys to understand what products consumers wish to purchase but are unavailable.
- Align County resources to ensure they are used effectively.
- Employ technology to bring products to customers in a timely manner.
  - » Deploy a shared, refrigerated locker system that offers 24-hour healthy food access.
  - » Conduct crowd-sourced menu development to inform food trainings and meal preparation services (for example, Meals on Wheels or packaged snacks prepared by store owners).
- Host tasting events and mobile markets with support from nutrition educators to introduce the community to foods and food preparation techniques.
- Engage participants such as the Maryland Food Center Tenant Advisory Board in planning and execution.
  - » Build a cooperative purchasing and distribution model to service a group of local stores.
  - » Assist in the design and development of a system to increase cooperative purchasing efficiency.
  - » Develop or increase financial assistance programs to encourage greater liquidity in the local food system.

Marketing and Branding Strategies

3

Increasing the capacity of shoppers to buy and consume healthy foods

Interviews and case studies highlighted the need to increase the capacity of shoppers to use healthy, raw food, plan meals, and cook from recipes. It includes using utensils, cookware, kitchen appliances, and pantry staples (cooking oil, salt, pepper, pasta, canned tomatoes, beans). Supporting increased capacity as a marketing activity includes:

- Expanding the range and diversity of training and education events to reach a broader audience.
- Providing on-shelf information about recipes and product pairing.
- Developing co-branded means to distribute pantry staples and basic kitchen utensils.
- Creating branded, culturally based youth engagement activities built around food.

4

Assisting owners of small stores in improving their bottom line

Once actionable market information is available, stores must have the ability to plan, purchase, inventory, market, and sell the products. Given the limited economic means of most store owners, the following actions will be necessary:

- Reduce the costs and risks of changing inventory standards and re-equipping the stores to handle more perishable products by providing low-cost financing and grants.
- Support cooperative purchasing, merchandising, and category management services.
- Create store-level branding capability using tools such as style guides, values-based messaging about healthy foods, and private labeling of store-brand products.
- Support business process improvement to include training on proper use of point-of-sale programs, enhanced financial controls, and improved inventory management.
- Develop a healthy corner store peer group to aid in collective problem solving and marketing.
- Provide design service solutions to increase per-square-foot sales.

5

Enhancing technology utilization and innovation at the store level

The application of modern technology to increase healthy food consumption has been well demonstrated throughout the COVID-19 pandemic.[7] Yet, small retailers tend to lag in the adoption of technology to enhance efficiency and reach a broader client base. Modest technology adoptions that may positively impact store sales include:

- Just-in-time product inventory can increase sales capacity without store expansion. Create the APIs (Application Programming Interface) to link Electronic Data Interchange (EDI) systems at wholesalers and distributors to improve HCSI stores' access to merchandising services.
- Improve utilization of existing POS systems to improve management efficiency. This may include teaching store owners how to use existing systems to simplify ordering, improve fulfillment accuracy, and increase profitability.
- Integrate customer relationship management software within the POS system to improve customer shopping satisfaction. Such a system can assist store owners to better understand the purchasing dynamics of their customers.
- Conduct regular electronic surveys of the community to assist HCSI store owners to better match consumer needs with inventory and stocking decisions. Posting QR code survey links at the corner stores' cash registers have been used effectively to encourage participation.
- Employ shared technology resources such as a locker-based last-mile delivery network with the ability to allow multiple vendors to access the community 24 hours a day. This will improve customer access to products in the store and allow stores to share the costs of deployment.
- Create a meal-kit fulfillment network with customizable options to suit the individualized needs and desires of the community. The program may be modeled off that of Erie County, New York.

7 S. Y. Lim, K. W. Lee, W. L Seow, N. A. Mohamed, N. K. Devaraj, S. Amin-Nordin, "Effectiveness of Integrated Technology Apps for Supporting Healthy Food Purchasing and Consumption: A Systematic Review.," (Basel, Switzerland, 2021) https://doi.org/10.3390/foods10081861.

Marketing and Branding Strategies

6

Incentivizing positive changes in behavior

Some of the changes envisioned will require significant support and incentives including:

- Financing events that provide training and healthy food samples at store and community events.
- Funding coupons targeting diet-based health outcomes or those that may expand store owner interest in participating in healthy corner store initiatives.
- Providing grants for community and store innovations that are locally driven and fit the values of the Healthy Corner Store Initiative.

The marketing and branding strategies should be aggressively developed before providing architectural and engineering guidance to store owners. Interviews, store visits, and case studies all demonstrate the need for program development that starts at the store and community level. Once community level buy-in is achieved, program development can proceed in a manner that best suits the local market conditions and stakeholders upon whom success is predicated.

Appendices

Appendix A—Survey

1. **Store name:**

___

2. **What are neighboring buildings utilized for?**
   - ☐ Majority residential
   - ☐ Majority commercial
   - ☐ Majority industrial
   - ☐ Majority institutional
   - ☐ Majority food stores
   - ☐ Other

3. **What delivery/entry system do you see?**
   - ☐ Front door
   - ☐ Back door
   - ☐ Open air/kiosk
   - ☐ Overhead door
   - ☐ Other

4. **Is there evidence of a back-up power source?**
   - ☐ Yes
   - ☐ No
   - ☐ Maybe

5. **Is there parking available?**
   - ☐ Yes
   - ☐ No

6. **If there is parking, is it:**
   - ☐ On street
   - ☐ Off street

7. **If there is parking, is it:**
   - ☐ Free
   - ☐ Metered

8. **Is there a bike rack?**
   - ☐ Yes
   - ☐ No

9. **Is there a nearby transportation-share service?**
   - ☐ Bike
   - ☐ Car
   - ☐ Scooter
   - ☐ Other

10. **Is there a bus/train stop visible near the store entrance?**
    - ☐ Yes
    - ☐ No

11. **Are the following well-maintained?**

Pavement	☐ Yes	☐ No
Sidewalk	☐ Yes	☐ No
Building Exterior	☐ Yes	☐ No
Building Interior	☐ Yes	☐ No
Pavement	☐ Yes	☐ No
Sidewalk	☐ Yes	☐ No

12. **Is the building accessible to individuals with mobility issues?**
    - ☐ Yes
    - ☐ No

13. **Are there streetlights or other light sources visible near the store entrance?**
    - ☐ Yes
    - ☐ No

14. **Is there evidence of site security?**

___

___

15. **Describe the street activity: walkers, community activities, noise level, traffic, etc.**

___

___

16. **Is there a seating area outside?**
    - ☐ Yes
    - ☐ No

17. **Is there a seating area inside?**
    - ☐ Yes
    - ☐ No

18. **What products are advertised in the store windows?**
    - ☐ Tobacco products/E-cigarettes
    - ☐ Alcohol
    - ☐ Premade Food Products/Deli Items
    - ☐ Beverages/Packaged Foods
    - ☐ Fresh food
    - ☐ Nonfood Products
    - ☐ Services (Financial/Western Union/etc.)
    - ☐ Other

19. **Are there any signs advertising participation in food programs?**
    - ☐ Yes
    - ☐ No

20 Are there shopping baskets in the store?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

21 Were you greeted upon entry to the store?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

22 How easy is the store layout to navigate?

Not Very 1 2 3 4 5 Very

23 How crowded does the store feel?

Not Very 1 2 3 4 5 Very

24 Are there:

☐ Reach-in Fridges

☐ Refrigerated Shelves (Air Curtain)

☐ Chest Coolers (Cold Plate)

☐ End-of-Aisle Fridges

25 Is there fresh produce visible upon entry to the store?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

26 Are there vegetables, fruit, dairy, eggs, or meat products visible?

- ☐ On the shelves
- ☐ In fridges
- ☐ In freezers
- ☐ At checkout
- ☐ On the sidewalk/outside
- ☐ Other

27 What is the overall quality of

	Poor	Average	Excellent
Fruit	☐	☐	☐
Vegetables	☐	☐	☐
Eggs	☐	☐	☐
Diary	☐	☐	☐
Meat	☐	☐	☐

28. **Are product prices visible and easy to locate?**
- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Some

29. **Are the product description signs and/or products themselves in English?**
- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Some

30. **If not, what other languages are present?**

____

31. **If asked, can an employee direct you to products with relative ease?**

	Yes	No	N/A
Fresh Produce	☐	☐	☐
Tobacco	☐	☐	☐
Alcohol	☐	☐	☐
Lottery	☐	☐	☐
Prepackaged Food	☐	☐	☐
Other	☐	☐	☐

32. **Are there bathrooms available?**
- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

33. **Are any of these services available?**
- ☐ Coffee Station
- ☐ ATM
- ☐ Gambling/Gaming

34. **Which of these methods does the store accept?**
- ☐ Cash
- ☐ Credit Card
- ☐ Debit Card
- ☐ Checks
- ☐ Food Assistance

35. **Do they advertise accepting the above?**
- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

36. **How many customers were in the store during your visit?**
- ☐ 0
- ☐ 1-3
- ☐ 4-5
- ☐ 6+

37. **Describe any other relevant store conditions:**

____

____

____

____

____

____

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____

____

Appendix B—Glossary of Common Retail Food Terms

Glossary of Common Retail Food Terms	
Term	Common Meaning
Air Curtain Cooler	Open front cooler using a wall air for insulation
Reach-in Cooler	Vertical cooler with doors
End-of-Aisle cooler	Vertical cooler placed at the end of a gondola to highlight specials and support solution selling
Supplemental Display	Temporary display that Is moved around the store
Outside wall	Outside perimeter of the store where coolers of perishable and frozen items are stored
Gondola	Shelving that forms aisles
Cage	A secure area used to store products such as tobacco and lottery tickets
Multideck	A display case with vertical shelves
Backup Merchandise	In store inventory of high value items
Spoilage	Product lost to decay and damage
Shrinkage	Product lost to spoilage and theft
Basic Items	Items customers expect to find in the store at all times
Bounce Pattern	The pattern of customer flow in a store
Blind Ordering	Ordering while inventory is full
Squaring Down	Improving the look of worn out displays
Blue Chips	High margin items that are always in stock
Solution Selling	Packaging items to sell as a set
Booking Items	Ordering in advance to secure better pricing
Consignment sale	Distributor stocks product at their own risk
Critical stocking period	The time that a shelf may sit empty before restocking particularly after a busy period
Cluster marketing	A strategy to sell grouped products to customers with similar demographics
Specialty Store	Retail store with a limited number of items
Superstore	Large format supermarket with extended services and non-food products
Supermarket	Traditional grocery store with same store sales of more than $2 million
Grocery Store	A retail store that sells a variety of food products, including some perishable items and general merchandise
Green Grocer	Grocery store than only sells fruits and vegetables
Convenience Store	Small, easy-access retail food store with limited products
Warehouse Club Store	A large retail store that sells only to members who pay an annual membership fee
Box Store	A retail grocery store that sells directly from shipping boxes as a form of display
Mass Merchandiser	A general merchandisestore offering a large quantity of products such as food at low prices
Corner Store	Small, community based retail food store with limited products
Buying Group	A group of businesses buying non-competitive services such as advertising
Buying Cooperative	A group of competitive businesses using aggregated buying power to purchase basic items
Cooperative Group	A group of independent retailers that own and operate a warehouse to buy in bulk to save money
Broken Case Pricing	Higher pricing for products caused by extra handling requirements
Straight Load Pricing	Lower pricing for buying by the pallet or truck load
Merchandising	Creative handling and presentation of products at the point of sale to maximize their sales appeal
Category Management	Technique of analyzing product brands and mix, inventory levels, movement, shelf space allocation, promotions, buying, and profitability to maximize sales
Category Killer	A retailer who enters a market and fundamentally changes the profitability of a line of products
Display Advertising	Media prepared for display with a particular item to enhance customer choice
Display Module	Product shipped on a pallet or similar shipping method that is ready for floor display
Display Pallet	A pallet specifically built to be used as a display
Shelf-talker	A promotional tag or display sign located with the product
Hardware	Produce items that do not require specialized handling or cold storage to maintain adequate quality
Hardlines	Non-food items like batteries, clothing, appliances, and furniture
Stack Card	A sign used to identify and market a product on the shelf
Source: ACDS, 2021.	

Appendix C—Field Survey Stores

SF	Facility	Facility Address	Facility City
4,528	PATEL BROTHERS INC.	2074 UNIVERSITY BLVD	HYATTSVILLE, MD 20783
2,000	FRIENDLY FOOD MART	3609 FORESTVILLE RD	DISTRICT HTS, MD 20747
10,000	DISCOUNT MART	401 EASTERN AVE	CAPITOL HEIGHTS, MD 20743
1,000	MARGARITA'S GROCERY	4313 ST BARNABAS RD	TEMPLE HILLS, MD 20748
4,200	LA BENDICION MARKET	4905 SUITLAND RD	SUITLAND, MD 20746
4,239	LOS AMIGOS LATIN MARKET	5003 GREENBELT RD	COLLEGE PARK, MD 20740
2,053	RIGGS GROCERY	5405 KENILWORTH AVE	RIVERDALE, MD 20737
10,437	QUICK STOP FOOD MART	5700 EMERSON ST	BLADENSBURG, MD 20710
20,500	MEGAMART	5801 RIVERDALE RD	RIVERDALE, MD 20737
44,823	LA GRANDE SUPERMARKET	5821 RIVERDALE RD	RIVERDALE, MD 20737
1,800	MI TERRITA LATIN SUPERMARKET	7447 ANNAPOLIS	NEW CAROLLTON, MD 20784
1,000	D-GRACE INTERNATIONAL FOOD STORE	7513 LANDOVER RD	LANDOVER, MD 20785
1,250	LAGOS MARKET	7809 PARSTON DR	DISTRICT HTS, MD 20747
22,390	NEW GRAND MART	8401 ANNAPOLIS RD	NEW CARROLLTON, MD 20784
16,020	INDUS FOOD OF LAUREL	900 4TH ST	LAUREL, MD 20707
3,000	UNIQ ORIENTAL FOOD MARKET	9217 BALTIMORE AVE	COLLEGE PARK, MD 20740
5,765	BADEN GROCERY	16709 BRANDYWINE RD	BRANDYWINE, MD 20613
600	BIG BEN MARKET	805 LARCHMONT AVE	CAPITOL HEIGHTS, MD 20743
300	SPRINGHILL LAKE MINI MARKET	9240 SPRINGHILL LN	GREENBELT, MD 20770
750	ONE STOP GROCERY STORE	5679 SUITLAND RD	SUITLAND, MD 20746
2,400	NEW ERA CARE PHARMACY AND VARIETY	1436 Addiosn Road South	CAPITOL HEIGHTS, MD 20743
1,500	CONVENIENCE & TOBACCO CORNER	3320 WALTERS LN	DISTRICT HTS, MD 20747
2,000	MOMINA DOLLAR PLUS FOOD STORE	3512 OLD SILVER HILL RD	SUITLAND, MD 20746
1,500	7-TEN BEER, WINE & GROCERY	3664 ST BARNABAS RD	SUITLAND, MD 20746
500	YORDI DOLLAR PLUS FOOD STORE	4424 WHEELER RD	OXON HILL, MD 20745
750	ONE STOP SHOP	4509A COLLEGE AVE	COLLEGE PARK, MD 20740
19,548	LA COLONIA SUPER MARKET	4901 ALLENTOWN RD	SUITLAND, MD 20746
500	GALAXY FOOD MARKET	4917 SUITLAND RD	SUITLAND, MD 20746
500	24 DISCOUNT MART CONVENIENCE & TOBACCO	5003 MARLBORO PIKE	CAPITOL HEIGHTS, MD 20743
1,805	LUCKY MARKET	5240 MARLBORO PIKE	CAPITOL HEIGHTS, MD 20743
500	M & M INTERNATIONAL MARKET	5244 MARLBORO PIKE	CAPITOL HEIGHTS, MD 20743
500	D.F.C.S / PALS Mini Mart	5448 MARLBORO PIKE	DISTRICT HTS, MD 20747
750	TIENDA KARINA SPANISH MARKET	5681 SUITLAND RD	SUITLAND, MD 20746
1,900	BROWNS MARKET	5718 SILVER HILL RD	DISTRICT HTS, MD 20747
2,500	KO'S MINI MARKET	7717 BARLOWE RD	LANDOVER, MD 20785
35,000	TIGER MARKET	823 SOUTHERN AVE	OXON HILL, MD 20745
1,250	CONVENIENCE & TOBACCO SHOP	1466 ADDISON SOUTH RD	CAPITOL HEIGHTS, MD 20743
1,500	MEMO MARKET	1810 UNIVERSITY BLVD	HYATTSVILLE, MD 20783
1,000	GREEN MART	1940 COUNTY RD	DISTRICT HTS, MD 20747
1,250	HYATTSVILLE CONVENIENCE STORE	2230 UNIVERSITY BLVD	HYATTSVILLE, MD 20783
3,000	FRIENDLY FOOD MART	2308 IVERSON ST	TEMPLE HILLS, MD 20748
9,989	JUMBO FOOD INTERNATIONAL	3201 BRINKLEY RD	TEMPLE HILLS, MD 20748
1,500	ONE STOP CONVENIENT STORE	6106 OLD SILVER HILL RD	DISTRICT HTS, MD 20747
800	LA ESPERANZA GROCERY #2	6303 ALLENTOWN RD	TEMPLE HILLS, MD 20748
773	MI PAIS LATIN AMERICAN MARKET	6573 AGER RD	WEST HYATTSVILLE, MD 20782
1,200	NOURA HALAL MEAT MARKET	7441 ANNAPOLIS RD	NEW CARROLLTON, MD 20784
3,208	ECO FOOD STORE	7449 ANNAPOLIS RD	NEW CARROLLTON, MD 20784
1,800	ADMAS MARKET	7453 ANNAPOLIS RD	NEW CARROLLTON, MD 20784
8,870	MERCADITO RAMOS	8000 NEW HAMPSHIRE AVE	HYATTSVILLE, MD 20783
800	OMEGA MARKET	3423 BRANCH AVE	TEMPLE HILLS, MD 20748
3,500	ST. BARNABAS GROCERY	4505 ST BARNABAS RD	TEMPLE HILLS, MD 20748
2,992	BEST ONE FOOD CONVENIENCE STORE	4523 SILVER HILL RD	SUITLAND, MD 20746
1,540	EXPRESS FOOD MARKET	4901 MARLBORO PIKE	CAPITOL HEIGHTS, MD 20743
852	LOWEST MART	5342 SHERIFF RD	CAPITOL HEIGHTS, MD 20743
1,740	GLENARDEN CONVENIENCE	8100 MARTIN LUTHER KING J HWY	LANHAM-SEABROOK, MD 20706
2,594	25 HOUR MARKET	3316 DODGE PARK RD	LANDOVER, MD 20785
1,678	LAUREL CONVENIENCE STORE	14511 BOWIE RD	LAUREL, MD 20708
6,469	SHADYSIDE MART	2403 SHADYSIDE AVE	SUITLAND, MD 20746
2,622	JAZ WHOLE SALE MARKET	3400 WALTERS LN	DISTRICT HTS, MD 20747
2,695	SUNSET MART	3204 CURTIS DR	TEMPLE HILLS, MD 20748
2,739	BEST ONE FOOD MART	4225 SOUTHERN AVE	CAPITOL HEIGHTS, MD 20743
1,649	SCHREIBER'S COUNTRY STORE	4421 WHEELER RD	OXON HILL, MD 20745
2,025	24 EXPRESS	4451 WHEELER RD	OXON HILL, MD 20745
2,446	BEST ONE FOOD MARKET	5908 SEAT PLEASANT DR	CAPITOL HEIGHTS, MD 20743
3,096	BEST ONE MARKET	6306 ADDISON RD	CAPITOL HEIGHTS, MD 20743
800	FRIENDLY MARKET	6622 SEAT PLEASANT DR	CAPITOL HEIGHTS, MD 20743
3,504	ONE STOP INTERNATIONAL MARKET	7705 ANNAPOLIS RD	LANHAM-SEABROOK, MD 20706

Green	Existing grocer with fresh food
Red	Mixed-Use space
Blue	Strip commercial space
Orange	Stand alone / pad site

Appendix D—Field Survey Results

FIELD SURVEY RESULTS

Prince George's County Healthy Corner Store Initiative

An initial survey of 46 stores yielded the data discussed in this presentation.

- The surveys were carried out discreetly, and provide information on the community, store conditions, and the consumers typically found in each store.
- The survey consisted of 32 questions.
- These surveys were carried out by team members from ACDS, LLC and PES Consulting.

Notable Findings

LOCATION & ACCESSIBILITY

- Most stores were in commercial districts.
- 40 of the surveyed stores have parking available, with 90% being off-street and 97.5% unmetered.
- 5.1% of stores had a bike rack and 35.9% had a bus/train stop visible from the store entrance.
- 83.3% of stores were accessible to individuals with mobility issues.
- Most stores were easy to navigate but crowded.

STORE CONDITIONS

- 1 store out of 37 had an outdoor seating area; 3 had an indoor seating area.
- 19.4% of stores had a shopping basket available.
- 61% of stores had product prices that were hard to locate.
- None of the stores had toilets available.
- 12 stores had cameras, 10 had plexiglass, and 8 had some form of security for the door (grate, bars, etc.).

Notable Findings

PRODUCTS

- 58.3% of stores advertised participation in food assistance programs.
- Most stores had product descriptions and products that were not in English. Spanish and Hindi were present.
- 43.2% of stores had produce visible upon entry to the store.
- End-of-aisle and reach-in fridges were the most common form of refrigeration and refrigerated shelves were least common.

CUSTOMERS & SERVICES

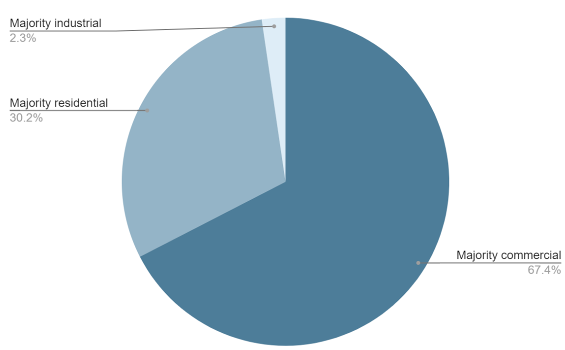
- Stores were most likely to accept cash and credit and debit cards; 62.2% accepted food assistance.
- 17 stores had an ATM, 12 offered gambling services, and 11 had a coffee station.
- 54.1% of stores had 1-3 customers present during the survey, followed by 27% of stores with no customers present.
- Fruit, vegetables, dairy, poultry, and meat were most likely to be "Average" as opposed to "Poor" or "Excellent."

The following stores were surveyed:

- Discount Mart
- 24/7 Food Mart
- Lucky Mart 202
- 8100 Martin Luther King Blvd.
- 7717 Barlowe Road
- Riggs Grocery
- Mi Pais Latin- American Market
- Lewisdale Market
- Hyattsville Convenience Store
- Patel Brothers
- One Stop International Market
- Halal Meat Market
- Mi Territa Mercado
- Eco Food Store
- And As Market
- Admas Market
- El Ranchito International Grocery
- Riggs Grocery
- One Stop Shop
- Uniq Oriental Food Market
- Los Amigos Latin Market
- Franklin Park/Springhill Lake Mini Market
- Lowest Mart
- Express Food Mart
- 24 Discount Mart Convenience & Tobacco
- Best One Market
- D-Grace Intl. Food Store
- 25 Hour Market
- La Esperanza Grocery #2
- Best 1 Food
- One Stop Grocery Store
- Tienda Karina Spanish Market
- Galaxy Food Market
- La Benedicion Market
- St. Barnabas Grocery
- Star Convenience Store
- Sunset Mart
- Momina Dollar Plus Food Store
- Friendly Food Mart
- Horde Dollar Plus
- Schreiber' Country Store
- Wheeler Hill Market
- Jaz Food Market
- International Grocery Store
- Pals Mini Mart
- Pike M&M Intl Market

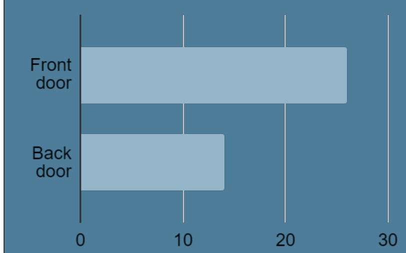
1. What are the neighboring buildings utilized for?

43 responses



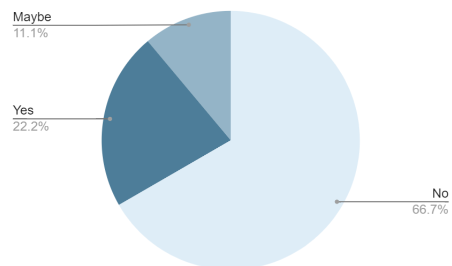
2. What delivery/entry system do you see?

40 responses



3. Is there evidence of a backup generator?

11 responses

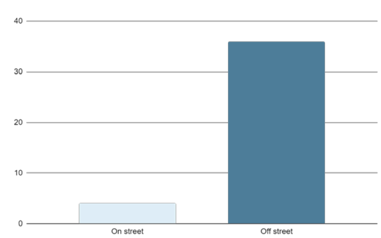


4. Is there parking available?

All 40 responses noted "Yes."

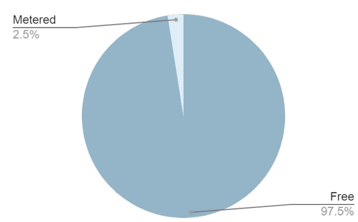
5. Is the parking on or off street?

40 responses



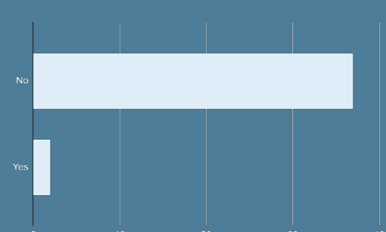
6. Is the parking free or metered?

40 responses



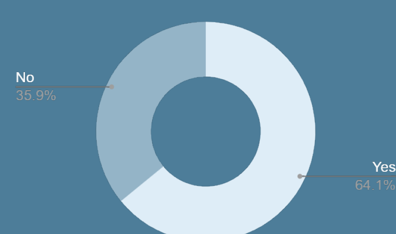
7. Is there a bike rack near the entrance of the store?

39 responses

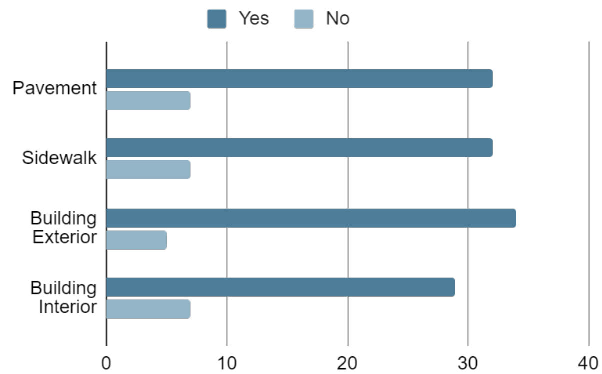


8. Is there a bus/train stop visible from the entrance?

39 responses

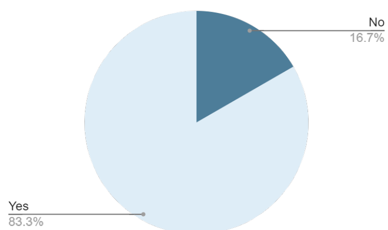


9. Are the following well-maintained?



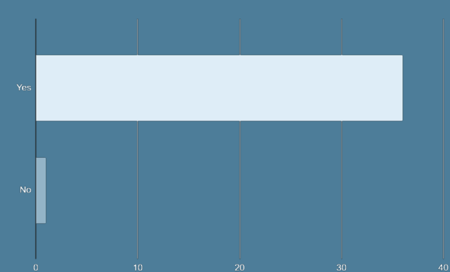
10. Is the building accessible to those with mobility issues?

36 responses

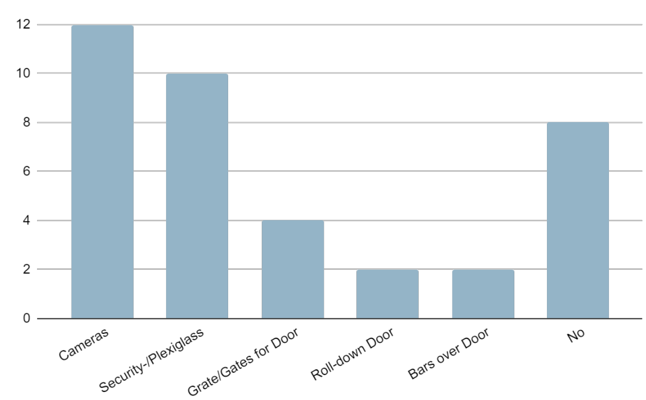


11. Are there streetlights or other light sources visible near the entrance?

37 responses

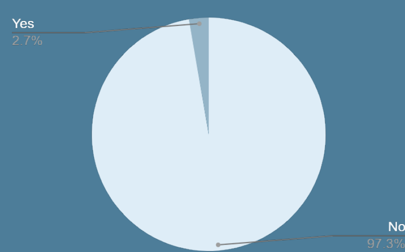


12. Is there evidence of site security?



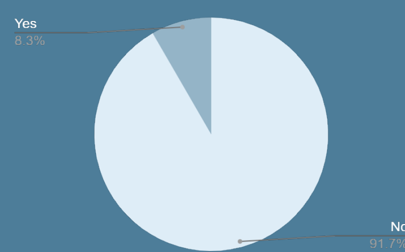
13. Is there an outdoor seating area?

37 responses

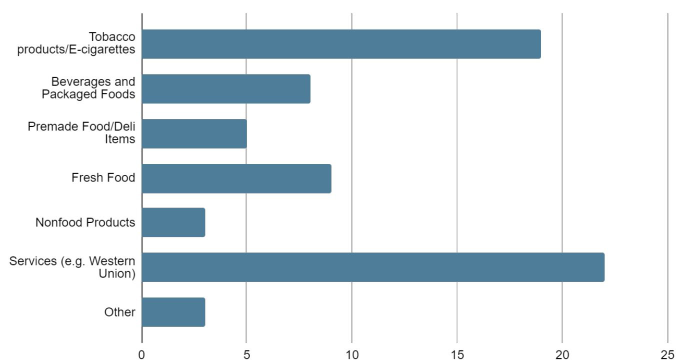


14. Is there an indoor seating area?

36 responses

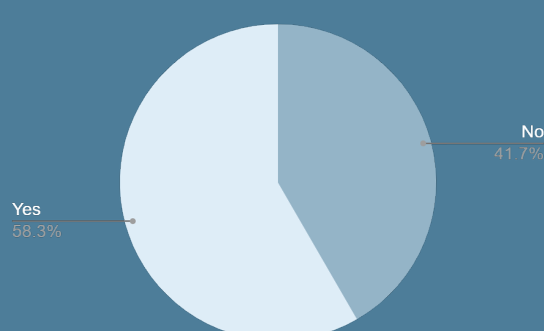


15. Which products are advertised in the store windows?



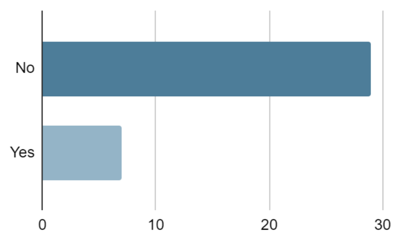
16. Are there signs advertising participation in any food programs?

36 responses



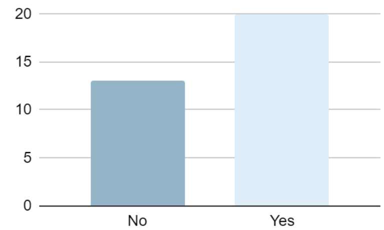
17. Are there shopping baskets/carts available?

36 responses



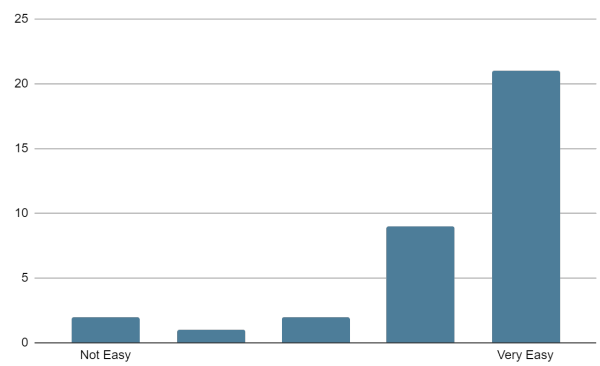
18. Were you greeted upon entry to the store?

33 responses



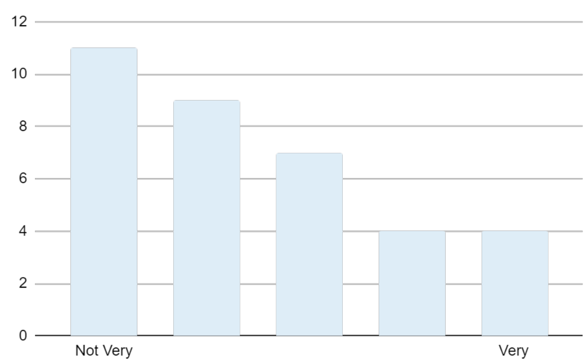
19. How easy is the store to navigate?

34 responses



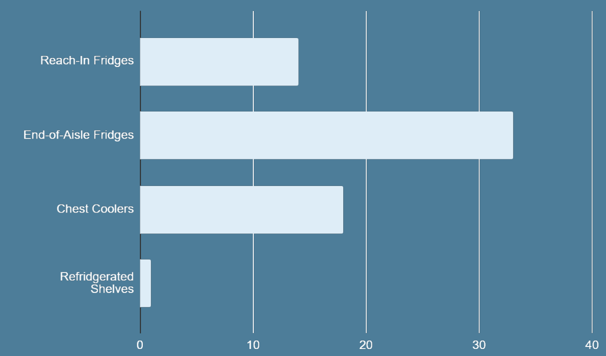
20. How crowded does the store feel?

35 responses



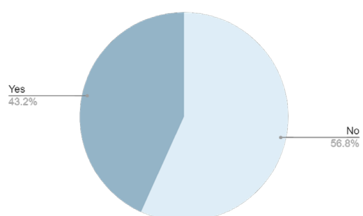
21. Which of the following are present?

34 responses



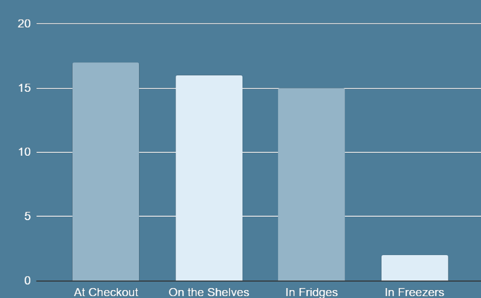
22. Is there fresh produce visible upon entry to the store?

37 responses

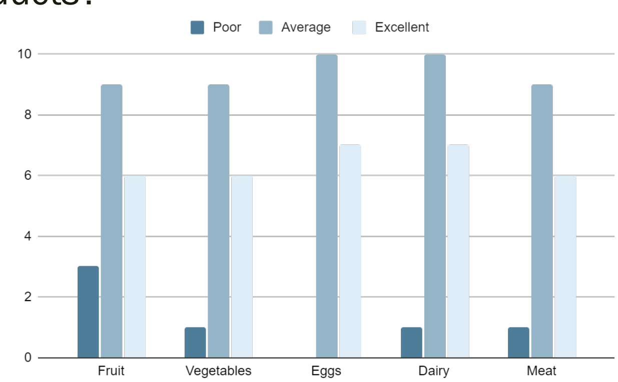


23. Are there fruits, vegetables, meat, eggs, or dairy products visible

25 responses

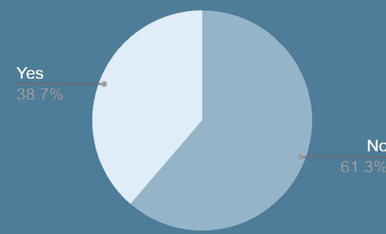


24. What is the overall quality of these food products?



25. Are product prices visible and easy to locate?

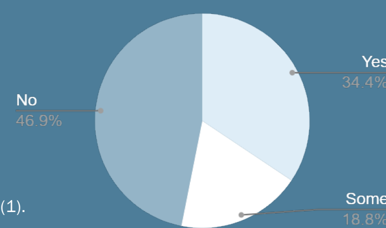
31 responses



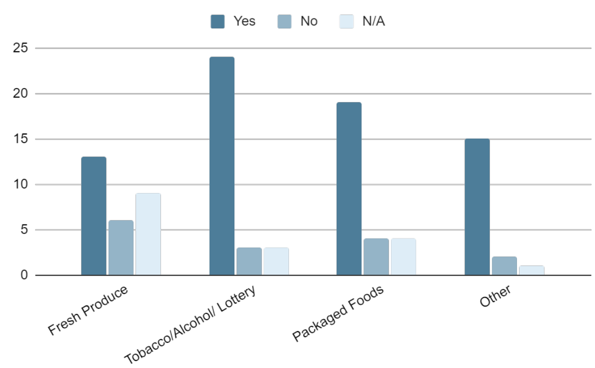
26. Are the product description signs/product packaging in English?

32 responses

Other present languages were Spanish (7) and Hindi (1).

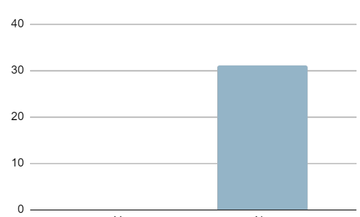


27. If asked, can an employee direct you to products with relative ease?



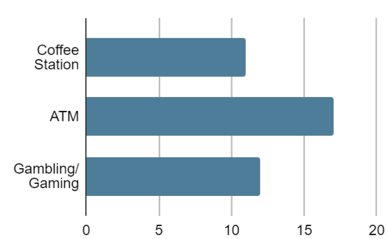
28. Are there bathrooms available?

31 responses



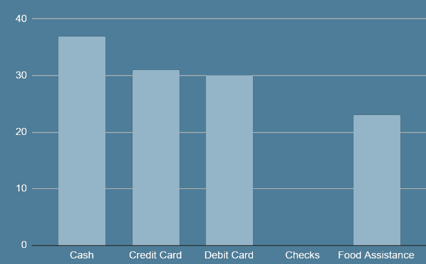
29. Which services are available?

22 responses



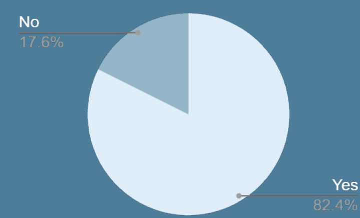
30. Which of these methods does the store accept?

37 responses



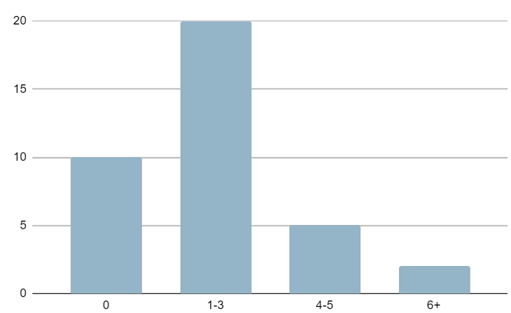
31. Do they advertise accepting these methods?

34 responses



32. How many customers were in the store during the survey?

37 responses



Appendix E—Brochure

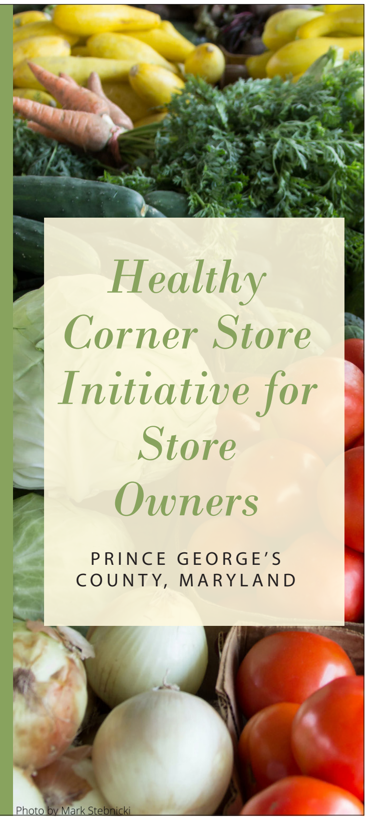
Photo by Jessica Le Wis Creative

Encouraging healthier eating through the neighborhood store.

[Contact information here.]

Address

website



Healthy Corner Store Initiative for Store Owners

PRINCE GEORGE'S COUNTY, MARYLAND

Photo by Mark Stebnicki

Are you interested in stocking healthier food in your store?

Get support from Prince George's County

The Healthy Corner Store Initiative's goal is to improve the quality and availability of healthy food at locally owned businesses in the County's Healthy Food Priority Areas. Smaller format stores are the most common destination for some shoppers. Our objective is to enable local owners to stock healthier food while improving their bottom line.

Healthy products can include dairy, snacks, proteins, and fresh produce.

Photo by Veeterzy

Photo by Pixabay

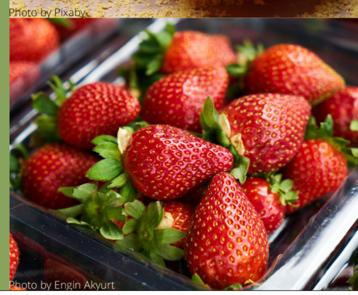


Photo by Engin Akyurt

Store Toolkit

Advice and financial support are available to improve:

- Store layout
- Display options for several product types
- Store infrastructure such as electrical and refrigeration
- Access to new distribution networks
- In-store promotions and labeling
- Banners and displays
- Customer education

Appendix F—Toolkit

Healthy Corner Stores Toolkit

The Toolkit provides help for store owners with healthy food promotions, store layout, display options, equipment upgrades, and distributions.

In-Store Promotions

The promotion of new, healthy food items on the shelves is critical to their success.

Labeling as Healthy

Label healthy food across the entire store inventory to allow customers a quick scan for healthy items (typically located proximate to each other). In many stores, a fruit or vegetable image represents a healthy food alternative and can be shown alone or with another price sticker. Incorporate the labeling onto existing store furniture including shelves/ bins/ baskets, immediately next to products, windows, doors, hanging ceiling signs and on the floor as decals with arrows. The two examples below demonstrate alternatives for labeling healthy food. These “shelf talkers” help customers quickly identify the healthy items and can have additional information such as “this item provides extra folic acid.”

SOURCE: PES

Stickers on the floor that direct customers to fresh produce and other healthy food items may prove useful:

Examples of floor stickers.
SOURCE: PES.

Banner/Poster Display

Simple signs can spark customers' interest in new healthy foods. Many corner stores need to remove dated signs and consolidate signage to allow for new healthy food displays. Tips include:

1. Create new visuals (banners/posters/ signs) for customers, often featuring images and little or few words.
2. Include sufficient lighting and consider translating content into multiple languages.
3. Outdoor signage on sandwich boards can be changed weekly.

SOURCE: ACDS.

Sampling

To shift consumers' shopping patterns, offer free samples of healthy food alternatives with accompanying easy recipes and storage tips. Locating a sampling station near the cash register allows store owners and employees to respond to questions and offer further information or hand out recipes. Community organizations such as schools, churches, nonprofits or colleges, may be interested in partnering on these campaigns by offering simple recipes from their members.

Pairing Healthy Items

Patrons will be more likely to purchase healthy foods that are familiar to them. Familiarity will be enhanced by making suggestions of other healthy food items that expand the store's offerings, share shelf space with similar foods, and using signs providing recipes that incorporate more than one healthy food item. The paired food items should share a consistent color to tie them together and not just use the symbol of healthy foods.

Incentives

Store owners will want to minimize risk when adding new products. One way to reducing risk would be to establish a temporary "buy back" program. Under this program, the County would guarantee up to $1,000 in "take-back" funding for any new healthy food product that did not sell within a specified time period, for example, the shelf-life of an item.

In New York City, the Adopt a Bodega program offers star ratings based on store owners' involvement in new store equipment to store healthy food, price discounts and community responses indicating healthier store participation.

In Washington, D.C., the D.C. Central Kitchen's Healthy Corners program began by offering a small sample of store upgrades to stock more variety and quantity of fresh produce. Their 5-for-5 program offered a $5 coupon toward the purchase of fresh produce to SNAP shoppers making a qualifying purchase of $5 or more with SNAP benefits.

Store Layout Evaluations

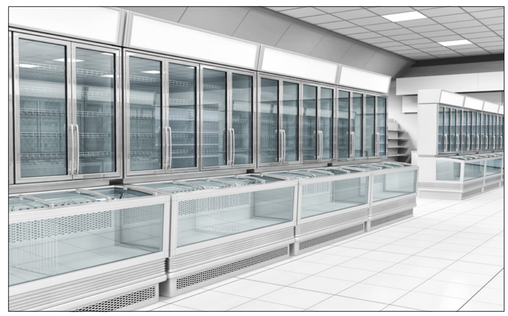
An example of a program might include that store owners will be provided with one on-one store layout assessment free of charge. Store owners simply need to fill out an online form and offer three dates and times for evaluations. The assessment will include a tour of the interior and exterior of the property with a list of recommendations on potential changes to layout emailed after consultation.

New Display Options

Prince George's County Food Policy Council and the Department of Health could fund up to two orders for new display options for fresh produce, with an agreement to use for six months to shelve additional healthy food items. This program could establish a partnership with store owners to purchase new display items: send an image of the item in use at the store, and complete an online form for reimbursement.

Equipment Subsidy

Stores may need supplemental electrical outlets and more capacity in coolers and freezer areas. In order for store owners to make this investment, they require training and technical assistance to understand current store needs/conditions of both the electrical and mechanical systems. An assessment of this system by a trained professional outside of the Prince George's County Department of Permitting, Inspections and Enforcement (DPIE) will be critical. Refrigeration equipment is costly; Prince George's County Department of Health and IPHI could assist by providing a match for up to 50 percent of the purchase price of qualifying new equipment.



SOURCE: ACDS.

Example of refrigeration equipment.

Equipment Technical Assistance

Corner store owners require more technical assistance when adding healthy produce to stores. Providing simple guidelines for produce handling and storage will make these owners able to train staff and maintain healthy food options. On-site coaching and training as well as supplemental materials delivered with different produce will help owners be aware of healthy food light and temperature requirements.

Distribution

Most corner stores receive weekly deliveries of packaged items, but research suggests two deliveries per week presents the best conditions for distribution of healthy foods. Fresh produce offered at corner stores depends on the different distribution models available to retailers in Prince George's County, where the higher costs, delivery fees, and limited frequency of delivery make it a challenge to offer healthy food options. Many corner stores offer products purchased from other retail outlets, such as Costco, Walmart or area supermarkets, and do not restock as frequently as necessary to keep produce fresh.

For corner stores, direct store delivery from a manufacturer represents the ideal distribution method for soda, snacks, beer, and dairy. Two alternatives or a combination of approaches may be necessary to improve distribution to Prince George's County corner stores:

1. Local Farmers: Form a collective of area corner stores to buy seasonal produce from local farms (May through October). That would require an additional delivery system, but the collective could negotiate better pricing and increased frequency of produce delivery.
2. Buying Groups: Form a coalition of stores to obtain volume discounts for group purchases of healthy produce. Each store would either establish a pickup or negotiate deals with direct-to store vendors. Another alternative would be to use the same practices and incorporate a cost-plus distributor to leverage better pricing.

An initial step would be to have the County Department of Health develop a guide to the region's produce distributors with detailed information on minimum order size, delivery areas, and offerings.

Within the corner store community, the Prince George's Healthy Corner Store Advisory Committee could bring together store owners to establish relationships. After trust and relationships are established, there may be opportunities for cooperative purchasing agreements between stores to share healthy products. These types of agreements can reduce costs and help coordinate deliveries as well as meet minimum purchasing requirements.

Acknowledgments

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