Making the Healthy Choice the Easy Choice

For central Ohioans who have a grocery store or supermarket around the corner, finding healthy foods like fruits and vegetables isn’t usually a concern. Yet many Columbus residents lack nearby grocers or transportation to these food retailers, making it difficult to find fresh produce and other healthy foods.

Fresh Foods Here (FFH) is a community initiative that’s working to make the healthy choice the easy choice for low-income residents in our community by improving the availability of nutritious, affordable options.

The program takes a multi-dimensional approach to improving food access in central Ohio by:

- partnering with neighborhood corner stores to increase their inventory of healthy food and improve their store operations.
- engaging with community partners and residents through nutrition and cooking education activities to encourage healthy food choices.
Benefiting Children, Families and Our Community

Good nutrition for expecting mothers leads to healthier babies.
Infant mortality rates are largely affected by a lack of resources that support health, including healthy foods. Where fewer resources are available, families have an increased risk of losing a child before his or her first birthday. Better nutrition for expecting mothers and for children is an important strategy for addressing infant mortality.

Healthy, affordable food choices fight hunger in schools.
Research shows that students who are hungry are more likely to perform poorly in school, and good nutrition is an essential part of childhood development. FFH locations are purposefully placed near schools and youth programming sites so students and families can have healthier food choices.

Fresh Foods Here is accessible to residents on Medicaid.
In typical FFH neighborhoods, 35-50% of residents receive food stamps or other supplemental assistance to meet their basic needs, and between 30-40% of residents are Medicaid recipients. FFH reaches many of these vulnerable residents and encourages them to make healthy choices that lead to better health outcomes and less healthcare spending overall.

Nutritious food options help reduce obesity and diet-related health problems.
Lower-income residents have higher rates of obesity and other diet-related health problems than the population as a whole. Increasing the amount of nutritious options at existing corner stores through FFH allows residents to make healthier choices, and can help reduce the rate of childhood obesity and other health problems.

In a survey of food insecure individuals in Ohio, 81% reported resorting to eating unhealthy food in the absence of affordable, healthy alternatives.
Reaching High-Need Neighborhoods with Low Access

Columbus neighborhoods with low rates of grocery store access have higher rates of diet-related health issues and community health problems. Areas that have been identified as having poor food access and high rates of diet-related deaths include Franklinton, Greater Hilltop, Far South Columbus and North Central Columbus.

The red areas on the map represent three factors that contribute to high-need environments:

1. Low grocery store sales, as a measure of limited food access
2. Low income, showing the financial limitations of consumers to purchase healthy, nutritious food
3. High rates of death due to diet-related diseases such as diabetes and heart disease

Fresh Foods Here is currently in the Franklinton/Hilltop neighborhood and the Near East Side, with plans to expand to two additional neighborhoods in the coming year.

2 million Ohioans lack adequate access to a grocery store due to inadequate transportation and other issues that make regular trips to the supermarket difficult.

Building on Success to Create a Healthier Central Ohio

Fresh Foods Here has experienced significant success from implementation in its first three stores in 2011 through two rounds of expansion to 12 stores. Corner stores partnering with Fresh Foods Here have increased the availability of healthy foods significantly, leading to an increase of shoppers by as much as 50% and an increase of as much as 60% in healthy food purchases.

In addition, shoppers surveyed at FFH locations demonstrate an increased knowledge of the importance of eating healthy food, and those who recognize the FFH brand are more confident than the average customer that they can choose healthy behaviors such as eating more fruits and vegetables, and choosing low sodium, lean protein and whole grain options.
Join Us to Expand Access to Healthy, Affordable Foods

You can join United Way of Central Ohio and community partners in creating a healthier central Ohio by investing in Fresh Foods Here. Your gift will help support a comprehensive solution to expanding food access in neighborhoods across all of Columbus. Access to healthier foods leads to healthier neighbors, healthier children and a healthier community. That helps all of us.

My United Way brings healthy foods to neighborhoods. I’m very passionate about bringing fresh foods to places that don’t have it. In addition to being a FFH volunteer, I’m a volunteer at the Highland Youth Garden where we teach kids that beans don’t come from a can and there are hundreds of varieties of tomatoes. We get kids excited about vegetables.

Fresh Foods Here is making healthy food accessible to people who don’t have access. People think that residents don’t want to eat fresh foods.

That’s not true in any shape or form. If you had to load up three kids in the pouring down rain on the bus just to get to the grocery store where you could get fresh foods, how likely would you be to do that? Not very likely. But people crave fresh foods.

One of the families who comes to the garden, lives in a house that doesn’t have a working stove or refrigerator, but they feel lucky to have a house. They have to buy their food daily so it’s important to them to get things fresh. People don’t understand that many individuals work multiple jobs and work 12 to 14 hours a day to make ends meet, so they’ve got to have fast, healthy options to provide for their families.

Taking away the barrier for people to get fresh foods is huge for our community. FFH coming in means people have access, and they now know they can get those healthier options. It’s also a sign that someone is taking the time to notice the needs and struggles in the neighborhood, and to work with the neighborhood to make things better."

–Beth Urban
Healthy Corner Store Collaborative Member

For additional information:

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