

Food Access Solutions to Create Healthy Counties

December 2009

This is the third in a series of issue briefs the National Association of Counties (NACo) is publishing in an effort to engage county officials and key department staff around the issues of health promotion and obesity prevention. To view other briefs in the series, or for additional resources from the National Association of Counties on how to build healthy communities, visit www.healthycounties.org.

While recent analyses show that rates of childhood obesity may be stabilizing, it remains a significant health concern as more than 23 million children and adolescents in the United States are overweight or obese.¹ Obesity increases the chance that individuals will develop serious health problems, such as type 2 diabetes, heart disease or other chronic health issues. According to *Fas in Fat 2009*, a report produced by *Trust for America's Health* and the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, over one quarter of health care costs in the United States are associated with obesity.

As counties play crucial roles in providing health care to the public, county officials have a strong incentive to invest in reducing the incidence of costly chronic diseases in their communities and improve the overall quality of life for county residents. County officials are uniquely positioned to develop local policies that directly impact residents' opportunities for physical activity and healthy eating. This brief will focus on ways that county leaders can increase residents' access to healthy and affordable foods and builds on the information contained in the *Leadership for Healthy Communities' Action Strategies Toolkit* (see box 1 for more information on this and other resources).

■ How Lack of Access to Healthy and Affordable Foods Affects Health Status and Obesity Rates

Studies have found strong correlations between diet-related diseases and lack of access to supermarkets offering healthy foods.² Additionally, greater access to healthy and affordable food can affect obesity rates and fruit and vegetable consumption. One study determined that adolescents who live near a supermarket with a wide selection of healthy foods are more likely to have a lower body mass index,⁴ and another found that greater access to these stores could increase fruit and vegetable intake by up to 32 percent.⁵

County officials are uniquely positioned to develop local policies that directly impact residents' opportunities for physical activity and healthy eating.

Neighborhoods with few easily accessible options available to purchase food that is both healthy and affordable are typically lower-income. Nationwide, lower-income neighborhoods have about 25 percent fewer supermarkets than middle-income communities.⁶ According to a June 2009 report from the U.S. Department of Agriculture, there are 11.5 million low-income individuals living in low-income neighborhoods that are more than one mile from a supermarket.⁷

In some urban neighborhoods, residents may find that the only accessible food stores are small grocery or convenience stores that have a limited selection of nutritious and affordable food choices. If fresh produce is available at these stores, it is often limited in selection, expensive and/or of poor

quality. Also, lack of access to personal vehicles and inadequate public transportation options may restrict residents' ability to shop at markets outside of their neighborhoods.⁸

Individuals in rural communities may also have limited access to healthy and reasonably priced foods due to a lack of nearby supermarkets. Furthermore, although rural residents often have greater access to cars than their urban counterparts, individuals without personal vehicles may face challenges in accessing supermarkets because rural areas typically have few if any public transportation options.⁹

■ County Leaders as Partners in Preventing Childhood Obesity by Increasing Access to Healthy and Affordable Foods

This brief outlines five strategies that county leaders can implement to increase residents' access to healthy and affordable foods:

- Improve healthy and affordable food options in existing stores
- Promote supermarket development
- Promote general economic development, land use and transportation policies that increase food access
- Support farmers' markets and community gardens
- Promote farm-to-school programs



■ Improve Healthy and Affordable Food Options in Existing Stores

In urban or rural areas that lack a nearby supermarket, residents may often rely on purchasing food items from corner convenience stores. These small retailers generally focus on carrying products that either sell quickly or prepared foods that have a long shelf life, and typically do not stock fresh produce because of storeowners' concerns that fresh fruits and vegetables will not be profitable or will not sell before spoiling.¹⁰ However, improving the range of food options sold in these stores is much less expensive than the cost, time and land needed to bring a new grocery store or supermarket to a community.¹¹

County leaders can help these types of existing local food retailers improve their offering of healthy food options by providing storeowners with information about community need and interest concerning healthy food as well as assistance in implementing store changes.¹² Listed below are some strategies that county governments can implement to assist storeowners with healthy store conversions:

- **Offer storeowners financial and/or technical assistance and resources about how to obtain, display and market perishable goods** — Small neighborhood stores may need financial assistance for any necessary refrigeration equipment to increase their capacity to carry perishable foods. Also, storeowners with little experience handling fresh fruits and vegetables may benefit from guidance on product marketing, general business skill development training and other technical assistance about how to stock and display fresh produce. County policy-makers can provide county health departments and local economic development corporations with funding to be active partners in these types of efforts.
- **Assess community food access needs and promote community involvement to help both inform and support store content changes** — Conducting an assessment of where healthy food access problems exist in the community can help guide county policy-makers' decisions about how to target resources. Also, gathering input from local residents can help generate support for store modifications and also helps ensure that changes address local needs.¹³ These kinds of community assessment and engagement

Box 1

■ Addressing Childhood Obesity at the Local Level

Three reports offer local leaders a range of strategies to address childhood obesity, including increasing the availability of healthy foods. They include:

- **The Leadership for Healthy Communities Action Strategies Toolkit** — The toolkit, developed in partnership with eleven of the nation's most prominent policy-maker organizations, outlines numerous policy strategies designed to reduce childhood obesity and create healthier communities. Leadership for Healthy Communities, a national program of the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, supports local and state leaders nationwide in their efforts to promote healthy, active communities and access to affordable, healthy foods. The toolkit is available online at www.leadershipforhealthycommunities.org/actionstrategies.
- **The Institute of Medicine's Local Government Actions to Prevent Childhood Obesity** — The report, developed by a committee convened by the Institute of Medicine (IOM) and the National Re-

search Council (NRC), provides strategies that officials at the regional and community levels can use to help prevent and reduce childhood obesity. For more information about the strategies outlined in the report, visit www.nap.edu/catalog.php?record_id=12674.

- The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's "Recommended Community Strategies and Measurements to Prevent Obesity in the United States" — The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) worked with the International City/County Management Association, public health consultants, and content-area experts in urban planning, the built environment, obesity prevention, nutrition, and physical activity to identify and recommend a set of obesity prevention strategies and corresponding measurements that local governments and communities can use to plan, implement, and monitor initiatives to prevent obesity. For more information, go to www.cdc.gov/mmwr/preview/mmwrhtml/rr5807a1.htm.

efforts can be conducted by county health departments in partnership with community organizations.

- **Support efforts to help consumers identify healthy food items in stores through labeling and general information about healthy eating** — Consistent and wide-range marketing, promotion and labeling efforts in stores and throughout the broader community to promote healthy foods and eating can be conducted by county health departments in partnership with stores and community organizations. These types of efforts to increase awareness among residents about healthy eating can help generate and sustain demand for healthy foods in small convenience stores.

■ Promote Supermarket Development

Developing a large grocery store or supermarket¹⁴ can be a useful way to improve local food options because they usually offer greater selection, better food quality and generally lower prices than small grocery

or convenience stores.¹⁵ Although supermarket development typically takes many years and a significant amount of financing, county officials working in partnership with community organizations and other local leaders can encourage supermarket development by helping to bring together the significant financial capital, land, developers and retailers necessary for a large grocery store. Listed below are some strategies that county leaders can pursue:

- **Create or modify existing local economic incentives or earmark funding specifically for supermarket development** — County leaders can promote supermarket development through the creation or modification of economic development subsidies and incentive programs.¹⁶ These strategies can include Tax Increment Financing (TIF)¹⁷, tax exemptions or credits for developers that build in underserved areas or small business/economic development programs. County leaders can also earmark tax dollars and allocate economic development funding to help support supermarket development costs.

- **Utilize a mix of public and private funding** — Some federal programs that support development projects may be useful for helping to build a supermarket,¹⁸ and county leaders can help coordinate these funding sources. One such program is the New Markets Tax Credit, which aims to promote development and investment in low-income urban areas.¹⁹ Other sources of public funding that can be used for supermarket development are Community Development Block Grants, Section 108 loans, Economic Development Administration grants, or tax incentives through the Empowerment Zones/Enterprise Communities and Renewal Communities programs. In terms of private funding options, in addition to traditional private

banks, community development financial institutions (CDFIs) are lenders that specifically finance projects that provide social benefits to underserved communities.

- **Prioritize identification of potential sites for supermarkets in underserved areas and expedite the development process by providing a clear point of contact for potential developers** — County officials with zoning authority can identify potential areas and prioritize potential land parcels for grocery stores in zoning regulations and general community plans. County planners can provide density bonuses or other zoning code incentives for development projects that incorporate a supermarket. County officials can also help guide potential developers through the complex

process of obtaining items such as appropriate permits by providing supermarket operators with a single point of access to communicate with local government offices and ensuring local codes are designed in ways that reduce the development time for supermarkets.²⁰

- **Provide more adequate market analyses of neighborhoods and utilize more comprehensive databases to better inform community investment decisions** — Traditional market analyses of low-income communities have tended to underestimate the investment potential of these areas. Local policy-makers can conduct their own community food assessments, which typically involve surveying residents regarding their grocery

Box 2

Local Examples and Resources

Rockland County, N.Y.

Rockland County's Steps Corner Store program, begun in 2004, focuses on promoting healthier food options in small groceries and convenience stores. Participating stores commit to stock at least two healthier food items as well as encourage customers to purchase more nutritious foods and try to accommodate their requests for healthier options. Some stores use signs to indicate healthier foods, such as fresh produce, 100 percent fruit juices, whole-grain products and low-fat dairy products.

Currently over 50 participating stores carry and label 400 healthier food choices, impacting more than 100,000 residents who live near these stores. The Steps Corner Store program is part of the larger Steps to a Healthier Rockland initiative to address obesity and other chronic diseases, which was developed through a five-year award from the CDC's Steps to a Healthier U.S. Although the CDC funding ended in 2008, the Rockland County Health Department's Health Promotion Division receives funding from the county to continue work on disease prevention and wellness promotion efforts through the range of successful initiatives that were developed, including the Steps Corner Store program.

For questions about any of the Steps to a Healthier Rockland programs, visit www.rocklandsteps.org/index.php?section=our-programs.

Louisville-Jefferson County, K.Y.

In the consolidated city-county government of Louisville-Jefferson County, the YMCA of Greater Louisville in collaboration with the Louisville Department of Public Health and Wellness and the Center for Health Equity launched the Healthy in a Hurry Corner Store initiative in January 2009. The project began by providing two local grocers with \$10,000 each in grants to cover the costs associated with adding fresh produce to their stores, and the initial investment included \$5,000 for refrigeration units, \$2,000 for signage and other set up, \$1,000 to offset initial inventory cost while determining the best product mix, and about \$1,000 for community outreach/marketing.

While one of the corner stores, a gas station convenience store, was not successful selling produce, the other corner store has demonstrated positive results, selling about \$600 of fresh produce monthly particularly due to the new fresh fruit and vegetable vouchers offered through the Women, Infants and Children (WIC) program. Also, the health department has been very involved in the Healthy in a Hurry Corner Store project, providing community nutrition education and promoting community engagement. Surveys conducted by the health department of local residents who live near the successful store have reported they are buying more fresh fruits and vegetables.

The goal is to expand to other stores in the region as well, and potential new stores are in the process of being identified.

For more information, see www.louisvilleky.gov/economicdevelopment/News/2009/FreshProduceNewOfferinginParkHill.htm.

Additional Resources:

- The Healthy Corner Stores Network connects local government staff, community members, nonprofit organizations and funders to best practices regarding introducing nutritious foods to small corner stores in lower-income neighborhoods. For more information, go to www.healthycornerstores.org.
- Beginning with the Marshall Islands Healthy Stores program in 2000, Dr. Joel Gittelsohn of the Johns Hopkins Center for Human Nutrition initiated a series of store-based interventions to address the need for systemic environmental change in low income areas where healthy options were rarely available. For more information, go to www.healthystores.org/about.html.
- Public Health Law & Policy's publication, "Healthy Corner Stores: The State of the Movement," summarizes strategies that can help healthy corner store projects be sustainable. To access a copy of the publication, visit <http://healthycornerstores.org/wpcontent/uploads/resources/Healthy-CornerStores-StateoftheMovement.pdf>.

shopping practices. County policy-makers can also use economic assessment methods that more accurately gauge business opportunities in lower-income communities. For example, The Reinvestment Fund (TRF) has created a national data mapping tool, policymap.com, which contains a wide range of demographic, real estate, crime, education, income and other data. This information can help demonstrate the area's market viability to potential retailers.

- **Identify possible grocery retailers and developers, which may often be smaller, independent operators** — Smaller independent grocery operators may be eager to expand into an emerging retail market and potentially more willing to build in an underserved community than traditional chain supermarkets. County leaders can find smaller-scale retailers through in-

dustry trade associations such as the International Council of Shopping Centers or the National Grocers Association, or development firms with experience in commercial or mixed-use development interested in a grocery store project.²¹

■ Promote General Local Economic Development, Land Use and Transportation Policies That Increase Food Access

Neighborhood infrastructure improvements can help with the success of any new grocery store developments or efforts to improve food options in existing food stores. For example, in some urban low-income areas, there can be blighted buildings, as well as crime, graffiti or litter problems near food retailers that need to be addressed. Additionally, county of-

ficials can design land use and transportation policies in ways that support access to healthy foods. Below are some strategies for county leaders to consider:

- **Promote positive perceptions and overall commercial revitalization in the neighborhood** — Commercial district enhancements such as better lighting, signage and other beautification efforts can help with the success of new or existing food retailers. County leaders and community groups can jointly publicize any improvements achieved in safety and/or neighborhood physical conditions to help reverse any negative perceptions potential retailers may have about the area.²⁴
- **Invest in greater efforts to improve neighborhood safety** — To address safety concerns, local leaders can work with

Box 3

■ Local Examples and Resources

Washington, D.C.

Washington, D.C.'s Supermarket Tax Exemption Act, established in 2000, is an example of how local policy-makers can promote supermarket development through tax abatement programs. The measure allows for a ten-year exemption of real estate and personal property taxes and license fees, as well as exemptions of sales and use taxes on building materials for construction or rehabilitation.

For more information about the tax exemption, go to www.wdcep.com/development/devinc.php

Lea County, N.M.

In the northern quarter of this rural county in New Mexico, where in the small town of Tatum, for example, the closest supermarket was over 20 miles away, residents of about a half dozen unincorporated and municipal communities engaged the countywide economic development agency to increase their grocery store options. In response, in 2008 the county commission provided Tatum with \$150,000 of funding to reopen a shuttered grocery and expand the store's original refrigeration capacity. The enhanced capacity of the store meant the refurbished Tatum Food Market could carry fresh meat products and other staples not previously available.^{22,23} The store opened in 2008, and sales

have surpassed expectations.

For more information, download the newsletters at www.edclc.org/files/newsletter_2008_08.pdf or www.edclc.org/files/newsletter_2008_12.pdf.

Broome County, NY

Residents in the North Side neighborhood of Binghamton, NY lacked a grocery store for more than 14 years until the groundbreaking for a new store began in November 2009. Broome County policy-makers directly assisted in the effort by passing a resolution to allocate \$40,000 in economic development funds for the project, particularly to cover the costs associated with an environmental inspection for the site. This funding is from the 2 percent hotel/motel occupancy tax funds which were specifically earmarked by the county for economic development, marketing and brownfield redevelopment initiatives. Legislator Jason Garnar says the investors expect to create 25 new jobs, and many employees will be hired from the neighborhood.

For more information, go to www.gobroomecounty.com/countyexec/fiala-supports-grocery-store-effort-binghamton-s-north-side.

Additional Resources

- A joint publication of PolicyLink and the Local Initiatives Support Corporation,

“Grocery Store Attraction Strategies: A Resource Guide” for *Community Activists and Local Governments*, provides information about how localities can develop a coordinated strategy to attract supermarkets. To access a copy of the publication, go to www.policylink.org. A downloadable file is available under the Publications link.

- Leadership for Healthy Communities' policy brief, “Tax Increment Financing: A Tool for Advancing Healthy Eating and Active Living,” examines how tax increment financing can be used to fund initiatives that promote healthy kids and healthy communities. The brief is available for download at www.leadershipforhealthycommunities.org under resources – policy briefs..
- Public Health Law & Policy's publication, “Getting to Grocery: Tools for Attracting Healthy Food Retail to Underserved Neighborhoods,” is written to help advocates and public health agencies coordinate and leverage the tools available through local government and other organizations to bring grocery stores into low-income communities. To access the publication, go to www.phlpnet.org/healthy-planning/products/getting-to-grocery.

police to increase efforts to reduce crime by increasing community policing strategies or developing community safety initiatives.²⁵

- **Implement land use policies that promote mixed-use development and/or protect farmland** — In terms of land use decisions, in counties that have zoning authority, leaders can allocate land to support the local food system, such as through the preservation of agricultural land, or they can design or retrofit neighborhoods to make food retailers easily accessible to residents.
- **Develop transportation policies that connect neighborhoods to healthy food options** — Enhancements to public transportation systems can also help improve residents' access to healthy and affordable foods. Local officials or community organizations can partner with the local public transportation system to improve routes that link lower-income areas with supermarkets or offer businesses financial incentives to develop projects near public transportation routes.

■ Support Farmers' Markets and Community Gardens

While farmers' markets are generally seasonal and may be limited in terms of scope and consistent selection, they can serve as a good source of affordable and high quality fruits and vegetables for residents. One advantage of farmers' markets is that typically the costs to local governments are low, because vendor fees generally cover the operating expenses.²⁶ County leaders can also establish and support community gardens, which in addition to providing residents greater access to fresh produce, can also generate a number of secondary benefits, such as opportunities for environmental education and greater neighborhood green space.



Local leaders can pursue a number of strategies that will help increase the likelihood that farmers' markets and community gardens will be successful and sustainable:

- **Ensure that zoning designations allow for farmers' markets and help identify appropriate sites** — To promote their sustainability, county officials with zoning authority can verify that zoning rules allow for farmers' markets. Although localities may not have an outright ban on this type of food retailing, unless regulations clearly permit this activity, farmers' markets may be vulnerable to being shut down.²⁷ Regarding identifying a site, county leaders can authorize the use of public spaces, such as parking lots, streets, parks or other locations.²⁸
- **Enable farmers' markets to accept federal food assistance program benefits and**

promote these markets to program participants — The Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children (WIC) Farmers' Market Nutrition Program (FMNP), begun in 1992, helps expand WIC participants' awareness and use of farmers' markets. Eligible recipients are given FMNP coupons in addition to their regular WIC benefits, which can be used at markets approved to accept the coupons. The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) has utilized an electronic benefit transfer (EBT) system since 2004 that allows recipients of federal food assistance to pay for products with a card similar to a debit card, rather than with paper food stamps. However, most farmers' markets are not equipped with the technology to be able to accept EBT cards. Therefore, local efforts to help

Box 4

■ Local Examples and Resources

Macomb County, MI

Rapid population growth in the county led to development that began to encroach on useful farmland. In response, county commissioners in 2000 formed a committee to focus on policy options for balanced growth within the county. The committee's recommendations were adopted by the Board of Commissioners in 2001, and the county subsequently formed the Macomb Agricultural Purchase of Development Rights Committee (MAPDRC) to establish eligibility for a state grant for farmland preservation. MAPDRC was awarded a grant in 2006, and these funds helped the county preserve 40 acres of prime farm land.

For more information, see NACo's brief, *Planning and Land Use Solutions to Create Active, Healthy Counties*, available at www.naco.org or visit www.macombcountymi.gov/mcped/Project_Programs/PE/Growth%20Management%20and%20Resource%20Conservation.html.

Travis County, TX

In 1996 the Austin/Travis County Food Policy Council worked with the Austin, Texas Capital Metro to develop a bus line intended to improve low-income Latino residents' access to healthy food options.

The bus route helped link the neighborhood with two supermarkets.

For more information, go to www.ncsl.org/programs/health/publicHealth/foodaccess/transportation_policies.htm.

Additional Resources

- A checklist developed by the American Institute of Certified Planners and the Professional Institute of the American Planning Association can help promote discussion about enhancing neighborhood safety and serve as a guide for identifying unsafe neighborhood conditions. To access the publication, visit <http://myapa.planning.org/symposium/pdf/SafeGrowthAmericaChecklist.pdf>.
- NACo's brief, *Planning and Land Use Solutions to Create Active, Healthy Counties*, describes how county planners and land use officials can design communities to promote health and prevent obesity. The brief is available at www.naco.org.
- NACo's brief, *Transportation Solutions to Create Active, Healthy Counties*, offers suggestions about how county transportation leaders can implement transportation infrastructure changes to promote healthy living. The brief is available at www.naco.org.

farmers' markets become set up with wireless point-of-sale (POS) systems can be an important step for building and sustaining a farmers' market in a lower-income neighborhood.²⁹

- **Help promote and publicize local farmers' markets and community gardens** — County health departments can encourage residents to purchase healthy foods at farmers' markets by providing information about the location and dates of farmers' markets. County government can also promote community gardens through brochures, public notices and signs, and online information.
- **Connect farmers' markets with other community purchasers and improve local infrastructure** — County policy-makers can connect farmers with other places to sell their goods by passing resolutions that encourage local food purchasing prac-



tices among institutions such as schools, hospitals and correctional facilities. Also, county governments can help farmers reduce their storage and transportation costs by creating any necessary facilities

and enhancing community partnerships to improve product distribution.³⁰

- **Develop partnerships with community organizations and county cooperative extension offices to support community gardens** — County governments can partner with local community groups and county cooperative extension offices to develop and sustain community gardens. In Arlington County, Virginia, the county Department of Parks, Recreation and Cultural Resources provides oversight and management support for eight community gardens throughout the region with the assistance of the county cooperative extension office.

■ Promoting Farm-to-School Programs

Farm-to-school programs are another way that county governments — particularly those with rural areas in their boundaries— can increase children's access to healthy and affordable food options. Farm-to-school programs involve local school districts or schools purchasing fresh products from surrounding area farms to use in their school food offerings. These programs also typically incorporate learning opportunities for students, such as nutrition education and visits to local farms that can tie in with science and math curriculum. Additionally, there are also broader community benefits associated with these programs, as local farmers benefit economically and schools have reduced food transportation costs by obtaining produce from local growers. County governments can support local farm-to-school programs through a range of strategies:

- **Establish local policies that support the purchase of locally-grown foods** — County officials can adopt resolutions that promote the purchasing of local agricultural products and outline their active support of efforts to enhance the local food system.
- **Create local food policy councils to support farm-to-school programs** — Local food policy councils help develop and shape policies and programs that affect the local food supply, including promoting farm-to-school programs. County officials can help create food policy councils, as well as help sustain them through political, technical and in-kind support. Additionally, county officials or staff may serve as representatives on local food policy councils.
- **Assisting local farmers to improve their**

Box 5 ■ Local Examples and Resources

San Francisco County, CA

The Board of Supervisors of the consolidated city-county government of San Francisco passed an amendment to their park code in 2007 that permits farmers' markets on park property. The amendment also requires farmers' markets to accept government food assistance vouchers and coupons.

For more information and to see the policy language go to www.preventioninstitute.org/sa/policies/pdf/text/SFFarmersMarkets.pdf.

Carroll County, Md.

In Maryland each county Women, Infants and Children (WIC) coordinator receives a specified number of Farmers' Market Nutrition Program (FMNP) vouchers based on the percentage of WIC participants in the county, which can be used at designated farmers' markets. Carroll County is a diversified rural/suburban community, and because it was identified that many FMNP voucher coupons were not being used, there was an opportunity to increase the utilization of the voucher coupons while also supporting the largest local industry, agriculture. Fresh Start is a one-day farmers' market that coincides with the distribution of the WIC voucher coupons, and is held onsite where the coupons are distributed. In 2006, the 50.3% voucher redemp-

tion rate was the highest redemption rate in 10 years, with an increase of 14% since 2004. The Fresh Start Farmers' Market is a cooperative effort between the Carroll County Department of Economic Development, the Carroll County WIC Program and the Maryland Department of Agriculture. The county received a 2007 NACo Achievement Award for its efforts.

For more information, visit www.naco.org. Additionally, other farmers' markets in the county accept WIC and Senior Farmers' Market Nutrition Program checks.

Additional Resources:

- Public Health Law and Policy's publication, *Establishing Land Use Protections for Farmers' Markets*, provides information and model policy language about how to protect and expand farmers' markets through general plans and zoning. To access the publication, visit www.farmlandinfo.org/documents/37866/farmersmarketpolicies1.pdf.
- The American Community Gardening Association provides information about community gardening across the United States and Canada, supports community gardening initiatives and research, and hosts educational training programs. For more information, go to www.communitygarden.org/.

Box 6

Local Examples and Resources

Missoula County, Mont.

Their farm-to-school program began in 2005 when a graduate student who had started a farm-to-college program at the University of Montana reached out to the public schools to see if they would be interested in implementing a farm-to-school program. Through a private sector grant, the county school district secured some additional staff and the program began with school food events that featured locally grown ingredients. This demonstrated the feasibility of the effort and subsequently the school district began purchasing Montana grown food regularly.

In the first part of the 2006-2007 school year, more than 16,000 pounds of Montana grown food were purchased, and a cost analysis by the school district found that these foods were either no more expensive than their prior suppliers or actually less expensive. The county has directly supported the farm-to-school program through local legislation that promotes purchasing of local agricultural products as well as through a joint city and county resolution that outlines support of efforts to enhance and sustain the local food system. This resolution also led to the creation of a regional food policy council, which one of the county

commissioners serves on, and the city-county health department helps promote the program as well.

For more information, go to www.umt.edu/cfa/farmtoschool_missoula.htm.

Food System Economic Partnership (FSEP), MI

FSEP is a nonprofit established in 2005 that seeks to develop solutions to address food system issues in southeast Michigan, and is a five-county partnership between Jackson, Lenawee, Monroe, Washtenaw and Wayne counties. County officials and administrators from the five counties, along with Michigan State University Extension, farm organization and food industry leaders, community groups and economic development experts, provide leadership for FSEP's efforts which include implementing farm-to-school programs in the region.

During the 2007-2008 school year the three pilot farm-to-school programs initiated by FSEP successfully purchased local farm products. Since then the program has expanded to include 15 school districts, purchasing from nearly 20 farms across the region. FSEP also has a toolkit on how to

implement farm-to-school programs available on their website.

For more information, visit <http://fsep-michigan.org/>.

Additional Resources

- The National Farm to School Network is a joint effort operated by the Center for Food & Justice, a division of the Urban & Environmental Policy Institute at Occidental College and the Community Food Security Coalition. The network provides information, resources, and technical assistance for existing farm-to-school programs and for communities seeking to implement these types of programs. For more information, visit www.farmtoschool.org.
- NACo's publication, *Counties and Local Food Systems: Ensuring Healthy Foods, Nurturing Healthy Children*, provides information about how counties can support local food systems and increase residents' access to healthy and affordable foods through food policy councils, infrastructure development and agriculture conservation easements. The publication offers in-depth examples of counties that have implemented these strategies and is available at www.naco.org.

capacity to provide food to schools — Local producers may lack the necessary infrastructure and resources to be able to supply schools with farm fresh products. County governments can help increase smaller producers' storage, processing, and distribution capacities through developing policies that ease permitting processes, provide financial support and help to enhance community partnerships.³¹

Endnotes

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About NACo's Health Programs

NACo's Health programs are designed to help counties find solutions to the health challenges they face in their communities, including increasing access to care, expansion of rural health systems, and advancing programs and policies to prevent childhood obesity. For more information on NACo's Health programs, please contact Anita Cardwell at acardwell@naco.org or 202/942-4267.

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