



## Healthy Food, Healthy Communities

Promising Strategies to Improve Access to Fresh,  
Healthy Food and Transform Communities



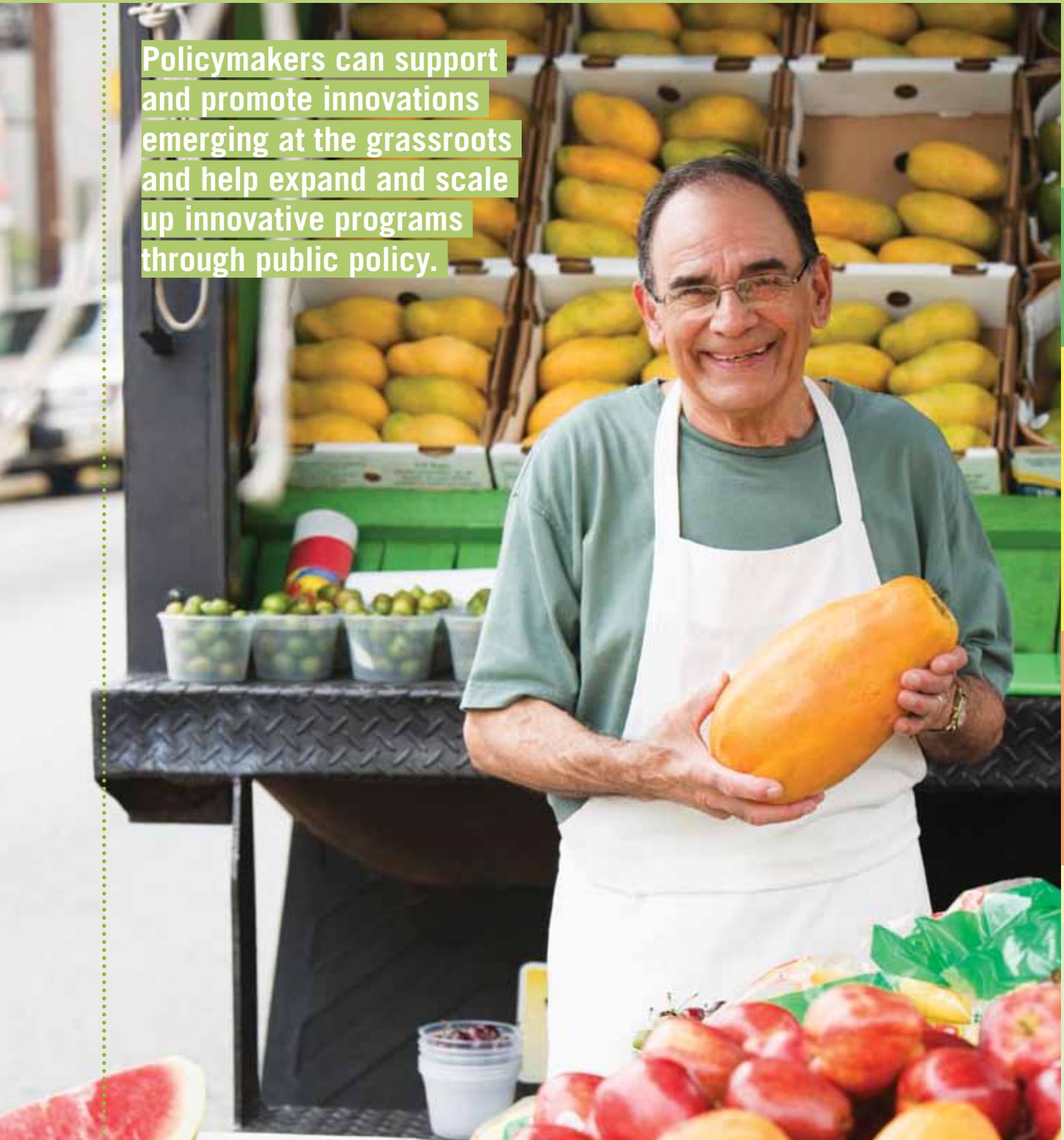


# Healthy Food, Healthy Communities:

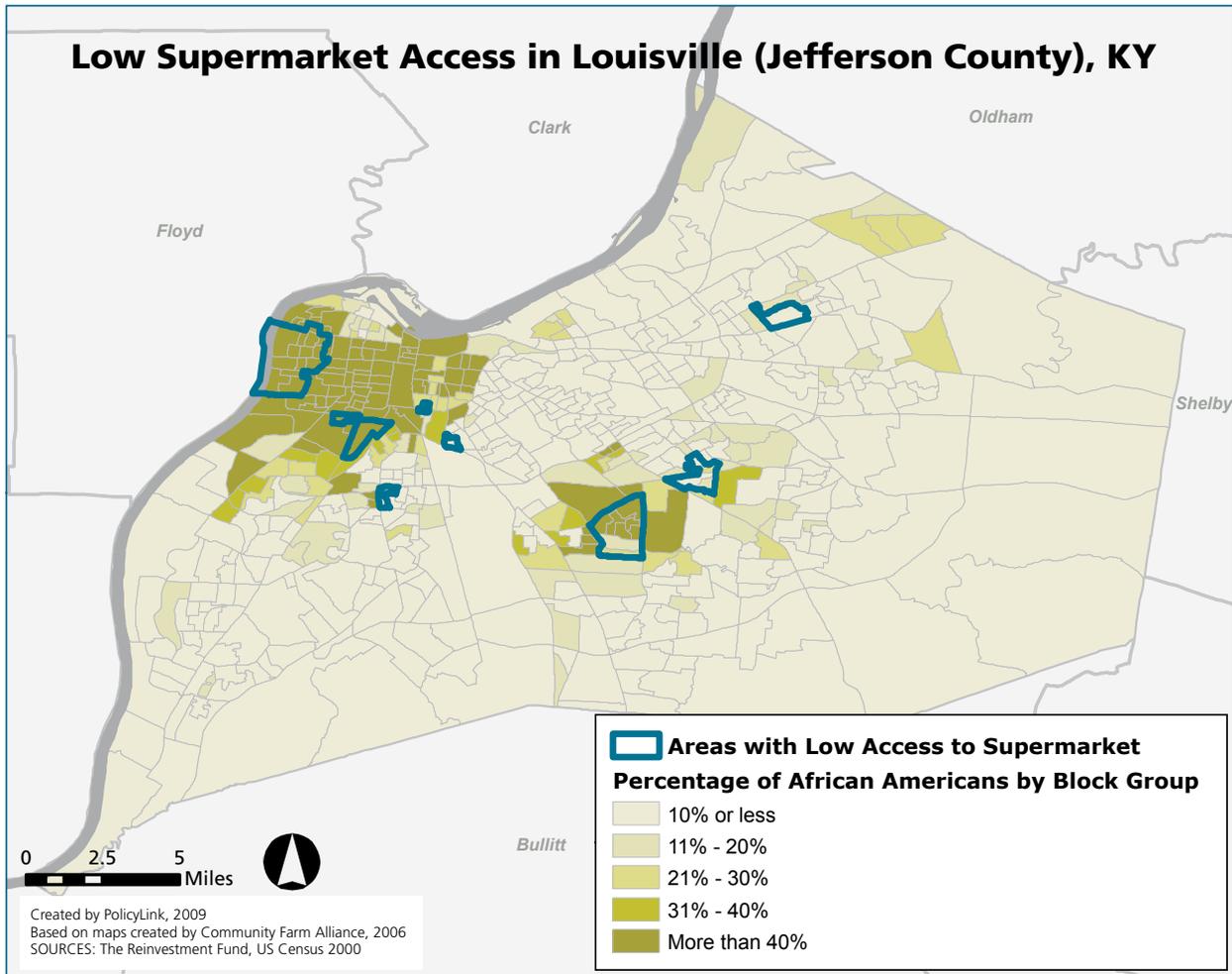
## Promising Strategies to Improve Access to Fresh, Healthy Food and Transform Communities

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Policymakers can support and promote innovations emerging at the grassroots and help expand and scale up innovative programs through public policy.



In many low-income communities across the country, the only places to buy food are fast-food and convenience stores that sell fatty, sugary, processed foods. Some communities have no food vendors of any kind. This lack of access to healthy food makes it difficult for families to eat well, fueling the country's growing obesity epidemic and the severe health problems that accompany it. Bad food makes for bad economics as well. Communities without full-service grocery retailers also lose out on the benefits these retailers bring: steady jobs, decent wages, and foot traffic that promotes additional commercial activity. Fortunately, scalable solutions are emerging—solutions that can improve health, spark economic development, and help transform underserved communities into communities of opportunity.



In low access, lower-income areas, residents travel longer distances to supermarkets than similar higher-income areas. Though Jefferson County is only 19 percent African American overall, in areas with low access to supermarkets the population is 68 percent African American.

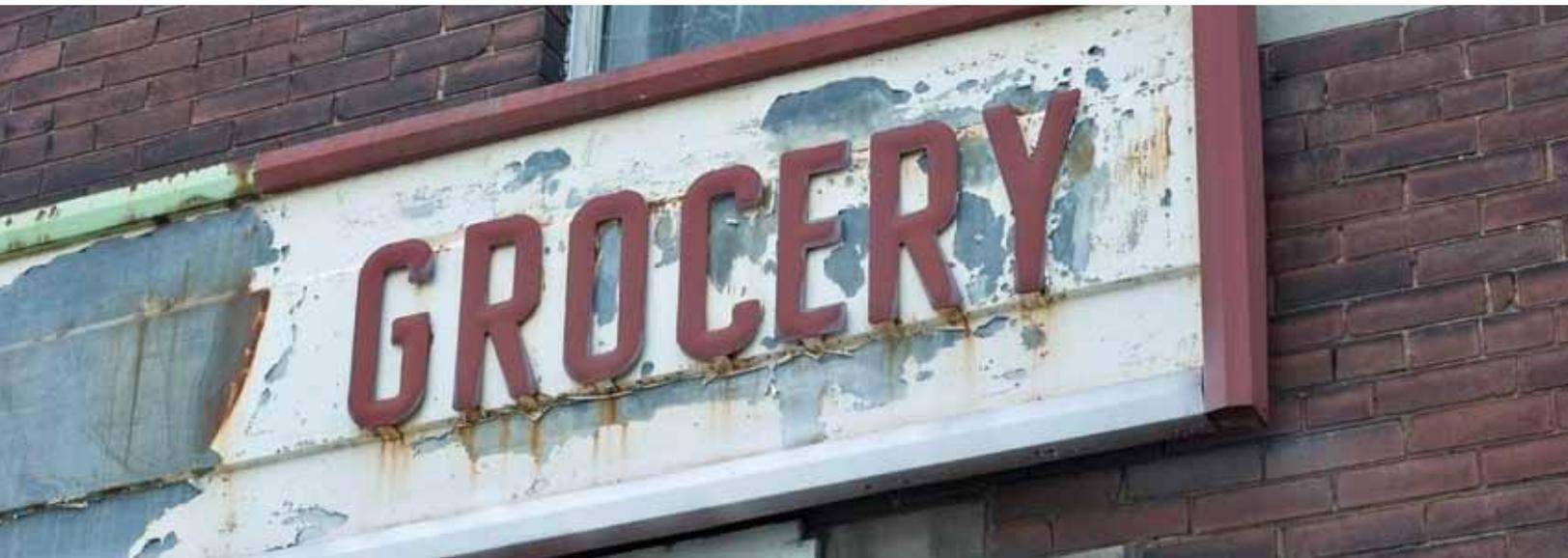
Based on maps created by the Community Farm Alliance in 2006 and The Reinvestment Fund's low supermarket access analysis. For more information on The Reinvestment Fund's methodology, see [www.trfund.com/financing/realestate/EstimatingSupermarketAccess-1pg.pdf](http://www.trfund.com/financing/realestate/EstimatingSupermarketAccess-1pg.pdf).

## Limited Access to Healthy Food

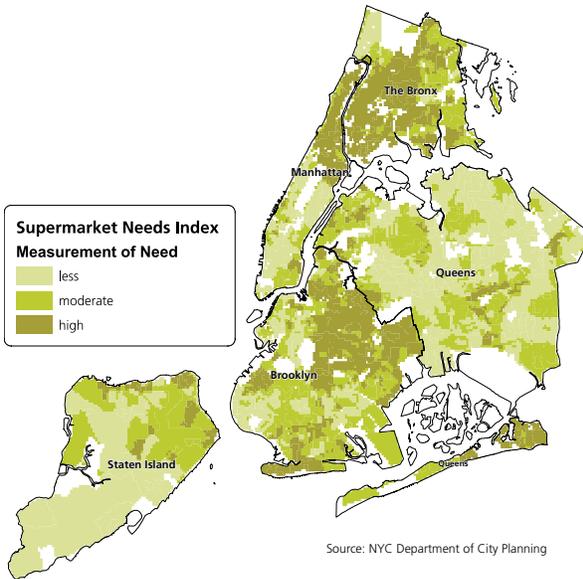
Low-income communities of color, and low-income rural areas, are most affected by limited access to healthy food. Studies have consistently shown that there are fewer supermarkets and other retail outlets selling affordable, nutritious food in low-income communities than in wealthier ones,<sup>1</sup> and in predominantly African American and Latino neighborhoods than in predominantly white neighborhoods.<sup>2</sup> One nationwide study found that low-income zip codes have 25 percent fewer chain supermarkets than middle-income zip codes. Compared to predominantly white zip codes, majority African American zip codes have about half the number of supermarkets, and mostly Latino zip codes have about a third as many.<sup>3</sup> This pattern is clear for many urban areas.<sup>4</sup> For example, in Washington, DC, the city's lowest-income and almost exclusively African American wards (Wards 7 and 8) have one supermarket for every 70,000 people while two of the three highest-income and predominantly white wards (Wards 2 and 3) have one for every 11,881 people.<sup>5</sup> One in five of the city's food stamp recipients live in a neighborhood without a grocery store.<sup>6</sup> Studies also find that rural communities face significant

healthy food access challenges.<sup>7</sup> In one example from the Mississippi Delta, nearly three-quarters of households that qualify for food stamp benefits must travel more than 30 miles to reach a large grocery store or supermarket.<sup>8</sup>

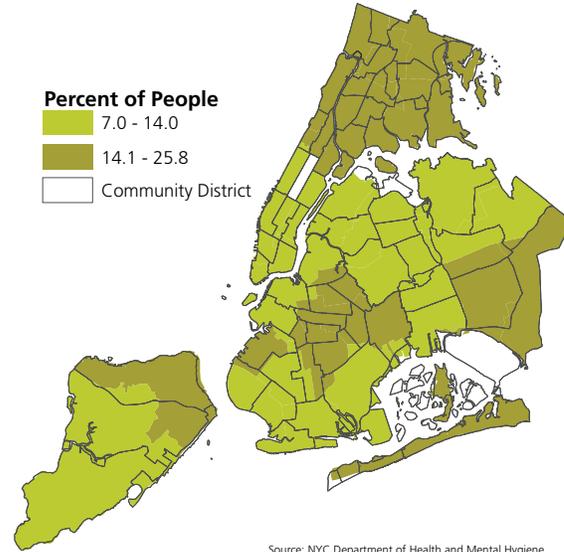
Residents of underserved communities typically lack the transportation to easily make trips to stores in other parts of town. Low-income African American and Latino households are less likely to own cars than whites and households with higher incomes,<sup>9</sup> and as a result often need to arrange rides with friends or relatives, piece together multiple bus routes, or pay for taxi rides to do their grocery shopping.<sup>10</sup> Rural households generally have greater access to cars, but those that don't—farmworkers for example—have virtually no public transportation available to them to reach stores beyond their immediate communities. With limited transportation, low-income residents often must rely on the smaller convenience stores closer to their homes. These stores usually charge prices that are much higher than supermarkets' and their inventory is primarily high-fat, high-sugar snacks, soft drinks, and alcoholic beverages.<sup>11</sup>



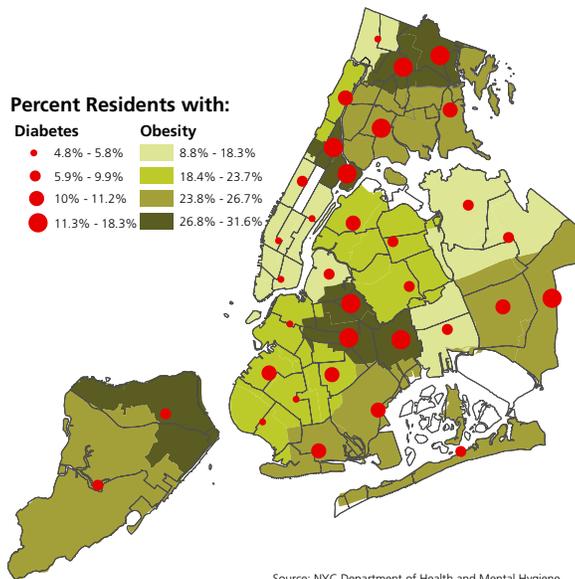
### Supermarket Access Index



### Percent of people reporting they consumed NO fruit or vegetables the previous day by the United Hospital Fund Neighborhoods



### Prevalence of Diabetes and Obesity reported in neighborhoods defined by the United Hospital Fund (UHF)



## Obesity, Poor Health, and Limited Economic Opportunities

Community environments affect people's eating and exercise habits. Scientists and medical professionals agree that lack of easy access to healthy food and safe outdoor areas for physical activity are key contributors to obesity.<sup>12</sup> The obesity epidemic, along with related health problems like diabetes and heart disease, is most severe for low-income people of color.<sup>13</sup> Nearly a fifth of all African American children, and nearly a quarter of Mexican American children is obese, compared to one in ten white children. Children from low-income families are twice as likely to be overweight as those from higher-income families.<sup>14</sup> Researchers estimate that for the first time in American history, today's generation of children will live shorter lives than their parents, due to the health consequences of obesity and being overweight.<sup>15</sup>

Studies have shown that better access to healthy food corresponds to healthier eating and lower rates of obesity and diabetes.<sup>16</sup> For example, one study examining several U.S. states found that African Americans living in a census tract with a supermarket are more likely to meet federal guidelines for fruits and vegetable consumption,

and for each additional supermarket, produce consumption increased by 32 percent.<sup>17</sup> In rural Mississippi, adults living in counties without supermarkets were 23 percent less likely to meet guidelines for daily fruit and vegetable consumption than adults living in counties with supermarkets.<sup>18</sup> Studies have concluded that New Yorkers and Californians living in areas with more fresh food retailers, along with fewer convenience stores and fast food restaurants, have lower rates of obesity.<sup>19</sup> Researchers in Indianapolis found that adding a new grocery store to a neighborhood translated into an average weight loss of three pounds for adults in that community.<sup>20</sup>

Improving access to healthy food also brings economic benefits. A large full-service supermarket creates between 100 and 200 full- and part-time jobs, and there is some emerging evidence that a grocery store can increase local tax revenues and stabilize or even increase local home values.<sup>21</sup> A study found that tripling the amount of fresh produce that farmers sell directly to consumers at farmers' markets in Michigan could generate as many as 1,889 new jobs and \$187 million in additional personal income.<sup>22</sup>



Improving food access for everyone demands multiple approaches to meet the different needs of diverse communities.



## Solutions

**A**cross the country, innovative programs and policy efforts are helping to open grocery stores, re-stock convenience stores with healthier foods, and link small farmers and their fresh produce directly to consumers. Policymakers can support and promote innovations emerging at the grassroots and help expand and scale up innovative programs through public policy. Improving food access for everyone demands multiple approaches to meet the different needs of diverse communities. Several strategies gaining momentum are outlined in this section.



### Options for Increasing Access to Healthy Food: Key Differences

	Developing New Grocery Stores	Improving Existing Neighborhood Stores	Starting and Sustaining Farmers' Markets	Linking Farmers to Consumers: Community Supported Agriculture (CSAs) <sup>23</sup> and Community Gardens/Urban Agriculture
COMPLEXITY / TIME	Complex and time-consuming. Land must be identified and purchased. Requires significant financing. Grocers must be convinced that the area can support a store. Regulatory processes such as zoning and the construction process take time.	A significant challenge, but less complex and requires less time than building new stores. Can see results sooner.	A significant challenge, but less complex and requires less time than building new stores. Can see results sooner.	A significant challenge, but less complex and requires less time than building new stores. Can see results sooner.
LAND	The average supermarket is 44,000 square feet, and new stores are usually much larger. They require ample parking lots, and are often anchors to much larger developments of retail stores. Smaller grocery stores are typically 10,000 to 12,000 square feet and may fit into existing sites.	Requires no new land since the stores already exist.	Only requires a parking lot, a blocked off street, or another public space that can be used for short periods of time.	CSAs require land for farming and often need a distribution center for gathering and packaging their products. Community gardens/urban agriculture require land for farming.
FUNDING	New supermarkets require millions of dollars to construct and operate. Smaller grocery stores are less expensive but still cost over a million dollars.	Re-outfitting a corner store to sell fresh produce can cost less than \$100,000 in technical assistance, equipment, and initial inventory. <sup>24</sup>	A reasonable first year budget is approximately \$34,000, though markets can cost as little as \$2,000 or as much as \$150,000 per year. <sup>25</sup>	A reasonable first year budget for a CSA can range between \$1,500 to \$100,000 depending on how many members join and pricing of shares. <sup>26</sup> Community gardens/urban agriculture cost approximately \$1 per square foot per year over five years for soil, seeds, soil testing, wire fence, and initial cleanup, assuming volunteer labor and free water sources. <sup>27</sup>
CUSTOMER BASE	Supermarkets require extremely high volume and so must draw shoppers from beyond a single immediate neighborhood. Heavily trafficked roads can increase potential customer base. Smaller grocery stores can rely more on neighborhood customer bases.	It is helpful to demonstrate community interest in purchasing healthy foods so that storeowners know that they will be able to sell whatever produce they purchase and still make a profit.	Need enough customers to be worth the farmers' time at the market and transportation costs, as well as enough profit to pay for a market coordinator.	CSA customer bases can be as small as 5 people or as large as several hundred people. Membership shares range in price, but a share in the \$20 range should cover first year inputs. <sup>28</sup> Community gardens/urban agriculture can serve a small or very large customer base since the gardens/farms can range from a few hundred square feet to many acres.

## The Fresh Food Financing Initiative

In recent years, a model—the Fresh Food Financing Initiative (FFFI)—has emerged that can support a range of healthy food access efforts and has already demonstrated remarkable successes.

In 2001, the Food Trust, a nonprofit organization that promotes food access and healthy eating, released a report highlighting disparities in food access for low-income residents in Pennsylvania and high levels of diet-related disease. In response, the Philadelphia City Council charged The Food Trust to convene a task force of leaders from city government, the supermarket industry, and the civic sector, to recommend ways for expanding access to affordable, nutritious food in underserved areas. Financing emerged as a key obstacle, and the task force recommended a statewide initiative to fund fresh food retail development.

State Representative Dwight Evans championed this recommendation, and with the support of other key legislators, the Pennsylvania General Assembly appropriated \$30 million over three years to create the Fresh Food Financing Initiative (FFFI). Developed as a public-private partnership, FFFI provides one-time loans and grants to encourage fresh food retailers to locate or remain in underserved low-income communities. The Reinvestment Fund (TRF), The Food Trust, and The Greater Philadelphia Urban Affairs Coalition are charged with implementing and managing FFFI.

TRF, one of the nation's largest community development financial institutions, successfully matched the \$30 million state appropriation with more than \$90 million in private capital to create a comprehensive program to finance fresh food retailers in underserved communities. FFFI loans and grants can be used for expenses such as demolition, environmental remediation, land acquisition, equipment financing, construction financing, and workforce recruitment and training.

Since 2004, the program has approved 78 new or improved grocery stores and other healthy food retailers in underserved low- and moderate-income neighborhoods in cities such as Philadelphia and Pittsburgh as well as in rural communities such as Derry and Williamsburg. Grocery stores, small-scale corner stores, co-ops, and farmers' markets have been supported by the FFFI. These projects have led to 4,860 full- and part-time jobs, 1.5 million square feet of grocery retail space, and expanded food access for more than 400,000 residents.<sup>29</sup>

Studies have quantified the increases in jobs, wages, local tax revenues, and other economic activity that occurred when a supermarket financed by FFFI opened.<sup>30</sup> These studies find that the vast majority of jobs were filled by local residents, the salaries and benefits were on par with their suburban and industry peers, and the jobs had a positive wage trajectory. The supermarkets financed by FFFI often served as retail anchors in their communities, sparking other kinds of economic activity. In addition, values of nearby homes located within one-quarter to one-half mile of the selected stores increased by four to seven percent (an average of \$1,500), mitigating the downward trend in real estate values, especially in neighborhoods with weaker housing markets where the effect was larger.

In New York City and New Orleans, Illinois, Louisiana, and New York State, elected officials have passed policies modeled on FFFI. These efforts are promising, but are not enough to address the full scope of the problem nationwide.

PolicyLink, The Food Trust, and The Reinvestment Fund are working to replicate the FFFI at the federal level. Momentum is building, and the Healthy Food Financing Initiative (HFFI) already has support from a broad range of organizations representing public health, children's health, civil rights, economic development, and the grocery industry. Like the Pennsylvania effort, the HFFI would attract healthy food retailing investment in underserved communities by providing critical one-time loan and grant financing through a combination of public and private sources—and as a result, improve children's health, create jobs, and spur economic development across the nation.



## Develop New Grocery Stores

Grocery stores often carry a wide selection of food at affordable prices, and create jobs, many of which go to local residents.<sup>31</sup> Large grocery stores often serve as high-volume “anchors” that spur local economic development and bring needed tax revenues to cash-strapped municipalities. Developing stores in low-income neighborhoods is challenging, however. The development process is lengthy and complex; retailers believe that stores in low-income communities have high start-up and operating costs; appropriate sites are hard to find; and securing financing is difficult. Strategies to address these challenges include:

- **Create dedicated financing sources.** Efforts like the Pennsylvania Fresh Food Financing Initiative have demonstrated that one-time loans and grants can successfully lead to the development of remarkable numbers of new grocery stores in long underserved communities. For more information on this effort, similar local and state efforts, and the work to advance a national Healthy Food Financing Initiative see page 11.
- **Develop and use better information tools.** Grocery store executives need to use accurate data and market analyses that account for the real business potential of low-income communities. Alternative market assessment models and databases have been developed by groups such as Social Compact and LISC MetroEdge.
- **Facilitate site identification and development.** To secure land for new grocery stores, cities can reclaim vacant

land and abandoned properties and clean up contaminated parcels or “brownfields.” Chicago has passed an ordinance to prevent supermarkets from using restrictive land use covenants that prevent competitors from locating on particular sites. Grocery stores can sometimes reconfigure their operations to squeeze into smaller spaces. Some local governments help grocery developers and retailers navigate through the planning and zoning process, offering incentives such as relaxed parking requirements.

- **Involve residents and local suppliers in planning.** By communicating directly with residents, grocery stores can gather more information about local customer preferences. In addition, stores can develop relationships with local suppliers, enabling them to better meet consumers’ needs while also contributing to community economic development.
- **Reduce operating costs while better serving the community.** Community organizations can be important partners—even owners and operators—in grocery store development. They can help stores identify and train employees, and their involvement can increase community acceptance and contribute to improved store security. Stores can increase per-trip purchases by providing free or low-cost transportation. Environmentally-conscious, or “green” building strategies, can reduce energy costs.

## ShopRite Parkside: Bringing Hope (and Food) to a Neighborhood

The ShopRite at the Park West Town Center in Philadelphia looks like a grocery store in any suburban neighborhood. The one-year old ShopRite is bustling, bright, clean, and has plenty of parking. But this ShopRite isn't located in the suburbs—it's in a low-income urban neighborhood.

For 15 years, committed community members tried without success to get a large merchant into their community. Fortunately, several years ago, Jeff Brown, the owner of 10 ShopRite stores, partnered with Pennsylvania's Fresh Food Financing Initiative (FFFI) to make the community's dream a reality. "Without FFFI's financial know-how and assistance, Parkside ShopRite wouldn't have happened—the costs and obstacles were too substantial for me to take it on independently," says Brown.

Residents now have access to a variety of foods they lacked just a year ago. The percentage of fresh produce sold at the 65,600-square-foot store is the same as at Brown's suburban outlets. Based on community input, the store stocks a variety of halal products used by the neighborhood's large Muslim population and African food staples to meet the needs of nearby West African immigrants. And the store has been a good business proposition, with revenues exceeding projections.

ShopRite Parkside offers more than food to the neighborhood. The store has created between 250 and 300 jobs, with the vast majority going to neighborhood residents. Employees are unionized and earn wages comparable to those of their suburban and industry peers. Working with two nonprofits, Brown established a training and employment program and now employs more than 40 people who were formerly incarcerated. The store has a large meeting room available for community meetings at no charge. "A grocery store doesn't just bring food to a neighborhood," says Brown, "it can create an environment of possibility that spills over into the entire community."



## Improve Small Stores

Improving corner and convenience stores is less complex and costly than constructing a new store, and builds on existing community resources. Small merchants, however, do not have the advantages of scale that can translate into lower prices for consumers. Many of these retailers are unfamiliar with how to handle, display, and stock produce, and may lack needed refrigeration or adequate shelf space to experiment with new products. And selling produce has risks—because produce spoils quickly, it must be sold quickly. To address these challenges:

- **Reduce the risk, and the costs, for small stores.** Community groups can encourage small stores to increase shelf space for fresh produce by documenting unmet demand, subsidizing the additional costs, and providing managers with tips to help them buy, sell, and display produce. To reduce costs, store owners can collaborate with other stores to jointly buy foods from local farmers.
- **Pick the right retailer.** Improvement efforts are most successful when merchants

are genuinely receptive to selling healthier products and willing to invest to improve long-term viability. Efforts focused on corner stores near schools can help ensure healthier food and beverage choices for children during their school day.

- **Increase and capitalize on customer spending power.** Advocates can promote resident participation in nutrition assistance programs such as the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), or food stamps, and the Women with Infants and Children program (WIC) to bolster the purchasing power of local residents, while ensuring that retailers accept WIC and SNAP benefit cards. Community organizations can promote stores that offer healthier food.
- **Connect stores with government resources.** Financial and technical assistance for small businesses can be targeted to small-scale retailers in low-income communities who are willing to improve their selection of healthy foods. Local economic development and health departments may also be able to support these efforts.



## Making Good Neighbors

In 2000, Literacy for Environmental Justice (LEJ), a community-based nonprofit organization working to improve the environment in a low-income community of color in San Francisco, undertook an assessment of the community's food environment. The youth interns who surveyed residents and local merchants found that corner stores were a primary food shopping destination for residents, and that these stores devoted an average of only two percent of shelf space to fresh food.

LEJ then launched the Good Neighbor Program, a partnership between Bayview's community-based organizations, businesses, and city government to improve the quality of foods available in Bayview Hunter's Point. The program developed criteria that defined "good" store neighbors, including: devoting at least 10 percent of inventory to fresh produce and an additional 10 to 20 percent of inventory to other healthy foods; accepting food stamps; limiting tobacco and alcohol promotion; and adhering to environmental and health standards. Stores that agreed to comply with these criteria received technical assistance and training, energy efficiency upgrades, and marketing assistance. They also received grants to make initial purchases of healthy foods and test how the items sell.

An evaluation of one store showed that average sales of produce had increased by 12 percent, alcohol and cigarettes sales were down 10 percent, and overall profits were up 12 percent.<sup>32</sup> The San Francisco Redevelopment Department and the Southeast Food Access Coalition will continue providing assistance to the store to ensure ongoing success.<sup>33</sup>

Similar projects are cropping up across the country. The Healthy Corner Stores Network now provides opportunities for the leaders of these efforts to share challenges, strategies, and successes with one another.<sup>34</sup>



## Start and Sustain Farmers' Markets

Food at farmers' markets is generally fresh and of high quality, and prices are often lower than at grocery stores.<sup>35</sup> Farmers' markets can provide entrepreneurial opportunities for residents to sell baked goods, jams, crafts, or other goods. This vending requires very low start-up capital and can be a good pathway to upward mobility.<sup>36</sup> Locating farmers' markets in low-income communities requires raising funds, attracting sufficient numbers of both vendors and customers, and installing technology needed for accepting public benefits (EBT). Farmers must find ways to keep prices low enough for low-income consumers while making enough money for their own livelihood. Some strategies to address these challenges:

- **Link farmers to retail opportunities.** Community organizing to get customers to farmers' markets, and programs that connect farmers to public schools, universities, hospitals, correctional facilities, and restaurants can increase profit margins.

- **Increase use of EBT, WIC cash-value vouchers, and WIC and Senior Farmers' Market Nutrition Program coupons.** States can expand on successful pilot programs and capitalize on USDA supplemental funds to provide free wireless EBT equipment and service to farmers' markets, waive transaction fees, train workers to use the equipment, and promote the markets to food stamp recipients. Starting in some states in 2010, WIC recipients will be able to use their WIC cash-value vouchers to buy fresh fruits and vegetables at farmers' markets.<sup>37</sup> More states should establish policies to ensure that WIC cash-value vouchers, along with WIC and Senior Farmers' Market Nutrition Program coupons, are accepted at farmers' markets.
- **Support farmers' collaboratives and technical assistance.** Farmers can share the costs of cold storage facilities, transportation, and marketing. Targeted technical assistance programs can help farmers more effectively market their produce and manage their businesses.



## Broad Street Farmers' Market: Meeting the Needs of the Neighborhood

Almost all of the customers who visit the Broad Street Farmers' Market in Providence, Rhode Island every Saturday live in the surrounding neighborhood and the vast majority have low incomes. Before Broad Street opened, neighborhood residents had only limited and expensive options for purchasing fruits and vegetables.

Southside Community Land Trust (SCLT) founded Broad Street to provide local organic produce to the low-income community surrounding the market's current location. Two of the farmers at the market, Hmong immigrants, farm at SCLT's Urban Edge Farm, where low-income and immigrant farmers learn to grow, harvest, and market their own organic produce. The farmers sell specialty crops that appeal to the many immigrant families in the neighborhood. Broad Street is adding a fourth vendor—a multicultural community gardener marketing cooperative. The cooperative pools their produce for sale at farmers' markets and local restaurants. Each participating farmer takes a turn running the market table, selling produce from all the farmers in the co-op.

Because of the market, the neighborhood has the third highest redemption of WIC vouchers in the state. In the summer of 2007, 75 percent of Broad Street's sales came from WIC. The market is focusing on increasing the number of EBT customers, thanks to a recent grant that provided the funds to buy an EBT machine.



## Connect Local Farmers to Low-Income Consumers

Beyond farmers' markets, there are other ways to connect farmers and low-income communities for the benefit of both groups. These approaches include urban farming, community gardens, and community supported agriculture (CSA), in which participants buy shares at the beginning of a growing season in exchange for boxes of produce from the farm throughout the season. These strategies provide access to high quality, local healthy food, and keep food dollars in the local community or region. These efforts also sometimes increase interactions between urbanites and rural residents, and in the case of community gardening, provide opportunities for physical activity and social connections to neighbors. Challenges to these efforts include land access, start-up and operating costs, and poor soil quality. For CSAs, additional challenges include customers' difficulty rounding up lump-sum payments at the beginning of the growing season, customers' lack of control over the amount or type of crops produced, and CSA's difficulty accepting public benefits. To address these challenges:

### Community Supported Agriculture

- **Offer reduced rate membership shares, installment plans, and work shares for low-income households.** These options make high quality produce more affordable. Reduced rate memberships can be subsidized by more affluent CSA members.
- **Ensure that CSAs can accept EBT, and Senior and WIC Farmers' Market Nutrition Program vouchers.** Some CSAs have been able to accept EBT by allowing people to pay for their food when it is picked up rather than in a lump sum at the beginning of the growing season. States such as Vermont, Maryland, California, and New York have instituted programs to allow

farmers' markets to accept Senior and WIC Farmer's Market Nutrition Program vouchers, and it may be possible for CSAs to accept the new WIC cash-value vouchers as well.

- **Enact supportive local land use policies.** Local ordinances and regulations can help farmers acquire land and protect it from development. Policies can also make public spaces available for pick-ups and for farm stands, an alternative to traditional CSAs that reduces costs by limiting packaging.
- **Provide financing for local and regional producers.** Localities can enact programs to promote regional food systems and equitable access by supporting growers who make healthy foods available to underserved communities.

### Community Gardens/Urban Agriculture

- **Provide land.** Localities can inventory vacant and private lots and make this information available to the public, lease lots from landowners for agricultural purposes, lease municipal parcels, and clean contaminated properties. Chicago City Council, for example, created a city-funded entity called NeighborSpace which is authorized to purchase properties to protect them as open spaces, including community gardens.
- **Provide grants, low-interest loans, services, and technical assistance.** Localities can provide grants and loans to for-profit urban farmers, trash collection service, compost from the local recycling program, and free access to water, tools, and storage facilities. Localities can also provide incentives to promote regional food systems that make healthy foods available to low-income underserved communities. Cooperative extension agencies can promote and provide assistance to community gardens and urban farmers.

## Building Healthy Communities: From Farm to Market

In Milwaukee, near a large affordable housing complex, 14 greenhouses and livestock pens stand, filled with salad greens, arugula, beets, tilapia, perch, beehives, hens, ducks, goats, and turkeys. The project is run by Will Allen, a charismatic farmer who has become a national spokesperson for urban agriculture and a more just food system.

In 1993, Allen created a national nonprofit and land trust organization called Growing Power, which works to provide communities like this one in Milwaukee with better access to healthy, high-quality, and affordable food and fosters a more sustainable, equitable food system. The organization produces food through a sophisticated, organic system, using a combination of fish, worms, and recycled waste from local restaurants and farms, to generate nutrient-rich compost to help crops thrive. Growing Power distributes the food it grows through retail stores, restaurants, farmers' markets, schools, and a community supported agriculture program.<sup>38</sup>

In California, Juan Perez, along with his father, Pablo, started a small organic farm on half an acre in Monterey County, California. Today, J.P., as he is known, farms five acres filled with organic corn, cilantro, strawberries, carrots, green beans, and more. Each week he delivers his produce to local families. He keeps his prices reasonable and accepts EBT.

J.P.'s farm and business model is a result of support and training from the Agriculture and Land-Based Training Association (ALBA). Many of the aspiring farmers ALBA serves are farmworkers, and have struggled to enter California's competitive farming economy hindered by language and cultural barriers, few economic resources, institutional exclusion, and a lack of government support. ALBA provides education and land, and connects farmers to resources like business consultants, loan officers, and training in sustainable land management practices. ALBA helps farmers sell what they grow, creating programs to increase access to affordable nutritious foods for low-income residents of Monterey County—many of them farmworkers themselves. ALBA has partnered with local churches and elementary schools in underserved neighborhoods to host farm stands where ALBA farmers sell their produce, and has established three new farmers' markets serving low-income neighborhoods.



## Strategies to Promote a Range of Healthy Food Retail Outlets

State and city governments, private funders, and community developers can provide financial support for a wide range of healthy food access projects in underserved communities through loans, grants, and tax incentives. State officials in Pennsylvania, Illinois, and New York State, and municipal authorities in Chicago, New York, and New Orleans have adopted such policies. The Pennsylvania Fresh Food Financing Initiative was the first such effort, creating 75 new healthy food retail outlets in its first five years. There is growing momentum to create a national Healthy Food Financing Initiative (see page 11) that would take these efforts to the federal scale and allow a national response to the nationwide problem of lack of access to healthy foods.



## Conclusion



Promising programs and policies across the country demonstrate that the challenges to increasing access to healthy foods in underserved communities—from grocery store developers’ concerns about higher start-up costs for new stores in urban areas, to corner store owners’ unfamiliarity with how to profitably buy and sell produce, to farmers’ market operators’ struggles to generate sufficient sales to attract and retain farmers, to community gardeners’ need for land access and start-up capital—can be overcome.

Improved access to healthy foods can improve the health of local residents, reduce health disparities, create and retain jobs, improve local economic development, and generate increased tax revenue. More generally, and just as importantly, these efforts can help transform underserved communities into communities of choice and opportunity.

Efforts are underway to implement state and local healthy food financing efforts and pass a national Healthy Food Financing Initiative. Local governments are providing land and other support to farmers, offering technical assistance to corner store owners stocking healthy food, streamlining development processes for potential grocery stores, and providing additional forms of assistance. Community-based organizations are implementing a range of other innovative solutions to the problem of limited access to healthy food and local, state, and federal officials are looking for ways to support and scale up these efforts. All communities should have ready access to high quality, affordable, healthy food. Sustained and strategic focus from community leaders, advocates, policymakers, and other stakeholders, has brought our nation closer to this goal than we have ever been. Now is the time to actually reach it.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> K. Morland et al., “Neighborhood Characteristics Associated with the Location of Food Stores and Food Service Places,” *American Journal of Preventive Medicine* 22 (2002); R. Nayga and Z. Weinberg, “Supermarket Access in the Inner City,” *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services* 6 (1999): 141–145; California Center for Public Health Advocacy, PolicyLink, and the UCLA Center for Health Policy Research, *Designed for Disease: The Link Between Local Food Environments and Obesity and Diabetes* (Oakland, CA: California Center for Public Health Advocacy, PolicyLink, and the UCLA Center for Health Policy Research, 2008), <http://www.policylink.org/documents/DesignedforDisease.pdf>; and A. Rundle et al., “Neighborhood Food Environment and Walkability Predict Obesity in New York City,” *Environmental Health Perspectives* 117 (2009): 442–447.

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