

# FACTS

## Equal Access to Healthy Foods

Making the healthy choice the easy choice

### OVERVIEW

Good nutrition is critical to our future health and Americans are falling drastically short. Particularly troubling is that in many neighborhoods in Milwaukee, residents report a lack even basic access to healthy, affordable foods.<sup>1</sup> When neighborhoods have little or no access to a grocery store or other healthy food retail, residents may rely on fast food restaurants or other unhealthy options found at corner stores.



Healthy food financing programs can help. These programs help small business owners—local grocers, corner store owners, mobile markets and other food retailers—open, expand, and renovate in neighborhoods that lack access to healthy foods. Additionally, healthy food financing programs are effective and sustainable solutions to increase access to healthy foods, and they contribute to improved health of children and families.<sup>2</sup>

### DEFINING THE PROBLEM

Nearly 30 million people in neighborhoods across America have little or no access to healthy food like fruits and vegetables. These same neighborhoods often struggle with high rates of unemployment and diet-related chronic diseases like diabetes and heart disease. Instead of grocery stores, neighborhoods experiencing low access to healthy options often have a high proliferation of fast foods, and healthy foods, where available, are often priced higher.<sup>3</sup>

According to the Milwaukee Health Report 2013, Milwaukeeans living in lower socioeconomic neighborhoods report the following: 64% have no access to healthy foods, 70% report inadequate fruit and vegetable consumption, 29% are overweight and 43% of adults are obese.<sup>1</sup>

### HEALTHY FOOD FINANCING

Healthy food financing is an investment to break down barriers that keep businesses from locating or expanding in neighborhoods that lack access to healthy foods. Initiated with public funding, healthy food financing programs are frequently able to leverage private and philanthropic funding, ultimately expanding the economic and health impact of the initial investment.



Healthy food financing programs provide targeted loans and grants to support a range of large and small grocery stores and other food retail projects whose credit needs are unmet by conventional financial institutions. Flexible financing can support the multiple costs related to developing stores like pre-development, site assembly and improvement, construction and rehabilitation, equipment installation and upgrades, staff training, security, start-up inventory and working capital.

### STRENGTHENING NEIGHBORHOODS-SUCCESS STORIES

Healthy food financing is an idea that began over a decade ago in Pennsylvania, and it has spread to

cities and states across the country. The Pennsylvania Fresh Food Financing Initiative began in 2004 and has made it easier for an estimated 500,000 residents to find healthier food in their communities. It led to the financing of 88 healthy food stores or farmers' markets in underserved rural or urban locations, and created or retained some 5,000 jobs in struggling neighborhoods. Similar success stories have been seen in New York, New Jersey, Alabama, New Orleans and Houston.



### HEALTHY FOOD ON EVERY CORNER

Not every neighborhood has the physical space or population capacity to support a traditional grocery store. Fortunately, in a growing number of cities, increasing the quantity and quality of healthy options at corner stores has proven an effective use of space and funds.

In 2004, The Food Trust created the Healthy Corner Store Initiative to support corner store owners committed to increasing the healthy food inventory in their stores and to encourage customers to make healthier choices. Since the pilot project began in Philadelphia, efforts have grown steadily and substantially, working through a multifaceted approach including:

- ♥ Increasing store capacity to sell and market healthy items
- ♥ Offering training and technical assistance to store owners to make healthy changes profitable
- ♥ Marketing healthy messages to youth and adults to encourage healthy eating choices
- ♥ Linking corner store owners to community partners, local farmers and fresh food suppliers to create and sustain healthy corner stores<sup>4</sup>

### BENEFITS OF INVESTING IN HEALTHY FOOD ACCESS

The evidence published in the last two decades, and the past three years in particular, shows that access to healthy food continues to be a critical

factor for improving both the physical and economic well-being of communities.<sup>5</sup>



Healthy food financing programs are good for the economy. They create jobs for people living in the neighborhood, create markets for farmers, and have the potential to lower health care costs. Additionally, several studies have reported that residents that have greater access to grocery stores and other healthy options in their neighborhood eat more healthy and less unhealthy foods.<sup>6</sup>

### THE AHA ADVOCATES

Every neighborhood should have access to a place where people can buy fresh fruits and vegetables, lean meats, low-fat dairy and whole grains. Research shows that this will contribute to better eating habits and good health, including decreased risk for diet-related diseases like diabetes and heart disease.

State and local governments should invest in healthy food retail development in neighborhoods that lack access to healthy foods. In order to reduce the number of neighborhoods throughout the City with limited access to healthy food outlets, the City of Milwaukee must reduce barriers and provide financial incentives for grocers and other food retailers to locate or expand in these neighborhoods.

#### References:

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- 2 Policy Link and The Food Trust, *A Healthy Food Financing Initiative: A Innovative Approach Improving Health and Sparking Economic Development*. [http://www.kintera.org/atf/cf/%7B97c6d565-bb43-406d-a6d5-eca3bbf35af0%7D/HFFI\\_ADVOCACY\\_20131014.PDF](http://www.kintera.org/atf/cf/%7B97c6d565-bb43-406d-a6d5-eca3bbf35af0%7D/HFFI_ADVOCACY_20131014.PDF)
- 3 Barnes, Melody; White House Task Force on Childhood Obesity. May 2010. *Solving the Problem of Childhood Obesity Within a Generation*. Page 49.
- 4 The Food Trust, *Healthy Corner Store Initiative Overview*. [http://thefoodtrust.org/uploads/media\\_items/healthy-corner-store-overview.original.pdf](http://thefoodtrust.org/uploads/media_items/healthy-corner-store-overview.original.pdf)
- 5 The Food Trust, *Access to Healthy Food and Why it Matters: A Review of the Research*. <http://www.policylink.org/healthyfoodaccessmatters>
- 6 Treuhart, S., Karpyn, A. (2010). *The Grocery Gap: Who Has Access to Healthy Food and Why It Matters*. Oakland .C.A.: Policy Link and The Food Trust.