

TALKING POINTS FOR HEALTHY FOOD, HEALTHY COMMUNITIES: IMPROVING ACCESS AND OPPORTUNITIES THROUGH FOOD RETAILING

Everyone benefits when all communities offer places where residents can buy affordable, healthy food. State and local governments have a vital role to play in making this happen. The new PolicyLink report, *Healthy Food, Healthy Communities*, discusses how to improve community health by making healthy food readily available for purchase in all communities. Below are some talking points that highlight the main components of the report.

1) Everyone benefits when good quality, affordable healthy foods are readily available for purchase to all people regardless of income.

- Access to healthy food retailing opportunities **affects the health of residents** by ensuring they can make healthy choices about their diets.
- Healthy food retailing brings **economic benefits**. Jobs are generated by new stores. Grocery stores often serve as an “anchor” for other retail stores because it generates lots of foot traffic. So residents can spend money in their own community that would’ve been spent elsewhere, improving the local economy and generating even more jobs.
- Healthy food retailing provides for residents a sense that they live in a **healthy, vibrant community**.

2) State and local government have vital roles to play in ensuring that there are places where people can purchase healthy food in low-income communities.

- Pennsylvania passed legislation that allocates more than 100 million dollars that can be used for healthy food retailing. The first supermarket to be funded by this initiative opened in 2004 and created 258 jobs, over half going to local residents.
- Baltimore has prioritized reclamation of vacant and abandoned land and new grocery store development. In just two years, 18 new grocery stores have located in the city.

State Level Recommendations

- Prioritize food access as an issue
- Create sources of low-cost financing – see PA example above
- Fund pilot projects to identify ways to improve access and ensure sustainability (by ensuring the business can make a profit)
- Provide greater support for effective programs like the WIC and Senior Farmers’ Market Nutrition Programs
- Expand and improve existing pilot programs to ensure that farmers’ markets can accept electronic public benefits cards.

Local Level Recommendations

- Prioritize food access as a key part of neighborhood development
- Use economic development resources to promote new grocery stores – could take the form of grants, tax breaks, low-interest loans
- Clean up brownfields and reclaim vacant land for use by healthy food retailers
- Market underserved neighborhoods to healthy food retailers
- Dedicate small business development resources to existing, smaller stores to improve food and store quality

3) The new PolicyLink report, *Healthy Food, Healthy Communities*, provides strategies for overcoming obstacles to healthy food retailing in low-income communities, and case studies of communities that have succeeded in making change happen.

Three promising strategies to increase access to healthy, affordable foods

- Developing New Grocery Stores
- Improving Existing Small Stores
- Starting and Sustaining Farmers' Markets

To view the full report, please visit <http://www.policylink.org/Research/HealthyFood>