

**SFBB Working Group: Healthy, Local, Sustainable Food in City/County Venues
Report out to Board 9/24/2012**

Background:

Local governments have a strong interest in improving the health of their residents. One of the ways governments can do this is by creating greater access to healthy foods. This can be done using their “regulatory” power - that is, by enacting laws or regulations. Using zoning laws, for example, cities can make it easier to establish farmers’ markets and community gardens throughout a community. Cities can also pass zoning laws to limit or even ban fast food outlets.

Local governments can also improve residents’ diets by exercising their “market participant” power - the power to buy and sell goods and services. By adopting healthy and local purchasing policies, governments can provide healthier food to community members and make a positive impact on community health. Additionally, purchasing foods that are locally produced from farms and businesses can strengthen the regional economy. Offering both healthy options and locally produced food demonstrates the City’s commitment to addressing diet related diseases and bolstering the local food economy. If their purchasing volume is large enough, they also may be able to influence the types of foods available more broadly to the community by creating greater demand for such products.

Need:

2 out of 3 adults in Travis County are overweight or obeseⁱ, whereas 21% of youth are overweightⁱⁱ. Both obesity and overweight increase the risk of diabetes, heart disease, asthma and other serious diseases. Obesity costs the United States \$147 billion dollars annually in direct health care costsⁱⁱⁱ. One way to lower health care costs is to improve residents’ diets: healthier diets alone could prevent an estimated \$71 billion per year in medical expenses, lost productivity, and lost lives nationwide^{iv}. By improving access to healthy foods, Austin/Travis County could lower its health care costs, improve lives and improve the livelihood of the local food economy.

Findings:

Currently neither the City of Austin nor Travis County has any policies relating to the nutritional content of food served or purchased by the City of Austin/Travis County to be consumed by Staff or the Public. Additionally, there are no policies relating to the procurement of locally produced foods. That being said, the City Health and Human Services Department (HHSD) has created a healthy vending policy and has implemented it at HHSD, but not City-wide.

There are many example polices from jurisdictions around the country that could be used to create such policies for our City and County. Below we have listed our recommendations as well as the challenges and stakeholders associated with implementing such policies.

Recommendations for Healthy Vending Policy

- 100% health vending from the beginning as outlined in HHSD policy
- Communication campaign headed by Healthy Connections beginning 3 months prior to implementation
- Some way for employees to provide input on what kinds of healthy options they’d like to see in the machines (maybe a survey with all the possibilities listed)

Recommendations for Food Purchased to Serve City/County Staff and Public

- All departments need a plan for food purchases and regular review
- No trans fat/fried foods
- Specific standards for purchased food (this includes pre-packaged food)
- Specific standards for meals and snacks served (for both City employees and public)
- Specific Agency and Population-Specific Standards and Exceptions (children and seniors have different nutritional needs)

- Sustainability standards (ensures that the policy supports a sustainable food system)^v
- Additional initiatives that encourage healthy and sustainable foods such as tray-less dining and beef-less or meat-less days^{vi}

Recommendations for Purchasing and Procurement

- Include evaluation preference for sustainable food practices (geography, production method, etc.), local businesses ^{vii}, and healthy options.

Challenges

- City-wide implementation
- Oversight
- Convention Center needs
- Food Safety/Food Handler-permits for fresh food
- Lost Revenue (or perception of)
- Up front costs for changing systems

Stakeholders

- Convention Center
- Purchasing
- All City Departments
- Existing City food vendors
- Employees
- Potential City food vendors
- Local producers
- Neighborhood Associations
- AISD CATCH/Wellness Teams
- Little Leagues

How to Develop Recommended Policies

- Clearly define what is meant by “healthy” and “sustainable” (“healthy” is already defined by HHSD vending policy^{viii}, but may need to be expanded in scope to include non-snack foods).
- Develop a justification statement outlining the benefits of a healthy, sustainable food purchasing policy.
- Develop a healthy, sustainable food purchasing policy that is integrated with the overall goals of the City, the ATCHHSD, and the SFPB.
- Lay the groundwork for success. Identify needs and interests of City staff, management, and customers and engage them in the process.
- Identify and formalize the interest and role of the SFPB in developing the policy and of the City staff in implementing it. Assure transparency.
- Establish a vision for the policy. Make it a “big picture” statement. Focus on values and desired outcomes.
- Anticipate challenges, identify and prioritize opportunities. Consider capacity and will of vendors, contractual barriers, physical limitations, staff learning curve, and budget constraints.
- Establish guiding strategies, standards, and compliance mechanisms - i.e., how will the policy be functionalized?
- Set goals for tracking and reporting progress. Goals may be for percentage of total purchases or for product characteristics.
- Create an action plan and an evaluation plan.
- Create a communication plan - to both communicate the policy and successes.^{ix}

Additional Resources:

http://www.publichealthadvocacy.org/PDFs/01_San%20Diego%20Parks%20and%20Rec%20Vending%20Fact%20Sheet_FINAL.pdf

http://www.cspinet.org/new/pdf/model_procurement_bill.pdf

ⁱ http://austintexas.gov/sites/default/files/files/Health/News_-_Home_Page/2012_critical_health_indicators.pdf

ⁱⁱ Kristi Metzger's presentation to AISD SHAC

ⁱⁱⁱ Finklestein E, Trogon J, Cohen J, and Dietz W. "Annual Medical Spending Attributable to Obesity: Payer and Service-Specific Estimates." Health Affairs 28, no. 5: w822-w831, 2009.

^{iv} Frazao E. High Costs of Poor Eating Patterns in the United States. Economic Research Service, U.S. Department of Agriculture. 1999, p. 5-32.

^v New York City Food Standards Part I: Standards for Meals/Snacks Purchased and Served: http://www.nyc.gov/html/dfta/downloads/pdf/community/food_standards.pdf

^{vi} Sustainable Food Services Policy Practices Draft for University of California: <http://bit.ly/OeX0xn>

^{vii} Cleveland Local Producer, Local-Food Purchaser and Sustainable Business Preference Code <http://cccfoodpolicy.org/sites/default/files/resources/Cleveland%20Ordinance%20No.%201660-A-09.pdf>

^{viii} Central Texas Diabetes Coalition (2010). Healthy Vending Machine Policy. Contact: Stephanie.Helfman@austintexas.gov

^{ix} A Guide to Developing a Sustainable Food Purchasing Policy: www.sustainablefoodpolicy.org

