

Health and Nutrition

Cleveland-Cuyahoga County Food Policy Coalition Food Policy Brief



The Problem:

In urban areas across Cleveland and Cuyahoga County, communities have difficulty accessing fresh fruits, vegetables, and other whole foods that make up a healthy diet, leading to poor nutritional intake, and poor overall health. Food that is overly prevalent in urban areas such as fast food and convenience store food is high in calories, fat, sugar, and salt, and low in nutritional value like vitamins and minerals. According to 2008 data, 38.4% of Cleveland residents are obese, which is significantly higher than the 29.2% of Ohio residents who are obese. Obesity poses a greater threat to limited resource populations, many of whom live in inner-city neighborhoods that have lost full-service grocers. According to the Center for Community Solutions, about 26% of residents receive food stamps in Cleveland, representing a 22% increase from 2002 to 2007. Inner-ring suburban communities such as Lakewood, Parma, and Cleveland Heights saw a 74% increase in food stamp participation during the same time period. There is a clear need for increasing the availability of fresh fruits, vegetables, and other whole foods to enhance the health and nutrition of Cuyahoga County residents.

There are neighborhoods here where, within a two-mile radius, there isn't any fresh produce available. Studies have shown that people who live in these food deserts tend to eat fewer fruits and vegetables, irrespective of their income.

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Goals:

The health and nutrition working group is primarily focused on improving healthy food access to under-served communities through a combination of nutrition education to increase awareness, and improving local food accessibility to improve food choices within urban communities. Local food accessibility programs can come in the form of institutional policy at farmers' markets or public schools, or in the form of legislative policy. The working group's ultimate goal is to improve the health and nutrition of the residents of Cleveland and Cuyahoga County in a sustainable way by encouraging education, and choice, and by improving access to healthy food, make better choices possible.

Progress to Date:

The Health and Nutrition Working Group has conducted numerous pilots and created numerous institutional policies that actively improve the food access of

Cleveland and Cuyahoga residents, while improving their health and nutrition. The Health working group completed retail food assessments of five Greater Cleveland communities; Central, Clark-Fulton, East Cleveland, Euclid, and Glenville to determine the relationship between healthy food access and public transit. The group also developed a

survey tool with Central residents to collect information from community members on using transit to access healthy food. Since 2009, the Health and Nutrition working group has created and distributed an annually updated Cuyahoga County Local Food Guide to educate residents on where to purchase local food, how to identify what's in season, and how to get involved in urban agriculture. The Health and Nutrition working group also created a policy brief that examined the barriers and successes of Food Assistance, WIC and Senior Farmers' Market Nutrition Program (SFMNP) coupons at farmers' markets in Cuyahoga County. The FPC also developed a comprehensive database to document the farmers' markets that accept these benefits. The working group has also done extensive work to create opportunities to use food assistance benefits like the Ohio Direction Card and EBT at Farmers' Markets. Beyond the installation of this program, the working group has also created an incentives program to encourage those using food assistance benefits to shop at farmers' markets. To learn more about these initiatives, see the below example.

Example:

The Health and Nutrition working group promoted the EBT for Food Assistance program at farmers' markets in Cuyahoga County, leading to a significant increase in the number of markets that accept these benefits. In 2008, one market had an EBT machine to process the Ohio Direction Card. In 2012, over 20 markets in Cuyahoga County had EBT machines to accept these benefits. Furthering their work on EBT at farmer's markets, the Health and Nutrition working group worked in partnership with The George Gund Foundation and Cleveland City

Council to develop a pilot incentive program for Ohio Direction Card users at four farmers' markets in East Cleveland. The incentive program has expanded to 17 farmers' markets in Cuyahoga County for the 2012 market season and provides an additional \$10 in Produce Perks for EBT shoppers. Furthermore, the Health and Nutrition working group developed and offered a workshop for farmers' market managers to learn about opportunities and the process for including EBT at their markets in January 2009 and February 2011. Over 30 market managers attended from three Ohio counties. Below are pictures from the EBT and Produce Perks Program at Lakewood's LEAF Farmers' Market. The top photo shows the customer service table where customers can use their Ohio Direction Card, and receive their Produce Perks Incentives. The Bottom photo shows an example of the two types of tokens that customers can use: one for EBT with the Ohio Direction card, and one for their Produce Perks incentives.

