



Affordable Distribution Key to Corner Stores Adding Fresh Fruits and Vegetables

Summary

Across Lucas County, Ohio, 81% of residents had purchased at least one food item at a convenience store in the past seven days, according to Scarborough Research. Residents of low-income neighborhoods without supermarkets especially rely on these small stores to buy groceries.

Healthy Lucas County's Eat Fresh, Live Well team launched a healthy corner store initiative in 2012. So far, 20 neighborhood stores have joined and sell fresh fruits and vegetables. One key to adding stores was offering a reliable, affordable produce distribution network.

Challenge

Eat Fresh, Live Well is increasing access to fresh fruits and vegetables, especially in low-income areas of Lucas County. The Eat Fresh, Live Well team, which includes a committee of representatives from the local health department, several nonprofits and the community, is recruiting small businesses to be healthy corner stores.

One major obstacle encountered early on in this initiative was the lack of a cost-effective produce distribution process that worked for small neighborhood stores. Wholesale distributors do not deliver smaller quantities of produce needed by corner stores, which typically have less space to display and store items. This results in many corner store owners going to supermarkets to buy produce, leading to higher prices for customers.

Some store owners are able to shop for deals on produce. But others want a reliable and affordable delivery option.

Solution

Eat Fresh, Live Well identified Lott Industries, a local nonprofit organization that provides jobs for developmentally disabled residents, as a distribution partner. A plan was put in place for stores to order wholesale produce on a weekly basis through Lott Industries.

Lott Industries combines orders from the stores and places a single, large order with a local wholesale distributor every week. The large wholesale order is delivered to Lott Industries, which fills and delivers each store's share for a small fee.



Your Involvement is Key

Eat Fresh, Live Well needs volunteers to help healthy corner stores kick off their additions of fresh fruits and vegetables. The team holds food demonstrations, hands out recipes and does other activities after each store joins the initiative.

Residents also can support neighborhood stores by buying their fresh produce and other healthy foods. Urge store owners that do not offer fresh produce to contact the Eat Fresh, Live Well team.



Results

Affordable produce deliveries are available to neighborhood corner stores, which in turn means more residents have access to affordable produce. Sixteen of 20 Toledo's healthy corner stores now get produce deliveries from Lott Industries' distribution network.

This new distribution model will allow more stores to join the healthy corner store program because they will have an affordable and dependable delivery option. They will have fewer restrictions on the size of their orders, and they can get fresh produce deliveries every week.

The model is a benefit to both independent stores and small local chains, neither of which can support a wholesale distributor's order to one location. It also provided work for Lott Industries, a local nonprofit organization that employs developmentally disabled residents.



"You have to be careful with the amount you buy. If you don't sell it, then you have to throw it out."

- Adam Aridi, Toledo healthy corner store owner

Sustainable Success

The Eat Fresh, Live Well team wants to expand the healthy corner store initiative to at least 75% of corner stores in low-income areas of Lucas County. Part of that expansion depends on being able to offer store owners the ability to buy low-cost produce and have it delivered for an affordable fee.

Lott Industries continues to work with its wholesale distributor to refine the delivery process. Meanwhile, the Eat Fresh, Live Well team is working to expand a sponsorship program so local businesses and schools could help cover at least part of a store's delivery costs.

Eat Fresh, Live Well received funding from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention through the Hospital Council of Northwest Ohio.

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