

ACCESS TO AFFORDABLE, HEALTHY FOOD FOR EVERYONE

Issue Brief



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Impact of Community Food Environments

Healthy options can be hard to find in too many communities. Millions of low-income Americans live in “food deserts,” neighborhoods that lack convenient access to affordable and healthy food. Instead of supermarkets or grocery stores, these communities often have an abundance of fast-food restaurants and convenience stores. In addition, stores in low-income communities may stock fewer and lower quality healthy foods. When available, the cost of

fresh foods in low-income areas can be high. Public transportation to supermarkets is often lacking, and long distances separate home and supermarkets.

It is hard for residents of these areas—even those fully informed and motivated—to follow the necessary and recommended steps to maintain a healthy weight for themselves and their children. Too often, economic incentives strongly favor



unhealthy eating, and accessibility, safety concerns, and convenience can also promote unhealthy outcomes. (Letsmove.gov)

Dietary behaviors are influenced by the realities of where we live, including the availability of food both inside and outside the home.

Impact of Limited Access to Healthy Food Choices

Limited access to healthy food choices can lead to poor diets and higher levels of obesity and other diet-related diseases. In addition, limited access to affordable food

choices can lead to higher levels of food insecurity, increasing the number of low- and moderate-income families without access to enough food to sustain a healthy, active life. There is a growing,

though incomplete, body of research that finds an association between food insecurity and obesity, suggesting that hunger and obesity may be two sides of the same coin. (Letsmove.gov)

*The U.S. Department of Agriculture defines a community's lack of reasonable access to affordable quality food as **community food insecurity**. This condition disproportionately affects minority and lower economic status communities and is a major contributor to health risks affecting these groups. Among the many reasons that a community may have limited access to healthy, affordable food are the flight of large grocery store chains from inner city neighborhoods, lack of affordable and accessible transportation options to access quality foods, and a proliferation of unhealthy eating options.*

Food security: access by all people at all times to enough nutritious food for an active, healthy lifestyle



Healthy Polk's Planning Initiative

Healthy Polk is a movement of individuals, businesses and community organizations focused on improving the quality of life and health status of people who live, work and play in Polk County.

In developing the Healthy Polk 2020 community health plan, input was collected from over 2,300 community members through community conversations, an online

survey and phone interviews. The process was finalized in February 2009 when 150 Polk County residents attended a Healthy Polk Community Caucus and chose 10 health priorities for our community. (The full list of priorities is available at www.healthypolk.org.



“Ensure equal access to safe and affordable and healthy food for all Polk County residents” is one of the 10 priorities.

Healthy Polk Affordable, Accessible Healthy Foods Planning

A group of experts from the food and nutrition community has been reviewing and analyzing existing efforts to ensure equal access to safe and affordable and healthy food for all Polk County residents.

Subject matter expert panels were convened to study Polk County's access to affordable healthy food assets and to identify barriers and needs. Through this in-depth analysis, these experts made recommendations for

community priority areas.

In March, 2011, forty-three (43) health leaders and food advocates came together to review the environmental scan and recommendations to choose the top priorities to ensure our residents have access to healthy affordable food.

Polk County's Food Assets

Advocacy & Policy

- Health Care Reform Bill
- Human needs advocates
- Hope for the Hungry conference
- Urban Ambassadors
- DMARC
- Job training in food production
- Healthy Urban food farming
- Nutrition Environmental Measure Survey (NEMS)
- IA food systems council
- Practical Farmers of Iowa
- Leopold Center
- Community gardens
- Empowerment gardens
- Faith-based gardens
- Healthy urban food farming
- Job training in food production
- Iowa Environmental Council
- DHS Early Childhood Standards for Health
- Hospital Policies on breast feeding
- La Leche League
- Lactation Consultants

Education, Awareness & Promotion

- Federal requirements on food policies in schools
- Hospital policies on breast feeding
- Breastfeeding Coalition
- La Leche League
- Lactation consultants
- Iowa Healthy Kids Act
- Boys/Girls Club food education
- American Dietetic Assoc. Healthy School Partnership
- USDA Team Nutrition
- Central Campus horticultural program
- DMACC and Central Campus culinary arts
- Public school Adult Ed
- Live Healthy Iowa
- Wellness Council of Iowa
- Mercy Health Coaches
- Primary Health Care, Inc.
- Private coaches & trainers
- Iowa Nutrition Network – Chef Charles
- ISU Expanded Food and Nutrition Education (IEFNP)
- ISU Family Nutrition Program (IFNP)

- Head Start
- Food pantry nutrition education
- Non-profit disease support groups (hospitals, YMCA)
- Better Choices/Better health Program

Safety/Environmental

- Department of Inspections and Appeals
- ISU SafeFood© program
- ISU Farm Food Safety and GAPs Training
- ISU and Iowa Restaurant Assoc. ServSafe® program
- Urban Ambassadors
- IDALS and private organic certification
- NRCS Urban Soil programming
- USDA Urban Agriculture
- IA Heartland RC&D – Food systems
- Iowa Environmental Council
- Polk County Conservation Schools - environmental learning

Low-income areas have fewer supermarkets and groceries that carry healthy foods than do predominantly white, middle- and high-income neighborhoods.

Stores in low-income neighborhoods stock fewer healthy items and have significantly lower-quality fresh produce.

When available, the cost of fresh foods in low-income areas is often prohibitive.

Polk County's Identified Gaps

1. Inadequate locations for healthy food retail and pantries to serve people of limited income
2. Lack of awareness/participation of general public of USDA-funded and emergency food sources and eligible people (especially seniors/immigrants) who don't know they're eligible for programs
3. SNAP education policy that it can only be taught in low-income schools prevents other students from receiving
4. Lack of desire, will, support and personal responsibility to make healthy choices
5. Lack of year-round access for school-aged children to enough healthy, nutritious food
6. Lack of policies to address dwindling land that is available for production of food
7. Lack of supply of raw and processed locally-produced healthy foods. Lack of coordinated communication and established networks across the food system sectors in Polk County

What Would It Look Like

Healthy food would be obtainable and nutrition information would be understandable.

Every person in Polk County would be willing and motivated to choose healthy food.

People would be willing to take the time to select and prepare nutritious food.

There would be enough servings of healthy food available, especially for persons of limited income, and a way for each to access the food.

There would be ample local and regional food production and processing capacity.

People would enjoy eating their food in a way few people do now.

Healthy Polk Food Priorities - Timeline for 2010-2012

1. Identify more locations where people can sign up for food assistance on line.
2. Strengthen the working relationships within the food community.
3. Improve communication within the food community.
4. Create a community food plan.
5. Establish a mobile food pantry.



Healthy Polk Food Priorities Timeline for 2013-2020

1. Promote the Summer Feeding Program.
2. Promote environments that support healthy nutrition choices.
3. Create a healthy food school environment.
4. Integrate dietitians into Public Health, especially in clinical and preventive services.
5. Expand the Summer Feeding Program.
6. Increase sales of healthy foods.
7. Define healthy food retail.
8. Conduct eligibility and referral education and awareness training and resource tools.
9. Develop a population specific education and awareness campaign to educate SNAP beneficiaries about additional benefits.
11. Increase local food production and processing.
12. Provide technical business and development assistance for small growers and businesses. Facilitate Small Business Development training for growers and processors
13. Create coordination to jointly market produce from faith-based and other local growers.
14. Co-locate food assistance programs with health, human services offices.
15. Develop a social marketing campaign to influence consumers to make better nutritional choices.

Expert Panel

Thirteen food, hunger and nutrition experts, who were identified by their peers, were gathered on several occasions over a three-and-a-half-month period, beginning in November 2010. The experts are as follows:

Brendan Comito, Chief Operations Officer, Capital City Fruit
 Jody Gatewood, MS, RD, LD, ISU Extension Nutrition and Health Program Specialist
 Linda Gobberdiel, MA, RD, LD, Executive Director, 1000 Friends of Iowa
 Gary Huber, General Manager, Iowa Food Co-op
 Sandy Huisman, MS, RD, LD, Director of Food & Nutrition Management, Des Moines Public Schools
 Susan Klein, MS, Nutrition Educator and Consultant
 Doris Montgomery, MS, RD, LD, Iowa Nutrition Network Coordinator, Iowa Department of Public Health
 Sarai Rice, Executive Director of Des Moines Area Religious Council
 Matt Russell, State Food Policy Project Coordinator, Drake University Agricultural Law Center

Laura Sands, MS, RD, LD, Public Health Nutritionist
 Lynn Swinger, RD, LD, Windsor Heights Hy-Vee Dietitian
 Mary Swalla Holmes, Healthy foods advocate and food mapping consultant
 Angie Tagtow, MS, RD, LD, Owner Environmental Nutrition Solutions; Co-founder Iowa Food Systems Council; Coordinator Iowa Food Access & Health Working Group; Founder and Managing editor of the *Journal of Hunger and Environmental Nutrition*

Priority Implementation Partners

100 Friends of Iowa
Agape Garden Committee
Des Moines Area Religious Council
Drake Agricultural Center
Empowerment Gardens - King/Irving Neighborhoods
Family Planning Council of Iowa
Greater Des Moines Habitat for Humanity
Healthy Urban Food and Farming
Hy-Vee
Iowa Chronic Care Consortium
Iowa Department of Public Health
Iowa Environmental Council
Iowa Food Co-op
Iowa Food Systems Council
Iowa Health-Des Moines
Iowa State University, Dietetic Internship Program
Iowa State University, Expanded Food & Nutrition Education Program
Iowa State University Extension
Making Connections
Mid Iowa Health Foundation
Neighborhood Resource Office
Next Step Incorporated

Polk County Breastfeeding Coalition
Polk County Conservation Board
Polk County Health Department
Polk County Housing Continuum
Polk County Housing Trust Fund
Practical Farmers of Iowa
Primary Health Care, Inc.
St. Timothy Episcopal Church (Faith and Grace Garden)
Soil and Water Conservation Society
Urban Ambassadors
United Way of Central Iowa
Urbandale Public Schools
Wesley Life – Meals on Wheels
Women, Infants and Children (WIC) Program
Youth Emergency Shelters and Services

➤ And a number of private food consultants and advocates

Healthy Polk 2020

www.polkcountyiowa.gov/healthypolk

JOIN THE MOVEMENT!

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Reference Sources for Issue Brief

U.S. Department of Agriculture
Public Health Law Center
PolicyLink
Let'sMove.gov
Yale University Rudd Report on Access to Healthy Foods

Chair, Healthy Polk 2020
Chris McCarthy, Project Manager, Center for Healthy Communities,

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