

**Partnering with Small Stores to Improve the Retail Environment**  
**Sponsored by the Inland Desert Training & Resource Center, UC San Diego**  
**Webinar Q+A**

A recording of this webinar is available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZMWm7mwOKol&feature=youtu.be>.

***Is the certification process something that happens through a third party, or is it created and enforced by individual agencies?***

Most certification programs are created and operated by local health departments, though there are certainly examples of programs administered by other entities. For example, [HOPE Collaborative](#), based in Oakland, CA, is a community-based organization that has launched a Healthy Corner Store Project. The Healthy Corner Store Initiative in [Baton Rouge, LA](#), is a pilot program administered by the East Baton Rouge Redevelopment Authority.

***Is there a template for a healthy corner store program application?***

Here are a few examples of program applications for stores:

- Delridge Healthy Corner Store Project in Washington. [Click here to access the toolkit](#). (pages 65-68)
- Louisville, KY's Healthy in a Hurry Corner Store Initiative. [Click here to download the application](#).
- Minneapolis Healthy Corner Store Program. [Click here to access the application](#). (page 18)

Your program might have different criteria than those listed above, so be sure to tailor your application accordingly.

***Has anyone had the opportunity to work with a store that has a bad reputation in the community due to its lack of providing fresh produce? If yes, how did you go about building back their reputation?***

Andrea Morey, one of this webinar's guest speakers, shared this insight from her experience working at the Riverside County Department of Public Health:

We did not choose to work with stores that had zero produce, but several that had poor quality produce. I don't know if it was a 'reputation' within the community, but we did hear from customers that they were noticing an improvement in the displays and that the produce looked better than before. Sometimes people don't realize how bad something is until it changes for the better (or they compare to an example of how it could be).

We've heard from communities that—when possible—it's important to choose stores that the community already patronizes and thinks highly of (even if those stores aren't selling produce already). Working with stores that have an established customer base is one way to set yourself up for success from the start.

***Who is everyone referring stores to for equipment?***

One big player in this space [Sutti and Associates](#), a grocery design consulting firm. This firm provided pro bono support to San Francisco's Southeast Food Access Corner Store Program. You can see photos from before and after the re-design process in San Francisco [here](#) (slides #20-26).

***What are tips for creating a retail network or work group in a rural county? Are there any pilot programs you can suggest for a small rural county with a high Hispanic population?***

When it comes to creating a network, we'd recommend finding an existing coalition in your area that's concerned with community well-being. Some local health departments have partnered with wellness coalitions that originally focused on tobacco control or child abuse. It doesn't have to be food or health specific; you might look for a PTO, church group, or youth coalition. Finding an opportunity to integrate food access issues into an existing network that's already invested in positive community outcomes will be easier than building a new network from scratch.

Before launching any corner store effort, it's important to conduct an assessment to identify the specific needs of the community you're serving. The NEMS tool (Nutrition Environment Measures Survey) is one of several surveying tools that can be used to assess the nutrition environment. One pilot corner store program in Iowa utilized NEMS to survey the food environment in a predominantly Hispanic community. They quickly found, however, that the NEMS tool was not sensitive to the cultural differences in retail stores and products serving this population. This program, in partnership with Iowa State University, is now developing a modified version of the tool to fit this need. [Click here for more information](#). Salud America's [Growing Healthy Change](#) website is another resource that includes information specifically about increasing access to healthy foods in Latino neighborhoods.

Lastly, it's important to note that communities that identify as rural are very diverse in term of geography, density, and economy, and may face different food access challenges as a result. Before diving into any specific strategies, be sure to first take a step back and think about your community's food environment. You may end up discovering that a healthy retail program isn't the best fit after all. You might instead look to other food access strategies, like mobile retail, farmers' markets, or partnering with local farmers. There's no one-size-fits-all model when it comes to increasing access to healthy food. Our webinar [Food Access Strategies in Rural Communities](#) highlights a range of examples of how rural communities are connecting residents to healthier food options.

***If you've worked with storeowners to survey customers, what are the highlights in terms of what kind of products neighborhood residents/customers said they wanted or wanted more of?***

Andrea Morey shared this example from Riverside County:

Most residents were coming from apartment complexes, and had little food storage or refrigerator space – they wanted to get smaller quantities, preferably “prepped”, like a salsa kit (might have tomatoes, peppers, onions, etc. wrapped in a package together) or a chopped fruit salad in a cup. Mainly requesting more culturally-appropriate fruits & vegetables (instead of apples, they wanted mango, papaya; instead of iceberg lettuce, they wanted nopales).

***What loans or grants are available for retail renovation?***

ChangeLab Solutions' webinar [Going for Green](#) and our guide [Green for Greens](#) highlight various funding opportunities that can be leveraged to support healthy retail. These resources are a couple years old, so use them as a starting point, but be sure to double check that the programs highlighted are still operating.

When looking for funding opportunities, keep in mind that you may be eligible for a loan or grant that doesn't include the words “food” or “health” at all. The USDA's [Rural Energy for America Program](#), for example, provides funding to small businesses in rural areas to purchase renewable energy systems – like a cooling or refrigeration unit.

The [Healthy Food Access Portal](#) (a joint effort between PolicyLink, The Food Trust, and The Reinvestment Fund) is another great resource that highlights funding opportunities.

### ***Can someone speak to TA they've provided in terms of local food system efforts (e.g., connecting small farmers to corner stores)?***

Andrea Morey shared some insights from Riverside County:

Our attempts at farmer connections weren't working, because most don't have a formal ordering system or order form that store owners might be used to. We switched to a CSA box idea next, but sometimes the varieties in the boxes don't meet the demand of that particular store/neighborhood (too exotic for a small store). We are now trying an order/delivery system with a local school district that buys from many local growers, and can distribute in small quantities to the stores on a weekly basis (or even more frequently)."

In Baltimore, MD, a pilot program led by researchers at the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health connected local farms to two corner stores. Participating stores received the first 5 weeks of produce (delivered weekly by the farmers themselves) for free. Additionally, the farmers played an active role in engaging storeowners around what items to supply, and setting up and maintaining the produce displays. One store received a refrigeration unit for the duration of the 9-week intervention, and the other received non-refrigerated shelving. To increase community awareness, both stores held community events to kick off the program and organized monthly tastings of seasonal fruits and prepared dishes.

One store is no longer getting produce directly from the farm, but has increased its supply of produce from other sources. The other store stopped selling farm produce at a time when the farm was not producing food, but both parties are interested in figuring out how to re-ignite this partnership.

Some key takeaways:

- The participating farmers were used to harvesting produce at the peak of ripeness to sell immediately at farmers' markets. With this model, they had to learn to modify their harvesting methods to increase the shelf life of their produce at corner stores.
- In this intervention, both the farmers and the researchers played a hands-on role in supporting the stores. Having someone who can dedicate time on a regular basis (a couple hours every other day) will go a long way in reducing the burden on the storeowner.
- Small farms have little wiggle room to offer price discounts to corner stores.
- Farms noted an increase in store sales, but a decrease in farm stand sales.
- The farmers indicated this project increased visibility and improved their reputations in the community.
- For this model to be successful, it requires an "activated" community with a strong interest in local, fresh fruits and vegetables. Community outreach is important.
- Moving forward, this Baltimore-based group is interested in seeing if WIC farm vouchers can be used for farm produce sold in stores.

ChangeLab Solutions' resource [\*Providing Fresh Produce In Small Food Stores: Distribution Challenges & Solutions for Healthy Food Retail\*](#) highlights a few other farm-to-store initiatives, along with other innovative models for getting fresh produce to local stores.

### ***Are there any evaluation tools aside from CX3 materials?***

Each evaluation will need to be tailored to the specific program, but here are a couple resources that highlight programs' approaches to collecting data:

- The Minneapolis Healthy Corner Store Program developed a report on their evaluation methodology. [Click here to access the report.](#)
- Mandela Marketplace, a nonprofit in Oakland, CA, released a toolkit outlining its Healthy Neighborhood Store Alliance. It includes a replicable Customer Health Survey (page 31) and a Store Owner Satisfaction Assessment (page 32). [Click here to access the toolkit.](#)

***SNAP-Ed has approved posters and recipe cards, but are there other resources available through other partnerships besides these health department-approved materials?***

Most signage materials that have been created for healthy retail programs are branded with the specific initiative’s logo or name. If you see something that inspires you, we’d recommend reaching out to an individual at that program to ask who designed their materials, and whether you’d be able to modify them for your program.

While signage is important, there are other factors that go into making fresh produce stand out to customers. Seattle’s Healthy Foods Here program developed a [Produce Marketing Guide](#) that includes a range of practical tips for displaying and promoting fresh produce in stores.

Lastly, when it comes to marketing and signage, don’t be afraid to think outside of the box. Pictured below is a creative example from the [Shop Healthy NYC](#) program. Program staff took the concept of a flag banner—traditionally used to advertise beer and alcohol—and added their own healthy twist.



Photo credit: Shop Healthy NYC

***Still have questions?***

Feel free to reach out to us:

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