

Draft Recommendation – Healthy Food Access Strategies
May 28, 2015

The Austin / Travis County Community Health Assessment, published in 2013 reported that 8.7% of Travis County's low-income population does not live within a mile of a grocery store, and 2010 food insecurity data indicates that 16.6% of the Travis County population experiences limited or uncertain access to adequate food. A report published by Policy Link and The Food Trust entitled *The Grocery Gap* presents data that clearly indicates the link between better access to healthy food and healthier eating, whereas healthy food retail can reduce the economic and other impacts of poor health within a community and can create jobs. A case study of The Food Trust's work, *Philadelphia's Healthy Corner Store Initiative 2010-2012*, underscores the importance of healthy food access through corner stores, and suggests offering small incentives, training and technical assistance for store owners, and marketing and promotional support. In addition, a study entitled "Increasing access to healthful foods: A qualitative study with residents of low-income communities" conducted in Austin indicates the primary barriers to accessing healthy food are price, geographical proximity to retail outlets, lack of quality of produce, and lack of quality of retail outlets.

With an investment in a range of strategies in Austin for overcoming these barriers, we can improve access to healthy food while fulfilling stated goals of Imagine Austin and the Austin / Travis County Community Health Improvement Plan and building on ongoing community-based work and assets.

The Vision of Imagine Austin indicates that a key aspect of livability is that Austin's diverse population is active and healthy, with access to locally-grown, nourishing foods, and includes under the creation of a Healthy Austin Program to promote healthy foods, and to encourage successful formation and patronage of healthy food retail establishments (Imagine Austin, pp. 205-06) as recommended strategies to achieve in the short term.

The Austin / Travis County Year-2 Community Health Improvement Plan (CHIP) draft includes Strategy 2.2.3 to "incentivize private enterprise to provide healthy, nutritious, and affordable food by establishing full-service grocery stores in low-income communities" as part of the priority area focused on access to healthy foods in our built environment.

To build on these efforts, the Sustainable Food Policy Board recommends an investment by the City of Austin of \$400,000 to fund a spectrum of strategies for increasing access to healthy food, including a Healthy Food Retail Initiative, Community and School based Farm Markets, Neighborhood Food Buying Co-ops, Healthy Restaurant Options, and continued support for the

Sustainable Food Center's Double Dollars Incentive Program. While each of these programs implemented alone would not substantially change the food insecurity landscape in Austin, a combined effort to provide a broad layer of access options has been shown through extensive research to be the strongest approach to increasing community health. Numerous community and public organizations have begun work on all of these strategies and with additional support from the City of Austin, each can move from a planning or pilot phase into an implementation phase. City of Austin Departments, including HHSD and the Office of Sustainability, will work closely with private sector partners, such as the Sustainable Food Center, Farm Share Austin, GAVA, the Dell Foundation, St David's Foundation, UT School of Public Health, and AISD to implement these strategies.

Heathy Food Retail Initiative (\$150,000)

The Austin / Travis County Health and Human Services Department Chronic Disease Prevention and Control program in conjunction with several community organizations and through the CDC Community Transformation Grant has secured training, technical assistance, and resource materials from nationally-recognized organization The Food Trust in support of a Healthy Food Retail Initiative. Ongoing efforts associated with the GO! Austin / VAMOS! Austin (GAVA) initiative, the Susan and Michael Dell Foundation, the Alliance for African American Health in Central Texas, and Manantial de Salud are building community capacity to improve healthy food access in retail stores by applying Food Trust training in neighborhood based approaches.

Community and School based Farm Markets (\$100,000)

A broad coalition of groups has worked over the last three years to pilot the development of farm stands at Austin elementary school and community centers. The effort was started by UT's School of Public Health and now involves three AISD elementary schools, a local farm training program called Farm Share, the Sustainable Food Center, GAVA, and the COA Office of Sustainability. A template for replication is being developed this summer with hopes to provide this tool to a number of schools and community groups in the future.

Neighborhood Food Buying Co-ops (\$25,000)

Based on best-practice models from Louisville, Kentucky, a training program will be developed working with local cooperative organizing groups to provide communities with a tool kit for creating a fresh produce buying co-op. These coops build on the existing strengths of a community and provide the most affordable access to locally-grown healthy fresh fruits and vegetables.

The Sustainable Food Center's Double Dollars Incentive Program (\$100,000)

The Double Dollar Incentive Program (DDIP) allows families and individuals who receive SNAP (formerly food stamps), WIC EBT fruit and vegetable benefits, and/or FMNP vouchers to double the dollar amount that they can spend on fruits and vegetables at the market. Eligible shoppers are matched dollar for dollar up to \$20 each week, per program. DDIP is valid only for the purchase of fruits and vegetables. A report by the LBJ School of Public Affairs in May 2013 stated that that the SFC's Double Dollars Incentive Program had successfully generated increased purchases of fresh produce by SNAP recipients while benefitting local farmers.

Healthy Restaurant Options (\$25,000)

The City of Austin will work with local restaurants to increase healthy menu options for adults and adopt healthy children's menus. Focus area of implementation will include food deserts and low SES neighborhoods where healthy choices are limited with a goal of working with 2-5 restaurants per year.