



SHARED VISION

HEALTHY FOOD ACCESS CAMDEN

Recommendations of the Camden Food Access Work Group

2020



CAMDEN FOOD ACCESS WORK GROUP

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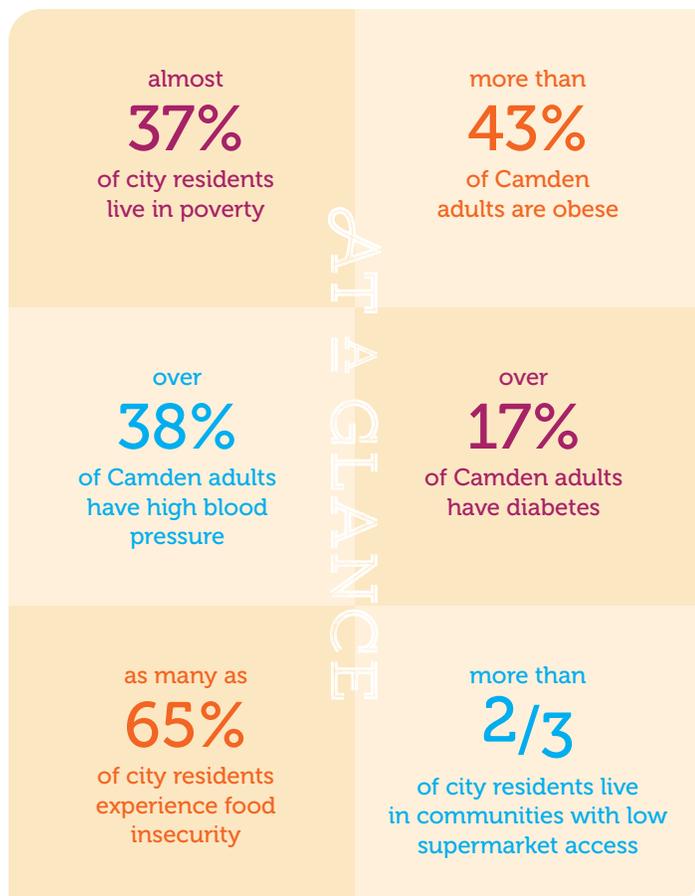
MEMBERS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The city of Camden faces a number of challenges, with rates of poverty, chronic disease and food insecurity significantly higher than state and national averages. Despite progress in recent years, almost 37% of city residents live in poverty.¹ Simultaneously, more than 43% of Camden adults are obese, over 38% have high blood pressure and over 17% have diabetes.² Surveys of hunger in Camden have found that as many as 65% of the city's residents experience some degree of food insecurity.³ At the same time, more than two-thirds of Camden residents live in communities with low supermarket access.⁴

To meet those challenges and reduce health disparities, over the last decade stakeholders across Camden have focused on improving access to healthy food, and providing resources to residents to make healthy food more affordable. To sustain and deepen that progress, The Food Trust and Campbell Soup Company's Healthy Communities Program convened the Camden Food Access Work Group. The group met six times over the course of 2019 and 2020 and developed strategies to sustain efforts to improve access to and affordability of nutritious food, along with nutrition education for city residents.

The Work Group's recommendations call for new activity and innovation related to ongoing efforts with the city's network of healthy corner stores, with nutrition incentive programs, and on the part of local farmers and farmers markets. While each strategy looks to improve healthy food access, they are tailored to the unique challenges experienced by different stakeholders, including the barriers corner store owners face running and stocking their businesses with healthy food, the high cost of purchasing healthy food experienced by people with low incomes, and the need among local farmers for better access to outlets to sell their food. The members of the Food Access Work Group, which consist of nonprofit organizations, government agencies and philanthropic partners, will work together to advance these strategies.



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SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

To improve access to healthy, fresh food for the residents of the city of Camden, the members of the Food Access Work Group have developed a shared vision that will continue to deepen our impact in the communities we serve for years to come. The recommendations below are an expression of that vision, and designed to serve as a platform for future collaboration.

Nutrition Incentives

When a head of lettuce often costs more than a bag of potato chips, it's easy to see why putting healthy food on the table can be out of reach for many families. By providing people with resources to purchase healthy food, nutrition incentives support a triple bottom line, helping families bring home more nutritious food, supporting American farmers and keeping more food dollars in the community. This work has achieved significant momentum in recent years with the inclusion of funding for incentive programs in the 2014 Farm Bill through the Gus Schumacher Nutrition Incentive Program (GusNIP, formerly known as FINI). In Camden, these programs take the form of coupons with distribution and redemption sites around the city, mainly at corner stores. The following actions will help sustain the progress with incentive programs and increase their scale in the years ahead:

1. Increase access to and knowledge of nutrition incentive programs.

Due to the different distribution and redemption methods, which are themselves often the result of different funding sources, it can be difficult to understand how incentive programs work. Overcoming the barrier to access should include a “cheat sheet” about how different incentive programs work for social service organizations so that staff can inform residents. For example: Food Bucks are currently funded through The Food Trust’s GusNIP grant and \$2 in Food Bucks are given out for every \$5 spent on an EBT card. Food Bucks RX, or “produce prescriptions,” are given out in \$10 coupons by Cooper Pediatrics and KIPP School Clinic and being expanded quickly through the BUILD Health Grant and partnership with Virtua and Camden Coalition. Heart Bucks are \$1 coupons distributed upon the completion of a nutrition education lesson tailored to the corner store environment. In addition, simple educational materials need to be created for the community, to better inform them about how programs work and how they can participate. Community outreach can be achieved through collaborations with schools, healthcare providers and community-based groups.



SUCCESS STORY

Meeting Community Needs During COVID-19

Parkside Business & Community in Partnership teamed up with The Food Trust to quickly meet the needs of the community during the COVID-19 pandemic. Instead of creating another food incentive, they bought Food Bucks directly from The Food Trust. By using The Food Trust’s existing infrastructure, redemption sites and knowledge base, Parkside has been able to efficiently get more produce into the hands of residents throughout the pandemic.



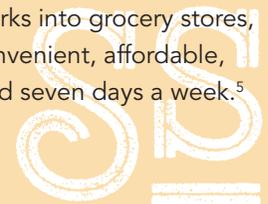
2. **Explore the development of a common currency for incentive programs** to streamline administration and participation. To avoid complications in accessing the various existing healthy food incentives, it is recommended that partners work together to use one voucher throughout the city. This will ensure better awareness, which in turn means more farmers, local stores and communities can benefit from these incentives.
3. **Ensure the sustainability of nutrition incentive programming** in Camden by identifying state funding sources; and improve their reach by expanding to more retailers and developing additional healthcare partnerships. Many successful incentive programs have state funding support and are accepted uniformly across cities to increase the efficiency of the program. Uniting the Camden incentive program with statewide initiatives could help stakeholders leverage additional funding through the GusNIP grant and possible state funding sources. With a more comprehensive network, expanding to additional healthcare systems would be more plausible.



4. **Improve communication and coordination among WIC, SNAP and other incentive programs** through increased engagement with the Camden County Board of Social Services. Improving the efficiency of social services at the city level would allow for more residents in need to access incentive programs. A recommended partnership with the [Integrated Benefits Initiative](#) would allow for technical assistance in Camden and the state of New Jersey. Stakeholders would need to coordinate with state agencies to advocate for New Jersey to receive technical assistance.

Scaling Impact in Ohio

Wholesome Wave's statewide network model makes it easier for Ohioans in poverty to afford fruits and vegetables. Early efforts to provide nutrition incentives at markets in Columbus, Cincinnati and Cleveland lacked coordination. A three-year FINI grant enabled Wholesome Wave to work with partners in all three cities to develop the Ohio Nutrition Incentive Network, a multi-sector coalition designed to amplify the reach and impact of Ohio's nutrition incentive program, Produce Perks. The number of farmers markets offering Produce Perks in Columbus and Franklin counties quickly doubled. Today the program reaches more than 4,000 Ohio families and expanded its reach by 153 percent between 2015 and 2016. Nearly 100 farmers markets now offer incentives across Ohio. Since 2015, Produce Perks has increased sales for over 830 farmers and producers, with more than \$345,000 spent on healthy, local food. These FINI impacts inspired the Ohio Department of Health (ODH) to make a pioneering investment of \$800,000 in the Produce Perks program and a new produce prescription pilot. Now ODH is working with Wholesome Wave and the Ohio Nutrition Incentive Network to expand Produce Perks into grocery stores, offering convenient, affordable, healthy food seven days a week.⁵



Healthy Corner Stores

Many neighborhoods in Camden have little or no access to healthy food, and many residents rely on corner stores for their daily shopping needs. Research shows that corner stores rely on high-profit, low-nutritive items such as candy, chips and soda and offer few options for healthy snacks, meals or cooking ingredients. In response to the lack of healthy food, Campbell Soup Company supported the development of the Camden Healthy Corner Store Network in 2011, which has grown to include almost 50 stores. Much progress has been made over the past nine years working with Camden’s corner stores to provide healthier options for the community. To deepen and sustain that work, stakeholders throughout the region should pursue the following actions:

1. **Create sustainable economic development support systems for corner store owners** including, but not limited to, business technical assistance, access to and building of credit, and the establishment of affordable and effective procurement practices, with a focus on local products. All too often, existing economic development programs are either not offered to small businesses such as corner stores, or are a poor fit for their needs. The goal of these economic development supports should be to provide healthy food to the people of Camden at a reasonable cost and support the corner store owners to strengthen their own skill set as entrepreneurs.

2. **Support corner stores in becoming micro-level social service hubs** where customers can receive information about wraparound services such as health screenings and nutrition supports. Corner stores are community gathering spots and can serve as a vital connector to critical social services with the right support. Organizations can provide materials to the store to help promote different services at checkout, and point customers toward community resource guides that are specialized by neighborhood.



SUCCESS STORY

Affinity Group Provides Safe Space and Support

A group of eight Camden corner store owners recently formed an affinity group with support from a local community development financial institution, FINANTA. The affinity group provides them with access to capital and management support. Each store owner received a small loan to help build credit, along with monthly trainings that provide business technical assistance. This group gives store owners a safe space to share mistakes made and learn from others about how to improve their businesses.



Photo: The first affinity group of Camden store owners receiving their micro loan through FINANTA.

3. **Build a communication plan for services accessible through neighborhood stores.** The work of community-based organizations and social services providers will only be effective if the community knows when and where programming is happening and how to access it. The Healthy Corner Store Network and store owners should partner with local religious organizations, schools and officials to better inform residents of Heart Smarts (short nutrition education lessons designed for the corner store environment), Food Bucks and Food Bucks Rx sites, health screenings and other available services.
4. **Develop trainings and surveys for corner store owners** to evaluate and then implement healthy grab-and-go sections. Data shows that customers coming into a corner store want quick options for food. Store owners and public health practitioners can meet that need, and develop creative, culturally appropriate, affordable and healthy meals for their customers. Given that many families have become familiar with reheatable meals offered to children through their schools during the pandemic, the timing is right for this type of intervention. This effort should be coordinated with the Health Department to ensure food safety measures within the grab-and-go and deli sections of corner stores.



Corner Store Introduces Grab-and-Go

Rosemary Mini Market has been a member of the Camden Healthy Corner Store Network since 2013. Store owner Danny Galvan was excited to take a risk and remodel his store to prioritize healthy options at the front to see if this could help him boost sales. He focused on the placement of healthy items while creating more space for the deli, which will offer smoothies and healthy grab-and-go options. Danny created a recipe for healthy grab-and-go sandwiches (chicken and tuna sandwiches with mixed spring greens on whole wheat bread) based on observations of customers' preferences. He introduced the sandwich during a free taste test accompanied by a survey to gather customer feedback. 95% liked the sandwich a lot and 80% would be very likely to buy the sandwich if it was sold in the store. Danny hopes to continue offering healthier options for the community and move his store away from "traditional" corner store offerings like soda, lottery tickets and tobacco products.



Farmers Markets and Farms

Urban farms have proliferated over the past 15 years around the city of Camden as innovative community development enterprises that combine agricultural production with valuable educational and environmental stewardship programs. Urban farms and farmers markets play an important role in the community food environment, serving as critical food access points in many communities without other reliable sources of fresh fruits and vegetables, and providing important community development services. Additionally, many stakeholders around Camden call for an increase in the number of farmers markets around the city. The recommendations below are meant to respond to the variety of challenges that urban farms and farmers markets encounter related to selling their food and managing their operations.

1. **Cultivate connections** among local farmers and emergency food providers, the School District of Camden, housing authority communities, corner stores, senior centers (to increase FMNP redemption) and other health and social service providers working in the food access sphere, with the goal of getting local food into more outlets in Camden. Due to the small scale of urban farms and the complex procurement policies of large institutions, supports are needed to enable small farms to sell or donate products to anchor institutions such as schools and emergency food providers. To overcome those barriers, stakeholders should explore the development of or connection to a food hub or other aggregation service that can enable small farmers to sell or donate products to anchor institutions. Similar operations and systems have been developed in multiple cities over the past 10 years, and would fill a critical gap in the Camden food environment.



2. **Support the development of new and improved farmers markets around Camden.** Since the closure of the Camden Farmers' Market in 2008, the city has been without a centralized farmers market that could provide residents with a high volume of locally grown fruits and vegetables and accept public benefits specifically for farmers markets, such as Farmers Market Nutrition Program vouchers. The market could also be a valuable retail site for local farms, which need better access to potential customers. To restart a farmers market, members of the Food

SUCCESS STORY

Distributor Working to Connect Communities

Common Market is a distributor of regional farm products linking the farmer and grower networks to buyers who want fresh and local food. As the distributor, they are able to work on the community level and help connect urban and rural communities through food systems. In Camden, Common Market is already working with Camden City Public Schools, KIPP Charter Schools, Mighty Writers, Camden Promise Charter School and Acelero Head Start.



Access Work Group will need to identify (or develop) an anchor institution capable of supporting the market, and then undertake a process to identify a site for the market and develop a business plan. In the near term, stakeholders should strengthen the micro markets that are currently run by small urban farmers at the neighborhood level in the city.

3. **Advocate for better policies** to support small urban farms and farmers markets. The city and county of Camden, as well as the state of New Jersey, need better policies to support farmers markets and small urban farms. The appetite for policy change related to these issues is made clear by the exceptions recently granted to farms smaller than five acres who can now participate in food assistance programs such as the Farmers Market Nutrition Program. In Camden, urban farmers need certification requirements from the Department of Health that are suited to their unique needs, and the re-establishment of a farmers market in the city may require exceptions to the city's streets ordinances or licensing code. Members of the Working Group, notably The Food Trust, can provide the city with model language for those regulations and make it easier to start and operate both urban farms and farmers markets in Camden in the years ahead.
4. **Involve communities in farmers markets** by cultivating trust between local farmers and residents, and include nutrition education and cooking demonstrations at markets as one tool in that approach. Farmers markets and urban farms are ideal sites for cooking demonstrations and nutrition education activities: Customers have the chance to learn about and sample local produce and new recipes, and the activities themselves can be a helpful way to attract new customers. Local organizations that implement nutrition education activities, such as SNAP-Ed implementing agencies and others, should partner with local farms and farmers markets to work toward shared goals.

Working Toward an Equitable Food System Through Farmers Markets

The nonprofit CitySeed operates four farmers markets in the city of New Haven, an economically, racially and culturally diverse city with a poverty rate of almost 27%. CitySeed's mission is to engage the community in growing an equitable, local food system that promotes economic development, community development and sustainable agriculture. CitySeed believes that food insecurity is rooted in poverty and structural barriers, keeping residents from being able to choose healthy, fresh and local foods. In response, CitySeed worked hard to ensure all of their farmers markets could accept SNAP benefits and FMNP vouchers. Their markets serve approximately 55,000 people each year, and more recently the organization has developed programs that encourage New Haven's rising entrepreneurs to source locally produced food, alongside programs that celebrate and promote the skills and culinary cuisine of the city's recent immigrants and refugees.



Photo: Camden residents participating in an event at Parkside Business & Community in Partnership's Learning Garden.



LOOKING AHEAD

In order to implement these recommendations, a core group of members from the Camden Food Access Work Group will continue to meet, with additional members as needed from other organizations, to ensure that the work is carried out. None of these recommendations can be moved forward in isolation, and much of this work will require thoughtful collaboration among multiple stakeholders. While many of the ideas set forth in these recommendations will require organizational changes, resources and community will, they are necessary steps to improve access to healthy food in the City of Camden, and by extension to ensure that all residents of the City can live their healthiest lives.

ENDNOTES

1. U.S. Census Bureau, 2018 American Community Survey
2. Data from CDC 500 Cities Project, 2017 estimates: <https://www.cdc.gov/500cities>
3. Page 10: http://thefoodtrust.org/uploads/media_items/campbell-report-2013.original.pdf
4. https://www.policymap.com/report_widget?type=hfap&area=predefined&pid=157628&sid=1395
5. From The Power of Produce: http://thefoodtrust.org/uploads/media_items/the-power-of-produce.original.pdf

About The Food Trust

The Food Trust's mission is to ensure that everyone has access to affordable, nutritious food and information to make healthy decisions. Working with neighborhoods, schools, grocers, farmers and policymakers, we've developed a comprehensive approach to improved food access that combines nutrition education and greater availability of affordable, healthy food. To learn more, visit thefoodtrust.org.



About Campbell's Healthy Communities

A signature philanthropic program of Campbell Soup Company, Campbell's Healthy Communities is a ten year, \$10 million commitment to measurably improve the health of young people in Camden, NJ, Campbell's hometown and world headquarters since 1869. The focus areas of the program include food access; nutrition education; physical activity and access; and public will. The program began in 2011 and is in its tenth, and final, year. Based on a Collective Impact approach, Campbell's Healthy Communities is unique in that it is not only funded by a corporation but the corporation has been the backbone for the collective. Successes of the program include in depth investment and technical assistance for the Camden Corner Store Network, taking a systems approach to making healthier, fresh foods available across the network while simultaneously introducing nutrition education in the stores, coupled with coupon incentive programs. Approximately 45% of Camden corner stores are enrolled in the program. Access to safe places to play with structured activity is now citywide, and participating schools in the Healthy Communities program now have salad bars as well as additional healthy options. The power of the collective is significant, and the partners have leveraged more than dollar for dollar the initial \$10 million invested by Campbell Soup Company.

