

PRESENTATION SNAPSHOT

Changing the food environment: What is feasible in small food stores



PLACE-BASED
FOOD SYSTEMS
CONFERENCE:

Making the Case, Making it Happen

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Presentation Abstract

Small retail food stores are on the decline in Minnesota, and 1.6 million Minnesotans have little access to a full-service grocery store (Rauch & Mattessich, 2016). Additionally, grocery stores closing in rural communities can be economically and socially detrimental to communities. Small food stores, such as convenience and corner stores, are becoming an increasingly important source of healthy food and an important partner with local food distributors in rural communities. The importance of small food stores is especially pronounced in under-resourced communities, as increasing their stock of healthy, appealing, and affordable foods, especially fruits and vegetables, could make these stores a more attractive destination for shoppers and decrease traveling time to other food stores. The Minnesota Department of Health (MDH) is responding to the need in rural Minnesota to develop flexible guidelines that advance place-based food systems. MDH collaborated with 10 local public health (LPH) agencies from across the state and partnered with small food stores to modify the availability, placement, and promotion of healthy food and beverage products. MDH and LPH agencies co-developed the intervention and evaluation and gathered input from storeowners to create innovative intervention strategies. Strategies were rooted in policies, systems, and environmental (PSE) change approaches and focused on stocking and selling healthy products. The approaches for sourcing healthy products varied, but some strategies included working with local food distributors to stock healthy products, which can not only increase healthy food availability, but also help to stimulate the local economy. In this presentation, we shared how MDH collaborated with partners to develop innovative interventions, strategies, and materials. We highlighted challenges and opportunities in evaluating an evolving, community-based intervention where implementation strategies are tailored to unique store needs. We discussed the feasibility of this model and lessons learned about how to successfully make PSE change in stores across Minnesota to create a more robust place-based food system.

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* Liana R. N. Schreiber, MPH, RDN, is a research scientist at the Minnesota Department of Health (MDH) who focuses on food access. She is passionate about using evaluation as a change agent and engaging stakeholders to develop evaluation plan with action-oriented results. At MDH, Liana has collaboratively developed evaluation materials and a database to capture statewide changes in policy and systems, and environmental changes related to improving food access and active living and decreasing tobacco use. She also co-leads a cross-sector team developing indicators to monitor changes in the Minnesota food system. She can be contacted at Liana.Schreiber@state.mn.us.


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Presentation Key Points

- Minnesota ranks seventh worst in the nation for healthy food access. Between 2007 and 2012, there was a large decrease in grocery stores in rural Minnesota (Rauch & Mattessich, 2016).
- The Minnesota Department of Health partnered with local public health agencies to work with small food retail stores throughout Minnesota to modify the store environment to improve access to healthy products. The store modifications were based on the marketing mix of product, placement, promotion, and price. State and local public health staff provided incentives to the stores, such as promotional signage and training in, produce handling, and stocking.
- Crucial components of moving this work forward include building trust between all partners involved, being flexible, and not rushing the process. Specifically for the evaluation, making sure that all partners were clear on the guiding evaluation questions was critical to creating shared understanding on the scope of the project. Also, limiting the number of data collection instruments decreased the stores' burden of data collection.
- Having a flexible timeline to accommodate storeowners' schedules is critical for continued partnership. 

Reference

Rausch, E. J., & Mattessich, P. W. (2016). *Healthy food access: A view of the landscape in Minnesota and lessons learned from healthy food financing initiatives*. Center for Prevention at Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Minnesota. Retrieved from <https://www.wilder.org/wilder-research/research-library/healthy-food-access-view-landscape-minnesota-and-lessons-learned-0>