

**Leadership for Healthy Communities**

Advancing Policies to Support Healthy Eating and Active Living

# Rural Childhood Obesity Prevention Toolkit

October 2014

Leadership for Healthy Communities is a national program  
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## Report Authors

**Maya Rockey Moore, PhD**

Director  
Leadership for Healthy Communities

**Craig Moschetti, MPH**

Health Policy Research Fellow  
Leadership for Healthy Communities

**Andrew Fountain**

Senior Communications Associate  
Leadership for Healthy Communities

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**Susan D. Promislo, MA**

Senior Communications Officer  
Robert Wood Johnson Foundation

**Shale Wong, MD, MSPH**

Senior Program Consultant for the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation  
Associate Professor of Pediatrics – University of Colorado School of Medicine

**Kristen M. Gurdin, JD**

Legal Counsel  
Robert Wood Johnson Foundation

**Allen Mattison, JD**

Trister, Ross, Schadler & Gold, PLLC

**Burness Communications**



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*Leadership for Healthy Communities* is a national program of the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation designed to support local and state government leaders nationwide in their efforts to reduce childhood obesity through public policies that promote active living, healthy eating and access to healthy foods. For more information, visit [www.leadershipforhealthycommunities.org](http://www.leadershipforhealthycommunities.org).

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# Message from Leadership for Health Communities

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Research shows that where we live matters for our health, wellness, and longevity. In fact, our zip code can be just as important as our genetic code in determining how well—and how long—we live.

Although we've recently seen some signs of progress across the United States in our effort to reverse the national childhood obesity epidemic, too many families continue to live in unhealthy communities that lack affordable nutritious foods or safe places to play. This is especially true in rural areas, where obesity tends to be more prevalent and healthy options can be few and far between.

*Leadership for Healthy Communities*, a national program office of the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, developed the **Rural Childhood Obesity Prevention Toolkit** to help local and state leaders advance innovative, evidence-informed strategies for improving health in rural towns, counties, tribal lands, and schools.

We encourage policymakers, advocates, and community leaders to work together and use these strategies to advance policy solutions that support vibrant, healthier rural communities.



Maya Rockey Moore, PhD  
Director  
*Leadership for Healthy Communities*

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# Introduction

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## Obesity in Rural America

The obesity epidemic extends across the United States and remains a significant public health crisis. More than two-thirds of adults and nearly one-third of children and adolescents are overweight or obese, including 40 percent of the 70 million residents living in rural America.<sup>1,2</sup> Residents of rural communities have worse health, on average, compared to the general population, lack access to quality health services, endure poorer socioeconomic conditions, and experience increased food insecurity. Although nearly 25 percent of the U.S. population lives in rural America, individual rural communities are less populated, often isolated, and diverse—all factors that contribute to higher rates of obesity.<sup>3,4</sup>

Rural obesity rates exceed urban obesity rates by nearly 7 percentage points overall.<sup>5</sup> This difference extends to Hispanic and non-Hispanic men and women as well as non-Hispanic black men and women.<sup>6</sup> Additionally, rural children have higher rates of obesity than their urban counterparts. A study in 2008 showed an obesity rate of nearly 17 percent for rural youth ages 10 to 17, compared to only 14 percent for urban youth.<sup>7</sup> Simply living in rural America increases the risk for obesity, even more so than typical risk factors such as age, education, income, minority status, diet, and physical activity.<sup>8</sup>

## The Rural Difference

Rural America's high rates of obesity are strongly influenced by poverty and lack of education as well as a variety of factors related to isolation and inadequate investments in infrastructure, community resources, and health systems.

Poverty-stricken rural areas have fewer resources to support health or infrastructure improvement, and individuals typically have less money to buy more nutritious foods. Rural families are more likely to live at or below the poverty line compared to those living in urban areas. Twelve percent of rural families actually live in deep poverty compared to 9 percent of those in urban areas.<sup>9</sup> Rural youths often live in households with low educational attainment and are less likely than non-rural youth to earn a bachelor's degree.<sup>10</sup> Obesity is significantly less likely in adolescents who live in households where their parents have attained a bachelor's degree or more.<sup>11</sup>

Workers in rural communities often have lower or seasonal incomes, which make purchasing healthy foods difficult and increase the attractiveness of cheaper, unhealthy options frequently sold in rural localities.<sup>12,13</sup> The often higher prices of fresh, nutritious foods combined with the accessibility of cheaper fast-food restaurants and convenience stores mean rural diets contain more fat and sugar and fewer fruits and vegetables.<sup>14,15</sup>

### DEFINING "RURAL"

This toolkit generally defines "rural" as an area with a population of less than 50,000, and includes rural towns (usually with populations under 2,500 people) as well as non-metropolitan areas with smaller populations.

For more information on defining "rural," visit: <http://www.ers.usda.gov/topics/rural-economy-population/rural-classifications/what-is-rural.aspx#.U9u0QKg62nU>

Geographic isolation compounds the challenges of poverty in rural communities. Twenty percent of rural counties are considered “food deserts,” or areas in which all residents live at least 10 miles from a supermarket.<sup>16</sup> Many poor rural residents, including the elderly, lack viable transportation options, which further limits their ability to access healthy foods. Living far from stores selling fresh produce and other nutritious foods makes eating healthy on a day-to-day basis difficult and encourages the purchase of “shelf-stable” foods (e.g., packaged goods) that will not spoil and are often high in calories, fat and sugar.

Residents of rural communities often lack access to safe areas for physical activity.<sup>17</sup> Long distances between communities and commercial centers encourage the use of automobiles for transportation and, thus, discourage walking and biking. Often, residents of rural communities want to be more active, yet the absence of safe, quality spaces for physical activity nearby limits their ability to do so.<sup>18</sup> The scarcity of sidewalks, bike lanes, and recreational spaces, along with insufficient traffic signs and lights, also present barriers to physical activity.

Residents of rural areas often lack access to health care as well. Rural communities have a severe shortage of physicians and other trained medical personnel, preventative care sources, and public health institutions.<sup>19</sup> Hospital staffs in rural areas frequently receive less training and have fewer opportunities for continued education. Additionally, trained physicians and nurses often do not want to remain in, or transfer to, rural areas due to their geographic isolation and lack of institutional funding. As a result, the care offered in rural communities is often inadequate or low quality, and rural residents visit health professionals less often. This creates yet another obstacle to curbing obesity rates.<sup>20</sup>

Smaller populations, fewer financial resources, and higher levels of poverty make it more difficult for rural communities to develop obesity prevention policies.<sup>21</sup> Rural areas often receive less federal funding for programs that have been shown to alleviate some of the factors contributing to high obesity rates.<sup>22</sup>

Finally, rural areas, like many other communities across the country, may lack the environment of collaboration and civic engagement that is often necessary for addressing community health concerns. Partnerships between health-focused organizations, such as local health departments, and organizations whose missions may not necessarily be health-specific, such as a community service club, can lead to the improvement of local residents’ health. The absence of such collaborative efforts in rural areas can limit the capacity of these communities to meaningfully address the root causes of obesity.<sup>23</sup>

To date, there has been no comprehensive or coordinated policy response to address obesity in rural America, as most resources have been dedicated to strategies for more populated, urban communities. State and local policymakers representing rural communities can implement policies geared specifically toward addressing obesity in these communities.

## Assessing Rural Communities

Not all rural communities face the same challenges, and each requires targeted policy strategies. Acknowledging the diverse characteristics of rural communities prior to prescribing interventions is a critical step to curbing obesity.<sup>24</sup>

Community assessments are useful tools for collecting the data needed to tailor health initiatives to local contexts. In general, community assessments identify barriers (physical or otherwise) to health and wellness and raise awareness about residents' concerns regarding health and community life.<sup>25</sup> They can also facilitate the development of new institutional and community capacity for improving health by highlighting specific needs.<sup>26</sup> Improved capacity can then set the foundation for building new relationships to successfully influence health and obesity, especially when such collaborations involve the participation of multiple institutions, residents, and other stakeholders. State and local policymakers can use assessment results to develop tailored policies and programs that capitalize on specific rural assets and address unique gaps in community well-being.

COMMUNITY ASSESSMENT MODEL	APPLIED TO RURAL COMMUNITIES
Identify the community	Based on ethnicity, culture, geographic boundaries, or income, etc.
Identify a problem and related indicators	Rural obesity: health status, living conditions, environment, health services, culture/values, employment, and lifestyle
Identify key stakeholders	Relevant policymakers, officials, health care providers, community leaders, etc.
Identify what is currently being done to address the problem	Existing programs and policies, health services, school programs, etc.
Determine the feasibility of various changes	Barriers, assets, and other resources that affect obesity rates
Develop a strategy to address specific barriers (e.g., cultural, political) to these types of changes <sup>27</sup>	Appropriate initiatives, coalitions, partnerships, and policy actions to build community capacity and curb obesity

## COMMUNITY ASSESSMENT RESOURCES

Several resources are available on the community assessment process. While not all are specific to rural communities, these resources can help guide policymakers seeking to learn about their communities' needs and assets to better facilitate obesity-related policy interventions.

<b>County Health Rankings &amp; Roadmaps</b>	A guide to assess a community's needs, resources, strengths, and assets in order to understand what helps and hinders improvements in community health. <a href="http://www.countyhealthrankings.org/roadmaps/action-center/assess-needs-resources">www.countyhealthrankings.org/roadmaps/action-center/assess-needs-resources</a>
<b>The Community Toolbox</b>	A free source for toolkits, detailed instructions, and further information on how to assess community needs and resources. <a href="http://ctb.ku.edu/en/default.aspx">http://ctb.ku.edu/en/default.aspx</a>
<b>Alameda County Public Health Department in California, Handbook for Participatory Community Assessments</b>	A detailed tool giving instructions on how to conduct a community assessment, emphasizing participation and collaboration between community groups and public health agencies. <a href="http://www.naccho.org/topics/infrastructure/mapp/framework/clearinghouse/phase3CTSA.cfm">www.naccho.org/topics/infrastructure/mapp/framework/clearinghouse/phase3CTSA.cfm</a>
<b>YMCA, Community Healthy Living Index</b>	Instructions and tools for assessing communities, including tools specific to smaller spheres of community life (e.g., schools, after-school programs, work environments, and neighborhoods). <a href="http://www.ymca.net/communityhealthylivingindex/">http://www.ymca.net/communityhealthylivingindex/</a>
<b>Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Healthy Communities Program, Sustainability Guide</b>	Under the subhead <i>Tools and Resources</i> , this includes an evidence-based guide to assess existing and develop new sustainable public health policies and infrastructure designed to facilitate lasting community well-being. <a href="http://www.cdc.gov/healthycommunitiesprogram">www.cdc.gov/healthycommunitiesprogram</a>

## How to Use this Toolkit

The **Rural Childhood Obesity Prevention Toolkit** provides comprehensive policy options for healthy eating and active living that rural communities can implement to address this threat to children's health. Recommendations are specific to rural settings, but also can be adapted to urban or suburban areas. They are focused on helping rural communities make healthy eating and physical activity the easy and available option for all residents.

Part 1 of this toolkit addresses active living and the built environment. Part 2 addresses healthy eating. Each policy area includes a specific objective and three elements for achieving that objective: a menu of policy strategies, a list of potential stakeholders, and a compilation of available resources for effective implementation.





Part 1

# Active Living and the Built Environment

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- ▶ Smart Growth and Development
- ▶ Daily Active Living
- ▶ Physical Activity in School and Outside of School
- ▶ Community Health Engagement

# Smart Growth and Community Development

## Encouraging active living through the built environment

### || GOALS

To preserve and enhance traditional rural community values, while also taking full advantage of local resources to encourage smart growth of the local economy and support healthy living. Smart growth aims to

- ▶ Improve the economic viability of the rural landscape;
- ▶ Enhance and protect existing places like downtowns or main streets; and
- ▶ Build new vibrant, lasting communities to encourage residents to live there for the long term.<sup>27</sup>

## 1. Walkable Communities and Complete Streets

Walkable communities with complete streets improve the quality of life and are a valuable way for rural towns to encourage active living habits and decrease the risk of obesity.<sup>28</sup> Complete streets can be defined as “streets for everyone,” or those “designed and operated to enable safe access for all users, including pedestrians, bicyclists, motorists and transit riders of all ages and abilities.”<sup>29</sup> In some cases, rural communities have been slower to adopt design policies that facilitate complete streets. In others, communities have not taken the necessary steps to complete a locality’s streets or make them fully conducive to active living.<sup>30</sup>

### THE NEED FOR COMPLETE STREETS IN RURAL TOWNS

#### Health<sup>31</sup>

- ▶ Residents of walkable neighborhoods get an average of 35 to 40 minutes more physical activity per week than residents of non-walkable communities.
- ▶ Residents of walkable communities are at lower risk for becoming overweight or obese.

#### Safety<sup>32</sup>

- ▶ More than half (56 percent) of traffic fatalities each year are in rural areas.
- ▶ Fatal crashes are more likely on rural roads with speed limits of or over 55 miles per hour.
- ▶ Many rural residents are older and/or low-income, and they often have limited mobility.

New and existing roads and highways in and around rural towns and communities should support pedestrians and cyclists. Complete streets provide health as well as economic benefits for communities by creating more opportunities for residents to safely get to jobs and retail businesses. Rural policymakers can play a key role in developing and implementing infrastructure policies that encourage walking, biking, and exercising outside.

## CHARACTERISTICS OF A WALKABLE COMMUNITY

- ▶ High density, distinct town centers with a variety of neighborhood services, stores, and public institutions such as the post office or library
- ▶ Mixed income and mixed-use areas with residences and private businesses in walking distance of most services, schools, and transportation options
- ▶ Safe, open, and identifiable public spaces, like parks and plazas, where children can play and residents can socialize
- ▶ Streets, sidewalks, ramps, medians, driveways, and public spaces with accessible, universal, and appealing designs
- ▶ Streets with lower speed limits, and adequate traffic and pedestrian signals and signs
- ▶ Sidewalks with smooth, unobstructed surfaces separated from traffic, wide enough for two wheelchairs, and safe for pedestrians including children and those with disabilities<sup>33,34</sup>

Building communities that encourage walking and biking requires the collaboration of policymakers with private and public stakeholders. Public education is also vital to generating support for the creation of walkable communities and contributes to the sustainability of programs seeking to enhance the built environment.<sup>35</sup>

## || POTENTIAL STAKEHOLDERS

### Policymakers

- ▶ State and local elected and appointed officials

### Other government and community stakeholders

- ▶ Local transportation agencies
- ▶ Regional transportation and metropolitan planning agencies
- ▶ State departments of transportation
- ▶ Transit agencies
- ▶ Departments of parks and recreation
- ▶ Local community and nonprofit organizations
- ▶ Housing officials
- ▶ Economic development organizations
- ▶ Community members

## SPOTLIGHT



### COMPLETE STREETS IN SEDRO-WOOLLEY, WASHINGTON

Washington state passed a Complete Streets bill in 2011 to fund grants supporting the development of complete streets initiatives. Since then, municipal governments throughout the state have implemented policies to ensure complete streets are routinely included in transportation and infrastructure improvement projects. Sedro-Woolley, a small, rural town north of Seattle that is home to 10,000 residents, decided to take advantage of the new funding opportunities. The Sedro-Woolley City Council successfully adopted a code that requires the integration of bike and pedestrian pathways into all new transportation projects, assuming sufficient funding and need warrants such construction. The town is developing new school zone crosswalks, pavement markers, and disability ramps to facilitate active living for all residents throughout their community.<sup>36</sup>



## || RESOURCES

- ▶ U.S. Department of Transportation, Federal Highway Administration, A Resident's Guide for Creating Safe and Walkable Communities  
[http://safety.fhwa.dot.gov/ped\\_bike/ped\\_cmnty/ped\\_walkguide/index.cfm](http://safety.fhwa.dot.gov/ped_bike/ped_cmnty/ped_walkguide/index.cfm)
- ▶ Walkable and Livable Communities Institute  
[www.walklive.org](http://www.walklive.org)
- ▶ Walking Matters  
[www.walkingmatters.ie](http://www.walkingmatters.ie)
- ▶ National Complete Streets Coalition  
[www.completestreets.org](http://www.completestreets.org)
- ▶ California Active Communities, Healthy Transportation Network, Safer Streets, Sidewalks & Trails  
[www.caactivecommunities.org/htn-safety-info/safer-streets-sidewalks-trails](http://www.caactivecommunities.org/htn-safety-info/safer-streets-sidewalks-trails)



## 2. Shared-Use Agreements

Shared-use agreements, also called “joint-use” agreements, are “formal agreements between two separate government entities—often a school and a city or county—setting forth the terms and conditions for shared use of public property or facilities.”<sup>37</sup> Such agreements enable increased community access to facilities for physical activity, such as gymnasiums or athletic fields, during non-school hours.<sup>38</sup> Other shared-use options include opening school recreation facilities to third-party community organizations or sports leagues, and opening all community recreation facilities for use by schools or a third party. In all arrangements, partnerships and sharing of spaces allow schools to share maintenance and security costs with participating parties.<sup>39</sup> For improving community health and well-being, local policymakers can encourage shared-use policies between schools and community organizations seeking new spaces and programs for physical activity.

### || POTENTIAL STAKEHOLDERS

#### Policymakers

- ▶ State and local elected and appointed officials
- ▶ School officials, state and local school boards, and school administrators

#### Other government and community stakeholders

- ▶ Local fitness and recreation groups
- ▶ Community-based organizations and nonprofits
- ▶ Local businesses
- ▶ Departments of parks and recreation
- ▶ Community members

### || RESOURCES

- ▶ Center for Cities and Schools and Public Health Law and Policy, Joint-Use School Partnerships in California: Strategies to Enhance Schools and Communities  
[http://citiesandschools.berkeley.edu/reports/CC&S\\_PHL\\_P\\_2008\\_JointUse\\_execsumm.pdf](http://citiesandschools.berkeley.edu/reports/CC&S_PHL_P_2008_JointUse_execsumm.pdf)
- ▶ California Joint Use Statewide Task Force, Joint Use  
<http://www.jointuse.org/>
- ▶ National Policy & Legal Analysis Network to Prevent Childhood Obesity (NPLAN), Joint-Use Legal Tools  
[www.nplanonline.org/childhood-obesity/products/nplan-joint-use-agreements](http://www.nplanonline.org/childhood-obesity/products/nplan-joint-use-agreements)
- ▶ ChangeLab Solutions, Opening School Grounds to the Community After Hours Toolkit  
<http://changelabsolutions.org/publications/CA-JUA-toolkit>



## SPOTLIGHT



### IMPROVING FITNESS IN SHELBY, MONTANA

The rural community of Shelby, Montana, took action to eliminate its recreational desert. Mayor Larry Bonderud partnered with a local hospital to establish a fitness center within the local civic center. The civic center received funds from membership dues and investments from local businesses that subsidized memberships for their employees. Mayor Bonderud and other governmental leaders recognized the importance of active living as an integral component of community life and set a great example for other rural communities to adopt similar innovative strategies.<sup>43</sup>

## 3. Recreational Deserts

Similar to food deserts, recreational or play deserts—areas lacking quality places and opportunities for physical activity—form another significant barrier to healthy and active living in rural communities.<sup>40</sup> Recreational deserts are often a result of multiple factors, including geographic isolation and cost constraints. Small populations in rural areas, for example, may not have the tax base to support a planning or recreation department.<sup>41</sup> The lack of open spaces that are conducive to active living only contributes to the tendency for rural residents to be often inactive and sedentary.

Providing new opportunities for physical activity and recreation can spur benefits that go beyond improving people's health and psychological well-being to also increasing property values within a community.<sup>42</sup> Policymakers can encourage support and funding for rural communities to build new or improve existing parks, take advantage of natural resources as destinations for active recreation, and facilitate transportation to and from parks and other recreational spaces. State and local policymakers also can take steps to reform zoning codes to facilitate the development of new parks and open spaces, and implement construction to revitalize old buildings for use as recreation centers.

### || POTENTIAL STAKEHOLDERS

#### Policymakers

- ▶ State and local elected and appointed officials

#### Other government and community stakeholders

- ▶ Parks and recreation officials
- ▶ Local businesses and employers
- ▶ Local hospitals and health institutions
- ▶ Local schools
- ▶ Community members

### || RESOURCES

- ▶ International City/County Management Association, *Creating a Regulatory Blueprint for Healthy Community Design: A Local Government Guide to Reforming Zoning and Land Development Codes*  
<http://bookstore.icma.org/freedocs/Active Living Code Reform.pdf>

## 4. Rails-to-Trails

Rail-to-trails are former railroad lines that are converted into public paths and trails for walking, biking, hiking, cross-country skiing, and more. They allow communities to take advantage of existing assets to facilitate active living and encourage the development of healthier communities. Rail-to-trails provide a variety of benefits, serving as everything from a method of preserving historical landmarks to a safe, convenient way for residents to actively get to work and school. In most cases, local, state, or federal government agencies will buy an abandoned rail corridor and then arrange for the building of the trail.

Rails-to-Trails Conservancy is a nonprofit organization that provides resources to facilitate the transformation of unused railroad tracks into walkable trails across America. Their goal is to create a national network of trails from former rail lines to improve opportunities for active living in rural areas. As of 2013, more than 1,400 rail-to-trails exist, with at least one in every state.

### || POTENTIAL STAKEHOLDERS

#### Policymakers

- ▶ State and local elected and appointed officials

#### Other government and community stakeholders

- ▶ Federal Surface Transportation Board
- ▶ State department of transportation's rail office
- ▶ Parks and recreation, environmental protection, tourism, and economic development agencies
- ▶ Metropolitan planning organizations or other types of regional intergovernmental bodies
- ▶ Adjacent property owners
- ▶ Community-based organizations and local nonprofits
- ▶ Community members

### || RESOURCES

- ▶ Rails-to-Trails Conservancy, Trail-Building Toolbox  
[www.railstotrails.org/ourWork/trailBuilding/toolbox/index.html](http://www.railstotrails.org/ourWork/trailBuilding/toolbox/index.html)

#### SPOTLIGHT



#### SPOTLIGHT: WEISER RIVER TRAIL, IDAHO

In 1997, Union Pacific Railroad donated a rail corridor to the nonprofit organization, Friends of Weiser River Trail, Inc. (FWRT). Since then, the 85-mile trail has provided the surrounding rural communities with a dynamic pathway for events ranging from equestrian activities to relays to wagon train rides. The towns of Weiser, Cambridge, and Council successfully applied for and received federal Transportation Enhancement funds to pave the trail with surfacing that is suitable for recreational activity. Events held on the trail raise additional funds to help FWRT maintain and manage it year-round, while simultaneously bringing in profits for local businesses including motels and restaurants.<sup>44</sup>

## SPOTLIGHT


**SMART GROWTH IN  
SAN JUAN PUEBLO**

In 2001, historic San Juan Pueblo, a small town located north of Santa Fe, New Mexico, developed a community design plan based on mixed-used principles aimed at better integrating community activities while maintaining tribal history and community values. San Juan Pueblo created a community advisory council of neighborhood stakeholders, which was managed by the tribal planning department, to guide the implementation of plans to coordinate infrastructure around housing and commercial development. The design plan facilitates walking, highlights historic plazas, and creates a sense of a “main street,” while still preserving the architectural heritage of the pueblo. San Juan Pueblo’s first mixed-used development project was completed in 2003. Tsigo Bugeh Village contains a 40-unit housing development with both market-rate and affordable units alongside a dynamic community center that provides residents with communal facilities such as a kitchen, computer lab, a gym, and a laundry. Awarded the Environmental Protection Agency’s Small Communities Smart Growth Achievement Award in 2004, San Juan Pueblo is a prime example of how mixed-use design can revitalize daily life and maintain the traditional sense of place within a small, rural community.<sup>47</sup>

## 5. Mixed-Use and High-Density Development

Mixed-use, high-density development allows communities to centralize the location of everything from commercial businesses and office spaces to residential housing. Communities implementing mixed-use, high-density development encourage the building of affordable housing options near commercial centers, downtowns, and transit centers. Walkable infrastructure and compact design are key factors for the success of mixed-use policies.<sup>45</sup> As a result, residents can easily access their homes, workplaces, and other daily destinations through active transportation—primarily walking and bicycling.

Steps to encourage mixed-use, high-density development include public-private partnerships to spearhead planning, implementation, and zoning code and district reforms that allow for such development.<sup>46</sup> State and local policymakers play an instrumental role in supporting the changes and attracting the funding necessary to develop mixed-use principles and facilitate active living choices in rural communities.

### || POTENTIAL STAKEHOLDERS

#### Policymakers

- ▶ State and local elected and appointed officials

#### Other government and community stakeholders

- ▶ Metropolitan planning organizations or other types of regional intergovernmental bodies
- ▶ Economic development organizations
- ▶ Housing officials
- ▶ Transportation officials
- ▶ Departments of parks and recreation
- ▶ Local businesses
- ▶ Community members

### || RESOURCES

- ▶ U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, Trip Generation Tool for Mixed-Use Development  
[www.epa.gov/smartgrowth/mxd\\_tripgeneration.html](http://www.epa.gov/smartgrowth/mxd_tripgeneration.html)
- ▶ National Association of Home Builders, Mixed-Use and Compact Development  
[www.nahb.org/reference\\_list.aspx?sectionID=628](http://www.nahb.org/reference_list.aspx?sectionID=628)
- ▶ National Association of County and City Health Officials, Healthy Community Design Toolkit  
[www.naccho.org/toolbox/program.cfm?id=14&display\\_name=Healthy%20Community%20Design%20Toolkit](http://www.naccho.org/toolbox/program.cfm?id=14&display_name=Healthy%20Community%20Design%20Toolkit)
- ▶ Wisconsin Comprehensive Planning Implementation Guide Toolkit  
<ftp://ftp.wi.gov/DOA/public/comprehensiveplans/ImplementationToolkit/Toolkit.pdf>

# Daily Active Living

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## Using community support to encourage daily active living

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### 1. Safe Routes to School and Walking / Biking “School Buses”

Children ride in some type of vehicle for almost 85 percent of their trips to school or other destinations.<sup>48</sup> Whereas sedentary forms of transportation tend to heighten the risk for childhood obesity, establishing a Safe Routes to School (SRTS) program encourages students and parents to adopt active forms of transportation.

SRTS programs make a community’s built environment more conducive to safe walking and biking by building new—or modifying existing—infrastructure to improve sidewalks and crosswalks, create new paths for biking and walking, reduce traffic congestion, add traffic signs and lights, and control traffic speed.

SRTS is especially relevant in rural areas where people live longer distances from schools and communities often lack the sidewalks, crosswalks, and other infrastructure necessary for families to safely forgo motorized vehicles. SRTS improvements can support innovative ways to encourage children to use new walking paths or bike lanes. For example, walking or biking “school buses” involve a few parent or volunteer “drivers” who supervise a group of children as they walk or ride to school. Rural communities can also establish remote drop-off points for school buses, which allow kids to take the bus for a portion of their route and to walk or bike for the remainder of the way.<sup>49</sup>

Community leaders and organizations, schools, parents, and policymakers concerned with reducing childhood obesity and enhancing options for active transportation can take the lead in establishing SRTS programs. Communities can assess connectivity needs and opportunities when establishing a SRTS program and reach out to their state SRTS coordinator for additional support.<sup>50</sup> (See below for the SRTS site that provides contact information for state coordinators.)

### || GOALS

To mobilize community members in support of active living and bring them together as they integrate physical activity into their daily lives.

## SPOTLIGHT



### NAKNEK, ALASKA'S SOCKEYE RUN FITNESS TRAIL AND BIKE PATH

Naknek, Alaska, a small island community with a population of 544, is located about three hours from Anchorage on the northeastern shore of Bristol Bay. In September 2012, the students and families of Naknek got a safe, secure passage to their schools and centers of community life.

Residents of this rural town wanted a safe way to travel from their homes to destinations like the Bristol Bay Borough School. Unfortunately, the common presence of off-highway vehicles (OHVs), which are capable of driving at high speeds on and off paved roads and gravel surfaces, posed a distinct threat to children who wanted to walk to school. Exhaust fumes from OHVs regularly cause respiratory problems, and the mere presence of vehicles driving off the main roads meant walking to school was not a safe option.

In response, the town built the 2.3-mile Sockeye Run Fitness Trail and Bike Path, with funding from Alaska's SRTS Program, the National Park Service's state recreational grants, and the Bristol Bay Borough. The trail connects the local school, senior center health clinic, and community center, thereby providing a safe opportunity for kids, parents, and the elderly to travel and play.<sup>51</sup>

## || POTENTIAL STAKEHOLDERS

### Policymakers

- ▶ State and local elected and appointed officials

### Other government and community stakeholders

- ▶ Principals, other school administrators, teachers, and school nurses
- ▶ Parent-teacher organizations
- ▶ Transportation or traffic engineers, local planners
- ▶ Public health professionals
- ▶ Law enforcement
- ▶ Parents and students, community members

## || RESOURCES

- ▶ National Center for Safe Routes to School, Safe Routes to School Guide: Steps to Creating a Safe Routes to School Program  
[http://guide.saferoutesinfo.org/pdf/SRTS-Guide\\_Steps.pdf](http://guide.saferoutesinfo.org/pdf/SRTS-Guide_Steps.pdf)
- ▶ National Center for Safe Routes to School, Find State Contacts for SRTS  
[www.saferoutesinfo.org/program-tools/find-state-contacts](http://www.saferoutesinfo.org/program-tools/find-state-contacts)
- ▶ National Center for Safe Routes to School, Starting a Walking School Bus  
[www.walkingschoolbus.org](http://www.walkingschoolbus.org)
- ▶ ChangeLab Solutions, Safe Routes to School Policies in Rural School Districts  
[http://changelabsolutions.org/sites/default/files/SRTS-Policies-Rural\\_School\\_Districts-FINAL\\_20140611.pdf](http://changelabsolutions.org/sites/default/files/SRTS-Policies-Rural_School_Districts-FINAL_20140611.pdf)
- ▶ ChangeLab Solutions, Opportunities to Walk to School Through Remote Drop-Off Programs  
[http://changelabsolutions.org/sites/default/files/SRTS-Remote-Drop-Off-Rural\\_School\\_Districts-FINAL\\_20140611.pdf](http://changelabsolutions.org/sites/default/files/SRTS-Remote-Drop-Off-Rural_School_Districts-FINAL_20140611.pdf)



## 2. Community Walking Groups

Community walking groups provide another option for helping residents stay active. Because walking is the most common form of movement and a valuable form of low-impact exercise, most residents, regardless of age or fitness level, can participate in community walking groups.<sup>52</sup>

Rural community walking groups can promote walking as a regular form of physical activity and provide a way for residents to socialize and engage with the community. Walking groups can take people through centrally located sites to make attendance convenient and build appreciation of community assets. Routes can go through newly renovated areas of town, areas of traditional local significance, historical landmarks, or natural resource areas. Walking groups provide a social opportunity to promote active living among people who may otherwise forgo physical activity on a regular basis. Policymakers can work with local departments of health, public works, or parks and recreation to create safe environments for walking groups in their communities.

### || POTENTIAL STAKEHOLDERS

#### Policymakers

- ▶ State and local elected and appointed officials

#### Other government and community stakeholders

- ▶ Departments of parks and recreation
- ▶ Local law enforcement
- ▶ Local employers
- ▶ Community-based organizations and local nonprofits
- ▶ Schools and after-school programs
- ▶ Faith-based institutions
- ▶ Civic, recreation, and fitness centers
- ▶ Community members

### || RESOURCES

- ▶ California Center for Physical Activity, Walk Kit: How to Start a Walking Program  
[www.caactivecommunities.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/03/walk\\_kit\\_v4.pdf](http://www.caactivecommunities.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/03/walk_kit_v4.pdf)
- ▶ Partnership for Prevention, Establishing a Community-Based Walking Group Program to Increase Physical Activity Among Youth and Adults  
<http://prevent.org/Topics.aspx?eaID=5&topicID=45>

# Physical Activity in School and Outside of School

## Integrating physical activity into the daily lives of youths

### || GOALS

To integrate regular, quality physical activity into the school day, ensuring rural students live healthier, more active lives while developing a lifelong appreciation for the value of physical activity.

### 1. Physical Education and Activity in School

Students are less active during school hours. A recent national survey from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) showed that only 27 percent of high school girls and just over 34 percent of high school boys attend physical education classes every day.<sup>53</sup> Similarly, only 25 percent of youths ages 12 to 15 engage in the recommended 60 minutes of daily physical activity.<sup>54</sup>

Physical education teachers, when available, must often fill a variety of roles due to limited school staffing, and this takes away valuable instructional time. Limited financial resources in many schools, including those in rural areas, mean teachers cannot attend conferences or training to improve physical education curricula, and physical education program budgets are often cut in favor of core academic classes.<sup>55,56,57</sup> As a result of these budget constraints, physical education facilities and materials are often not suitable for quality, school-based physical activity.<sup>58</sup>

Policymakers, health advocates, and school officials can work to promote the importance of daily physical activity in the development and health of students. Given the funding challenges faced by most rural schools, applying for rural education grants and partnering with institutions well versed in best practices for physical education—such as local universities or YMCAs—can provide rural schools with valuable resources.

To ensure quality physical education in rural schools, policymakers and school administrators can support the development of curricula that follows CDC recommendations for daily physical activity and help provide instructors with much-needed training and professional development. Policymakers can also institute minimum standards for either daily or weekly physical education time in line with current recommendations from the National Academies' Institute of Medicine.<sup>59</sup>

School administrators also can schedule physical activity breaks and include physical activity during normally sedentary academic classes to make sure students are exercising sufficiently throughout their time at school. This activity, in turn, can improve both students' health and academic outcomes.<sup>60</sup>

## || POTENTIAL STAKEHOLDERS

### Policymakers

- ▶ State and local elected and appointed officials

### Other government and community stakeholders

- ▶ School administrators
- ▶ School physical education instructors
- ▶ Local nonprofits and community-based organizations
- ▶ Universities and colleges
- ▶ Parent-teacher organizations

## || RESOURCES

- ▶ *Let's Move In School*  
<http://www.letsmove.gov/active-schools>
- ▶ SHAPE America  
<http://www.shapeamerica.org/>
- ▶ U.S. Department of Education, Rural Education Achievement Program  
[www2.ed.gov/nclb/freedom/local/reap.html](http://www2.ed.gov/nclb/freedom/local/reap.html)
- ▶ U.S. Department of Education, Carol M. White Physical Education Program  
<http://www2.ed.gov/programs/whitephysed/index.html>
- ▶ Shape Up Across Oregon  
[www.shapeupacrossoregon.org](http://www.shapeupacrossoregon.org)

## SPOTLIGHT



### CREATIVELY ENCOURAGING PHYSICAL ACTIVITY IN KIDS

Shape Up, a program established in Oregon and then expanded to Washington state, works to encourage daily physical activity and establish active living as a lifelong value. Students log “miles” on a map for every minute of physical activity in which they engage, with a goal of achieving enough miles to have crossed their state from end to end. Physical activity becomes a fun project that kids are excited about inside and outside of school. Students receive prizes throughout the duration of the program and, when they have completed their map, a certificate signed by the governor. Schools in rural Oregon and Washington have taken advantage of the Shape Up program and incorporated it into curricula for subjects like physical education, geography, and health. The Shape Up program exhibits one creative way of encouraging physical activity after—and during—school hours while simultaneously getting kids excited about being active.<sup>61</sup>

## 2. Physical Activity Outside of School

After-school programs in urban and rural areas offer a prime opportunity for integrating physical activity into the daily lives of children, especially since so few children receive physical education during the school day. Unfortunately, limited financial support means many rural after-school programs lack resources needed to provide quality programming and care. In fact, after-school programs in rural communities receive the lowest per-student funding of all grantees under the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Community Learning Centers federal grants program.<sup>62</sup> With 2.5 million rural children living in poverty, the absence of resources for after-school programs compounds other well-documented barriers to the healthy development of rural children.<sup>63</sup>

Policymakers can promote creative ways for schools and after-school programs to collaborate and raise funds. State and local officials can help develop partnerships between local community organizations, schools, recreation outlets, fitness centers, and other businesses. Such partnerships can leverage existing community resources for the maintenance of rural after-school programs and their physical activity components. In-kind donations for after-school physical activity equipment and materials, shared-use agreements, and linkages with existing after-school programs in the region represent just a few ways in which rural communities can find innovative sources of support for after-school programs.<sup>64</sup>

Additionally, rural towns and community-based organizations and nonprofits can work together to arrange for the transportation of children to after-school activities, including intramural sports sites or recreation centers. To fulfill the need for trained instructors, after-school programs can work with local colleges and universities to recruit local athletes to help run physical activity programs. Creative collaborations among community and school stakeholders can generate new ways to maintain quality after-school programs that ensure rural students remain active after the school day ends.

Other programs, such as the JAM (Just-a-Minute) School Program, are available free for all schools, and provide different ways to get students up and moving throughout the school day. For example, Jammin' Minute is a one-minute program that includes five simple exercises students can do while standing by their desks, while JAM Blast provides a message delivered by a famous athlete on healthy living and eating.<sup>65</sup> SHAPE America, formerly the American Alliance for Health, Physical Education, Recreation and Dance, provides a comprehensive list of organizations and resources that details goals and means of implementing physical activity in programming outside of school hours.

## || POTENTIAL STAKEHOLDERS

### Policymakers

- ▶ State and local elected and appointed officials
- ▶ School officials, state and local school boards, school administrators

### Other government and community stakeholders

- ▶ Local education community (teachers, physical education instructors, parent-teacher organizations)
- ▶ Business sector, local employers, and retail establishments
- ▶ Philanthropies
- ▶ Libraries
- ▶ Departments of parks and recreation
- ▶ Civic and community organizations
- ▶ Faith-based organizations
- ▶ Universities and colleges
- ▶ Health agencies
- ▶ Community members

## || RESOURCES

- ▶ Afterschool Alliance, Federal Policy – Active Hours Afterschool  
[www.afterschoolalliance.org/policyactivehours.cfm](http://www.afterschoolalliance.org/policyactivehours.cfm)
- ▶ The Finance Project, Financing and Sustaining Out-of-School Time Programs in Rural Communities  
[www.iowaafterschoolalliance.org/documents/resources/10.pdf](http://www.iowaafterschoolalliance.org/documents/resources/10.pdf)
- ▶ Child Trends, Research-to-Results Brief: Strategies for Improving Out-of-School Programs in Rural Communities  
[www.childtrends.org/wp-content/uploads/2008/05/Child\\_Trends-2008\\_05\\_05\\_RB\\_RuralOST.pdf](http://www.childtrends.org/wp-content/uploads/2008/05/Child_Trends-2008_05_05_RB_RuralOST.pdf)
- ▶ CANFIT, Policy Brief: Expanding Opportunities for Afterschool Physical Activity  
<http://canfit.org/pdf/CANFITExpandingASOpportunities.pdf>
- ▶ Spark, After School  
[www.sparkpe.org/after-school](http://www.sparkpe.org/after-school)



# Community Health Engagement

## Community-led policy development

### || GOALS

To actively involve residents in improving overall community health by removing barriers to active living and facilitating new projects to increase active living opportunities.

### 1. Rural Obesity Prevention Task Force

In May 2010, President Barack Obama announced the formation of a federal task force on childhood obesity. Along with *Let's Move!*, a program spearheaded by First Lady Michelle Obama, the task force works across federal departments and agencies, as well as with a variety of nongovernmental partners, to develop a coordinated, comprehensive approach to solving the problem of childhood obesity within a generation. The task force promotes:<sup>66</sup>

- ▶ Ensuring access to healthy food in schools and communities;
- ▶ Increasing physical activity for children; and
- ▶ Educating parents to help them make healthier choices for their children.

Rural communities can establish their own local versions of the White House Task Force on Obesity Prevention as a strategy to bring childhood obesity to the forefront of community priorities. By involving a variety of community actors—from school administrators and health professionals to local business owners and faith-based groups—task forces can help coordinate strategies for addressing barriers to healthy living, encourage all residents to take responsibility for safeguarding community health, and focus attention on local obesity issues. While rural task forces are not yet common, a few rural areas have successfully formed task forces to explore obesity solutions. Examples of these task forces are listed below under “Resources.”

### || POTENTIAL STAKEHOLDERS

#### Policymakers

- ▶ State and local elected and appointed officials
- ▶ School officials, including boards of education, local school boards, and school administrators

#### Other government and community stakeholders

- ▶ Hospitals, local public health departments, and county and city health officials
- ▶ Parent-teacher organizations
- ▶ Parks and recreation officials
- ▶ Local recreation and community centers
- ▶ Local faith-based institutions
- ▶ Community groups and local nonprofit organizations
- ▶ Local businesses, including restaurant owners, grocers, and other food distributors

## || RESOURCES

- ▶ San Pablo City Council, Childhood Obesity Prevention Task Force  
<http://sanpabloca.gov/index.aspx?NID=1334>
- ▶ Harford County Health Department, Harford County Local Health Improvement Plan Workgroups: Obesity Prevention/Healthy Eating and Active Lifestyle  
[www.harfordcountyhealth.com/?p=5543](http://www.harfordcountyhealth.com/?p=5543)



## 2. Diabetes Prevention Program

The diabetes rate in rural America is 17 percent higher than in urban areas.<sup>67</sup> Fortunately, the YMCA has a Diabetes Prevention Program that is an effective model to help rural communities reduce the prevalence of diabetes, one of the most common chronic diseases related to obesity.

Supported nationally by the Diabetes Prevention and Control Alliance and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the Diabetes Prevention Program uses education and lifestyle coaches to encourage people to eat healthy and be active. Topics highlighted in the program's curriculum include healthy eating, exercise, stress reduction, and problem solving. The program's two ultimate goals are helping participants to lose 7 percent of their body weight, and increasing participants' weekly exercise by 150 minutes.<sup>68</sup>

Rural community leaders, along with state and local policymakers, can establish diabetes prevention programs through their local YMCAs or create similar program models through other community-based organizations.

### || POTENTIAL STAKEHOLDERS

#### Policymakers

- ▶ State and local elected and appointed officials

#### Other government and community stakeholders

- ▶ Local YMCAs
- ▶ Local health care providers, including nurses, physicians, specialists, hospitals, and community health workers
- ▶ County and city health officials
- ▶ Schools, after-school programs, and parent-teacher organizations
- ▶ Parks and recreation officials
- ▶ Local recreation and community centers
- ▶ Nursing homes
- ▶ Nonprofits
- ▶ Community members

### || RESOURCES

- ▶ YMCA, Diabetes Prevention Program  
[www.ymca.net/diabetes-prevention](http://www.ymca.net/diabetes-prevention)



Part 2

## Healthy Eating

- ▶ School Policy
- ▶ Food and Beverage Policy
- ▶ Increasing Access to Healthy Foods
- ▶ Community Health Engagement



# School Policy

## Ensuring students have access to and education on healthy foods

### || GOALS

To encourage healthy eating habits among students during school hours by increasing access to fresh foods, limiting the availability of unhealthy foods, and providing comprehensive nutrition education.

### 1. School Meals

Children's dietary patterns are strongly associated with cognitive, academic, and psychosocial development.<sup>69</sup> Students consume roughly half of their daily calories during the school day, and studies have shown the strong influence of school food environments on adolescent dietary behaviors.<sup>70</sup>

The Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act of 2010 directed the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) to establish new, updated standards for school meals. Introduced in 2012, the new standards increased fruits, vegetables, and whole grains, while reducing saturated fat, sodium, and total calories. The standards are helping to ensure that every student, whether in urban or rural communities, has equal access to healthy, nutritious school meals.

#### BREAKFAST

Eating a healthy breakfast improves students' academic performance, decreases their behavioral problems in class, and helps reduce their risk for obesity.<sup>71</sup> Ensuring access to breakfast at school is especially important for children from low-income families who may not receive a healthy breakfast at home. The updated USDA standards have already improved the nutritional quality of school breakfasts, but school officials and local policymakers can pursue a variety of options to help expand students' access to the food, such as by serving breakfast in classrooms during first period, serving it between morning classes, and/or pre-bagging it and making it available at a convenient spot for students to grab on the way to classes.<sup>72</sup>

#### LUNCH

School administrators and policymakers also have a variety of options at their disposal to encourage participation in the school lunch program. Launching a school salad bar is one popular way to get students excited about fresh, healthy fruits and vegetables. Policymakers can work with school leadership and food service providers to establish new salad bars and apply for funding from programs such as *Let's Move! Salad Bars to Schools*.<sup>73</sup>

Many students, including those in low-income and rural communities, already have access to free or reduced-price healthy lunches. The Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act established the Community Eligibility Option to make it even easier for schools with high percentages of students from low-income families to receive free school meals. It allows schools in high-poverty areas to provide free meals to all of their students. After a series of successful pilot programs in certain states, the



Community Eligibility Option became available to schools nationwide beginning with the 2014–2015 school year. Policymakers can work with local school officials to take advantage of Community Eligibility and help ensure that low-income schools are being reimbursed for offering free breakfasts and lunches to students.

Another major issue facing many school districts is the lack of adequate kitchen equipment for successfully preparing and cooking school meals that meet the updated nutrition standards. Policymakers can provide schools with funding to modernize their kitchen equipment and make sure that kitchen staff have the training and resources they need to serve more nutritious meals.

## || POTENTIAL STAKEHOLDERS

### Policymakers

- ▶ State and local elected and appointed officials
- ▶ School district officials and school administrators

### Other government and community stakeholders

- ▶ Teachers
- ▶ USDA officials
- ▶ School health advocates
- ▶ Community health organizations and food councils
- ▶ School cafeteria staff
- ▶ Parents and parent-teacher organizations

## || RESOURCES

- ▶ AASA, the School Superintendents Association, School Breakfast Resources  
[www.aasa.org/content.aspx?id=20044](http://www.aasa.org/content.aspx?id=20044)
- ▶ Food Resource and Action Center, School Breakfast Program  
<http://frac.org/federal-foodnutrition-programs/school-breakfast-program/>
- ▶ Food Resource and Action Center, National School Lunch Program  
<http://frac.org/federal-foodnutrition-programs/national-school-lunch-program/>
- ▶ Robert Wood Johnson Foundation and The Pew Charitable Trusts, Kids' Safe and Healthful Foods Project, Safe and Healthy Meal Prep  
<http://www.healthyschoolfoodsnow.org/policy/safehealthymealprep-2/>
- ▶ *Let's Move Salad Bars to Schools*  
<http://www.saladbars2schools.org/>
- ▶ No Kid Hungry Center for Best Practices, No Kid Hungry Campaign Efforts – School Breakfast  
<http://bestpractices.nokidhungry.org/school-breakfast/no-kid-hungry-campaign-efforts>
- ▶ Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, Strong School Meal Standards May Help Reduce Obesity Among Kids From Lower-Income Families  
<http://www.rwjf.org/en/about-rwjf/newsroom/newsroom-content/2013/04/school-meal-standards-may-help-reduce-obesity.html>

## 2. School Snacks and Drinks

School snacks and drinks sold in à la carte lines, vending machines, or other venues such as school stores do not fall into the federally reimbursed school lunch category. For years, school snacks and drinks were often high in fat, calories, and sugar, which made it harder for students to develop healthy eating habits. These offerings also competed with healthy options offered by school lunch programs.<sup>74</sup> The Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act also updated nutrition standards for school snacks and drinks, which took effect at the start of the 2014-2015 school year.

State and local policymakers can partner with school districts and administrators to ensure that schools comply with—or even exceed—the updated standards. Combined with more active promotion of fruits and vegetables, these standards will help students eat healthier foods at school.<sup>75</sup> Several states and cities in which childhood obesity rates have recently declined have, among other policies, improved the nutritional content of school snacks and beverages.<sup>76,77</sup>

The USDA Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program is another way to bring healthy produce into schools and provide students with healthier snacks. Schools can also combine healthier foods with nutrition education.

### EXPLAINING THE USDA FRESH FRUIT AND VEGETABLE PROGRAM

Between breakfast, lunch and snacks, kids consume the majority of their daily caloric intake at school. The Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program (FFVP) is a critical link to providing some of the most vulnerable children, those most likely to be overweight and less likely to eat well, with fresh fruit and vegetable snacks. This program is present in all 50 states and targets schools with a high percentage of low-income students who receive free or reduced price lunch through the National School Lunch Program.<sup>78</sup>

### || POTENTIAL STAKEHOLDERS

#### Policymakers

- ▶ State and local elected and appointed officials
- ▶ School district officials and school administrators

#### Other government and community stakeholders

- ▶ Vending machine companies and local corner stores
- ▶ Teachers and nutritionists
- ▶ Local health nonprofits and food advocates
- ▶ Parents and teachers

## || RESOURCES

- ▶ Alliance for a Healthier Generation, Healthy Schools Program Framework of Best Practices  
[https://www.healthiergeneration.org/\\_asset/l062yk/07-278\\_HSPFramework.pdf](https://www.healthiergeneration.org/_asset/l062yk/07-278_HSPFramework.pdf)
- ▶ Alliance for a Healthier Generation, Smart Snack Calculator  
[https://www.healthiergeneration.org/take\\_action/schools/snacks\\_and\\_beverages/smart\\_snacks/alliance\\_product\\_calculator/](https://www.healthiergeneration.org/take_action/schools/snacks_and_beverages/smart_snacks/alliance_product_calculator/)
- ▶ Alliance for a Healthier Generation, Wellness Stories  
[https://www.healthiergeneration.org/about\\_childhood\\_obesity/wellness\\_stories/](https://www.healthiergeneration.org/about_childhood_obesity/wellness_stories/)
- ▶ CDC Division of Adolescent and School Health, Nutrition Standards for Foods in Schools  
[www.cdc.gov/healthyyouth/nutrition/pdf/nutrition\\_factsheet\\_parents.pdf](http://www.cdc.gov/healthyyouth/nutrition/pdf/nutrition_factsheet_parents.pdf)
- ▶ Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, Success Stories: Smart Snacks in School  
<http://www.rwjf.org/en/research-publications/find-rwjf-research/2014/05/smart-snacks-in-school.html>
- ▶ USDA Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program, A Handbook for Schools  
[www.fns.usda.gov/cnd/ffvp/handbook.pdf](http://www.fns.usda.gov/cnd/ffvp/handbook.pdf)

### 3. Farm-to-School Programs

Farm-to-school programs can help increase the availability of healthy, locally grown foods in schools while providing local growers with new markets. Of the \$2.59 billion spent by schools in 2011–2012 to buy food, \$355 million was directed locally.<sup>79</sup> These programs, which often include nutrition education components, offer new opportunities for teaching children about healthy eating and the value of fresh fruits and vegetables. Research on farm-to-school programs has shown a greater preference for fruits and vegetables among student participants and decreased waste.<sup>80</sup>

Since the first farm-to-school initiatives were piloted in 1996, more than 38,000 schools across all 50 states have established programs. Federal and state legislation has supported these efforts.<sup>81</sup> The 2008 Farm Bill boosted farm-to-school programming by including a directive to “encourage schools to purchase locally grown and locally raised products to the maximum extent practicable and appropriate.” In turn, more states enacted farm-to-school legislation, and schools have implemented programs that bring fresh produce into schools.<sup>82</sup> The 2010 Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act established a farm-to-school grant program to further aid schools in providing healthy, fresh foods to students.<sup>83</sup> In November 2013, USDA announced additional support for 71 farm-to-school projects in 42 states and the District of Columbia that are expected to serve nearly 1.26 million rural students.<sup>84</sup> State and local policymakers can collaborate with school districts and local growers to encourage the development of farm-to-school programs and support capacity-building for the provision of local foods to schools.

#### || POTENTIAL STAKEHOLDERS

##### Policymakers

- ▶ State and local elected and appointed officials

##### Other government and community stakeholders

- ▶ Farmers and local growers
- ▶ Farmers’ markets
- ▶ School health advocates and nutritionists
- ▶ School districts and school administrators
- ▶ Community organizations focused on health, nutrition, fighting hunger, and food security
- ▶ Environmental groups
- ▶ 4-H groups, feed supply stores
- ▶ Community members

## || RESOURCES

- ▶ USDA Food and Nutrition Service, Farm-to-School Website  
[www.fns.usda.gov/cnd/f2s/default.htm](http://www.fns.usda.gov/cnd/f2s/default.htm)
- ▶ USDA Food and Nutrition Service, Farm-to-School Resources  
[www.fns.usda.gov/cnd/f2s/f2s-resources.htm](http://www.fns.usda.gov/cnd/f2s/f2s-resources.htm)
- ▶ National Farm-to-School Network  
<http://www.farmtoschool.org/>
- ▶ National Farm-to-School Network, Evaluation Framework for Farm to School  
<http://www.farmtoschool.org/resources-main/evaluation-framework>





## SPOTLIGHT


**GLENWOOD SCHOOL  
GARDEN PROJECT**

Seeking to increase appreciation for and awareness of locally-grown foods, Juliet Cobb, a parent, teacher and school foundation president, has taken major steps in her rural community of West Plains, Missouri, to start a school garden. The Glenwood School Garden, which is funded by a place-based education grant of the Rural Schools Partnership and Community Foundation of the Ozarks, has secured the commitment of local public school students and staff. Each Glenwood class is responsible for maintaining its own garden and deciding what crops to grow. A garden club was also established so students can meet weekly and care for the garden outside of class hours. The gardens are located in a heavily trafficked area of the school, which allows students, parents, and teachers to see its progress. Students will eventually be able to pick and take home samples from their garden plots, giving them the unique experience of eating food they grew themselves and, hopefully, increasing their dedication to local produce and healthy eating.<sup>90</sup>

## 4. School Gardens

School gardens present students and teachers with the opportunity to learn about how food is produced, the importance of good nutrition, and making smart eating choices. School gardens can also help transform community spaces into areas for students to learn about the benefits of locally grown produce.<sup>85</sup>

Integration of nutrition education into school garden programs helps equip children with the knowledge they need to make healthier eating decisions, encourages them to share nutrition knowledge with their families, and helps them to develop a greater appreciation for the natural environment. Research has shown students more often choose fruits and vegetables for snacks and during meals after participating in a school gardening program.<sup>86</sup> In addition, school gardens offer children an opportunity for exercise.<sup>87</sup>

School gardens often involve the participation of farmers and other local growers, allowing students to interact with those who live in or near their communities and are responsible for producing fresh, healthy foods. Farmers can share their knowledge of agriculture, and also donate farming equipment or allow classes to visit their farms.<sup>88</sup> Members of the local farm bureau can serve as key instructors to teach students about planting, harvesting, food systems, and food safety.<sup>89</sup> A variety of funding sources are available for school garden projects, some of which can be found below.

### || POTENTIAL STAKEHOLDERS

#### Policymakers

- ▶ State and local elected and appointed officials
- ▶ School districts, school boards, and school administrators

#### Other government and community stakeholders

- ▶ Teachers, nurses, and physical education instructors
- ▶ Local farmers and other growers of produce
- ▶ Farmers' markets
- ▶ Local public health departments and nonprofit organizations
- ▶ Departments of parks and recreation
- ▶ Parents and parent-teacher organizations
- ▶ Community centers

### || RESOURCES

- ▶ Annie's Homegrown, Inc., Grants for Gardens  
<http://www.annies.com/giving-back/school-gardens/grants-for-gardens>
- ▶ National Gardening Association, 2013 Youth Garden Grant Award  
<http://grants.kidsgardening.org/2013-youth-garden-grant-award>
- ▶ Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, Setting Up and Running a School Garden: A Manual for Teachers, Parents, and Communities  
[www.fao.org/docrep/009/a0218e/a0218e00.htm](http://www.fao.org/docrep/009/a0218e/a0218e00.htm)



## 5. Expanded Healthy Food and Nutrition Education

Studies have shown that school-based health education can have a profound effect— not only on the health of students in the short and long terms, but also on the health and knowledge of parents and teachers.<sup>91</sup> A recent evaluation of the Nutrition Education and Obesity Prevention Grant Program, or SNAP-Ed, demonstrated that nutrition education programs can positively influence the willingness of participants in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) to buy and eat healthy foods.<sup>92</sup> Policymakers can work with schools to encourage the implementation of comprehensive nutrition and health education efforts, particularly in rural areas where farming is common. Nutrition education is often bundled together with health, science, or physical education classes. Expanding nutrition education curricula to include agriculture, seasonal food production, and the benefits of fresh produce could have a significant impact on students' daily eating habits.

### || POTENTIAL STAKEHOLDERS

#### Policymakers

- ▶ State and local elected and appointed officials
- ▶ School districts, state and local school boards, and school administrators

#### Other government and community stakeholders

- ▶ Teachers, school nutritionists, nurses, and food service directors
- ▶ Parents and parent-teacher organizations
- ▶ Local farmers or other growers
- ▶ Community-based organizations and nonprofits
- ▶ Local health institutions like hospitals, clinics, and nurses

### || RESOURCES

- ▶ Center for EcoLiteracy, Nourish Curriculum Guide  
[www.nourishlife.org/pdf/Nourish\\_Curriculum\\_Guide.pdf](http://www.nourishlife.org/pdf/Nourish_Curriculum_Guide.pdf)
- ▶ Nourish, Food System Tools  
[www.nourishlife.org/teach/food-system-tools](http://www.nourishlife.org/teach/food-system-tools)
- ▶ Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, Setting Up and Running a School Garden: A Manual for Teachers, Parents, and Communities  
[www.fao.org/docrep/009/a0218e/a0218e00.htm](http://www.fao.org/docrep/009/a0218e/a0218e00.htm)

# Food and Beverage Policy

## Engaging policy in support of healthy eating choices

### || GOALS

To reform food and beverage policies to better encourage healthy eating practices, end advertising and marketing of unhealthy foods, and provide support for the development of healthy food sources in rural communities.

### 1. Advertising of Unhealthy Foods and Beverages

The food and beverage industry spends billions of dollars each year marketing calorie-dense, nutrient-poor products to children.<sup>93</sup> As a result, kids see an average of 10 or more food-related ads every day, 80 percent of which advertise fast foods or other unhealthy snacks.<sup>94,95</sup> In addition, children and families in low-income areas, minority communities, and rural food deserts see a greater number of these ads than kids living in urban, higher-income areas.<sup>96,97</sup> Given the availability and affordability of unhealthy products and fast-food restaurants in rural areas, food and beverage ads can have significant ramifications for children's daily eating choices and long-term health. Parents, pediatricians, and policymakers can act to ensure that food and beverage advertising no longer targets unhealthy food ads to at-risk groups.

Rural residents can take steps in their homes and communities to counteract unhealthy food and beverage advertising. School staff, parents, pediatricians, and health advocates can work to educate children and parents about how food ads affect their daily eating choices. Rural pediatricians can teach parents and kids about the health impacts of the junk foods seen on television, in movies, or on the computer.<sup>98</sup>

State and local policymakers can limit food and beverage advertising by ensuring that local school wellness policies allow marketing and advertising only for those foods and beverages meeting the *Smart Snacks in Schools* standards;<sup>99</sup> prohibiting unhealthy food and beverage ads during children's television programming; incentivizing ads that focus more on nutritious food items; prohibiting interactive advertising involving unhealthy foods; and banning product placement of unhealthy foods and beverages in children's movies. Policymakers can work with members of Congress, the Federal Trade Commission, and the Federal Communications Commission to implement changes prohibiting food and beverage ads targeted to children, especially in rural and low-income areas.<sup>100,101</sup>

Policymakers are also in a unique position to take the lead on removing and prohibiting advertisements of unhealthy foods and beverages on government property or facilities, especially in areas frequented by children such as zoos, athletic facilities, and museums.<sup>102</sup>

## || POTENTIAL STAKEHOLDERS

### Policymakers

- ▶ State and local elected and appointed officials

### Other government and community stakeholders

- ▶ Food and beverage companies
- ▶ Schools and teachers
- ▶ Parents and parent-teacher organizations
- ▶ Community centers, the local YMCA, and recreation and fitness centers
- ▶ Local universities and colleges
- ▶ Community organizations, nonprofits, and local health advocates
- ▶ Hospitals, clinics, and nursing associations
- ▶ Federal Trade Commission
- ▶ Federal Communications Commission

## || RESOURCES

- ▶ The Prevention Institute, What You Can Do: Supporting Healthy Food & Activity Environments Advocacy  
[www.preventioninstitute.org/focus-areas/supporting-healthy-food-a-activity.html](http://www.preventioninstitute.org/focus-areas/supporting-healthy-food-a-activity.html)
- ▶ Berkeley Media Studies Group, State Law Approaches to Address Digital Food Marketing to Youth: Executive Summary  
<http://www.bmsg.org/resources/publications/state-law-approaches-address-digital-food-marketing-youth-why-digital>
- ▶ Yale Rudd Center for Food Policy & Obesity, Food Marketing to Youth  
[http://www.yaleruddcenter.org/what\\_we\\_do.aspx?id=4](http://www.yaleruddcenter.org/what_we_do.aspx?id=4)
- ▶ World Health Organization, Set of Recommendations on the Marketing of Foods and Non-Alcoholic Beverages to Children  
[www.who.int/dietphysicalactivity/marketing-food-to-children/en](http://www.who.int/dietphysicalactivity/marketing-food-to-children/en)

## SPOTLIGHT



### IOWANS TARGET OBESITY THROUGH RURAL RESTAURANT MENUS

To address high rates of obesity throughout Iowa, the University of Iowa's Prevention Research Center for Rural Health developed a low-cost, low-risk pilot program to promote healthy eating habits in rural Iowa. Inspired by the concerns of residents in the town of Sigourney, the Center established a program at five local restaurants to encourage people to order healthy choices. The program advances healthy options by placing signs listing more nutritious menu items on tables and around the restaurants. An evaluation of the program found the intervention reached between 50 and 60 percent of customers, with up to one in three saying they used the new signs. Combined with other community-based programs, the researchers concluded the intervention could be an effective tool to help create a healthier nutrition environment.<sup>106</sup>

## 2. Restaurant Menu Labeling

Rural residents must also have the option to choose healthy foods and beverages in local restaurants.<sup>103</sup> To enable consumers to make healthier decisions, the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) is in the process of implementing federal labeling requirements that would require restaurants and vending machine companies with 20 or more locations to include calorie counts for each menu option.

Since the pending FDA regulations only apply to restaurants, similar retail establishments, and vending machines with 20 or more locations, local and state policymakers can play an important role in encouraging those not covered—such as smaller local restaurants or smaller regional chains—to adhere voluntarily to the federal nutrition labeling requirements.<sup>104</sup>

Coalitions of public health organizations, public agencies, and restaurant retailers can safeguard community health and the interests of local businesses by achieving goals like menu labeling and more active promotion of healthy food choices.<sup>105</sup>

### || POTENTIAL STAKEHOLDERS

#### Policymakers

- ▶ State and local elected and appointed officials

#### Other government and community stakeholders

- ▶ Local health advocates, hospitals, nurses, and clinics
- ▶ Community development organizations, and nonprofits
- ▶ Local farmers' market associations and vendors
- ▶ Local convenience stores and restaurants
- ▶ Community residents

### || RESOURCES

- ▶ Overview of FDA Proposed Labeling Requirements for Restaurants, Similar Retail Food Establishments and Vending Machines

<http://www.fda.gov/Food/IngredientsPackagingLabeling/LabelingNutrition/ucm248732.htm>

## 3. Local Food Procurement

Demand for local foods continues to grow across the nation’s rural communities. Policymakers must ensure that production and distribution infrastructure exists in rural communities to meet this growing demand by developing food supply systems that can provide local growers with the facilities and resources they need. This would create new jobs, support local farming economies, and improve long-term health outcomes.<sup>107</sup>

Policymakers can take additional steps to support all aspects of local food distribution, including business plans, research on best practices, and innovative distribution and marketing. State agencies, policymakers, and local food advocates can encourage universities and other large institutions to procure a percentage of their food locally, promote strategies for developing local food distribution, and create a coalition council to spearhead the local farm and food system movement.<sup>108</sup>

### || POTENTIAL STAKEHOLDERS

#### Policymakers

- ▶ State and local elected and appointed officials

#### Other government and community stakeholders

- ▶ State agencies
- ▶ Universities and colleges
- ▶ Schools
- ▶ Food advocates and local nonprofits
- ▶ Local restaurants and other food retailers
- ▶ Local farmers

### || RESOURCES

- ▶ ChangeLab Solutions, Understanding Healthy Procurement: Using Government’s Purchasing Power to Increase Access to Healthy Food

<http://changelabsolutions.org/publications/healthy-procurement>

# Increasing Access to Healthy Foods

## Innovative ways to get fresh foods into rural communities

### || GOALS

To change the food landscape in rural communities by encouraging innovative solutions to address food insecurity and increase the availability and accessibility of affordable, nutritious foods.

### 1. Fresh Food Financing Initiatives

It is estimated that 20 percent of rural counties are “food deserts,” in which residents must travel at least 10 miles to the nearest supermarket.<sup>109</sup> Food insecurity is most common in rural and low-income areas, where residents face long distances to stores with nutritious foods and an abundance of nearby convenience stores and fast-food restaurants that serve unhealthy items. Fresh food financing initiatives (FFFIs) provide financial support for the establishment of grocery stores and supermarkets with fresh produce and other healthy options in the communities that need them most.<sup>110</sup>

The FFFI model was pioneered in Pennsylvania as a way to take on the daunting challenges to healthy food access in low-income areas. In partnership with the Food Trust, a national nonprofit group, the Reinvestment Fund, a community development finance firm, matched funds appropriated by the state to form a public-private financing initiative that would help increase the availability and accessibility of nutritious foods.<sup>111</sup> Since its establishment in 2004, Pennsylvania’s FFFI has developed nearly 90 new grocery stores with fresh-food options in underserved communities around the state.<sup>112</sup>

The successes of local FFFIs helped to bring about the Healthy Food Financing Initiative, a national program supported by the Obama administration, in part because the model attracts private capital investment to enhance the government’s contributions.<sup>113</sup> Since 2011, the federal initiative has distributed \$109 million in grants and leveraged more than \$1 billion in further community investments through public-private partnerships. The 2014 Farm Bill formally authorized the program for the first time with funding of \$125 million.<sup>114</sup> (For more information, see this Toolkit’s section on the 2014 Farm Bill and the local food movement.)

FFFIs are often implemented in urban areas, but work just as well in rural communities. FFFIs could help rural communities encourage supermarket chains to open stores in underserved areas, overcoming barriers like high development and operating costs and complicated development processes. The FFFI model also could help fund creative retailing options, such as mobile markets and food hubs, as additional ways to expand access to healthy foods throughout rural communities.

State and local policymakers can encourage groups and community leaders to access the federal Healthy Food Financing Initiative, as well as other available funding options, to develop similar efforts to increase the availability of healthy foods in rural communities.



## || POTENTIAL STAKEHOLDERS

### Polymakers

- ▶ State and local elected and appointed officials

### Other government and community stakeholders

- ▶ Public health organizations
- ▶ Child health advocates
- ▶ Economic development associations
- ▶ Associations representing supermarket and produce industries

## || RESOURCES

- ▶ The Reinvestment Fund, Pennsylvania Fresh Food Financing Initiative  
<http://www.trfund.com/pennsylvania-fresh-food-financing-initiative/>
- ▶ Office of Community Services, Healthy Food Financing Initiative  
[www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/ocs/resource/healthy-food-financing-initiative-0](http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/ocs/resource/healthy-food-financing-initiative-0)
- ▶ U.S. Department of the Treasury, Community Development Financial Institutions Fund: Financing Healthy Food Options  
[www.cdfifund.gov/what\\_we\\_do/FinancingHealthyFoodOptions.asp?programID=13](http://www.cdfifund.gov/what_we_do/FinancingHealthyFoodOptions.asp?programID=13)

## SPOTLIGHT



### A MOBILE MARKET FOR SOUTH CAROLINIANS

Knowing that many of South Carolina's rural areas suffer from food insecurity, state health advocates, with the help of the University of South Carolina, decided to examine one county's food landscape and the impact of food insecurity on health outcomes. The research revealed that a variety of rural communities in Spartanburg County were food deserts, and local residents were at high risk for becoming overweight or obese.

Healthy Kids, Healthy Communities, a national program of the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, decided to take action to bring healthy foods to at-risk rural South Carolinians. The Spartanburg County Healthy Kids, Healthy Communities partnership formed a leadership council dedicated to improving community health. The council, in turn devised plans to implement a new mobile food initiative.

The Hub City Farmers' Market now has a Mobile Market that brings fresh fruits and vegetables to local destinations, including a major apartment complex, a church, and the local school. Future plans for the Mobile Market include attending all festivals and celebrations around town, as well as diversifying the produce offered to encourage residents to try new kinds of healthy foods. The Mobile Market will also begin tracking sales to better predict which foods people demand the most.<sup>119</sup>

## 2. Healthy Mobile Markets

Rural communities often lack access to fresh foods. Mobile vending, or selling foods out of a portable vehicle, has emerged as an increasingly popular way to address food insecurity. The mobility of such markets enables them to bring healthy foods to hard-to-reach rural communities and avoids common barriers to providing healthy foods, such as zoning laws prohibiting the establishment of large supermarkets.<sup>115</sup>

A variety of mobile vending options can bring healthy foods to rural communities in need. Although food stands in urban areas often conjure up thoughts of hot dogs and pretzels, healthy versions of these types of stands can provide a convenient way to sell fresh produce. Mobile markets can also take the form of food trucks that stop at popular and convenient local destinations like churches and schools to sell fresh fruits and vegetables to residents. These food trucks ensure community members have access to affordable healthy options, with many accepting Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP, formerly known as food stamps) benefits as payment.<sup>116</sup>

Local and state policymakers can implement zoning laws and regulations that offer incentives to encourage the sale of healthy options from mobile markets. Counties have also used start-up loans or access to government-sponsored community events to attract and encourage mobile food vendors to sell healthy food options.<sup>117,118</sup> Community leaders, food retailers, and policymakers can work together to facilitate the use of mobile markets to counteract food insecurity in rural areas.

### || POTENTIAL STAKEHOLDERS

#### Policyholders

- ▶ State and local elected and appointed officials

#### Other government and community stakeholders

- ▶ Local housing authority
- ▶ Local farmers' market association and vendors
- ▶ Local farmers
- ▶ School districts
- ▶ Departments of parks and recreation
- ▶ Community organizations and health-focused nonprofits
- ▶ Universities and colleges
- ▶ Community residents

### || RESOURCES

- ▶ ChangeLab Solutions, Healthy Mobile Vending  
<http://changelabsolutions.org/childhood-obesity/mobile-vending-produce-carts>

### 3. Community Supported Agriculture

Community supported agriculture (CSA) allows rural residents to purchase shares of produce from local farmers, who deliver food, including fresh fruits and vegetables, dairy, or eggs to their customers. This sale and distribution method has grown in popularity as a way to bring healthy produce into rural food deserts and to connect rural communities with local farmers operating nearby. In addition, CSA has become a common method of connecting SNAP beneficiaries to previously inaccessible fresh foods. CSA agreements further the economic success of local farmers while simultaneously ensuring that the surrounding rural areas have access to foods normally shipped out to mass urban markets.<sup>120</sup>

CSAs also provide an opportunity for low-income rural families to afford healthy foods. Many CSA farmers' use payment systems that accept electronic benefit transfers (EBT) or an installment payment plan allowing individuals to pay in increments throughout the season. Some even hold community-wide fundraisers to help subsidize lower-income neighborhoods. Finally, CSAs often locate distribution sites near public transportation or organize carpools to ensure all customers can reach their food shares.<sup>121</sup> State and local policymakers can work with agricultural associations, farmers, and rural communities to facilitate the implementation of CSA programs.

#### || POTENTIAL STAKEHOLDERS

##### Policymakers

- ▶ State and local elected and appointed officials

##### Other government and community stakeholders

- ▶ Local farmers' market associations and vendors
- ▶ School districts
- ▶ Departments of parks and recreation
- ▶ Community organizations and health-focused nonprofits
- ▶ Community residents

#### || RESOURCES

- ▶ USDA National Agricultural Library, Community Supported Agriculture  
[www.nal.usda.gov/afsic/pubs/csa/csa.shtml](http://www.nal.usda.gov/afsic/pubs/csa/csa.shtml)
- ▶ Roby Van En Center at Wilson College  
[www.wilson.edu/about-wilson-college/fulton/robyn-van-en-center/index.aspx](http://www.wilson.edu/about-wilson-college/fulton/robyn-van-en-center/index.aspx)
- ▶ Food & Farming Network, CSA Training Manual  
<http://www.foodandfarmingnetwork.org/csa>
- ▶ Hunger Action New York State, Community Supported Agriculture in New York State: Profiles exploring how New York's farmers are providing low-income families with health, fresh, & nutritious fruits and vegetables  
[www.hungeractionnys.org/CSAProfiles.pdf](http://www.hungeractionnys.org/CSAProfiles.pdf)

## SPOTLIGHT



### TRACY CITY'S FOOD HUB PROJECT

Cumberland Farmers' Market in Tracy City, Tennessee, established the city's first food hub after receiving a USDA Rural Development Grant for approximately \$40,000. The food hub provides small and mid-sized farmers with an affordable, convenient way to market fresh foods to local businesses and institutions. In addition, customers can order fresh produce via the food hub's website, as well as through the regular farmers' market. Over the last four years, Tracy City's food hub has grown to offer hundreds of different products sold by more than 60 local farmers. Future development of the food hub will expand its services to allow small farmers to meet the wholesale demands of restaurants and businesses.<sup>126</sup>

## 4. Food Hubs

State and local policymakers can advocate for partnerships, funding, and in-kind support for the establishment of food hubs in rural communities. Providing small and mid-sized farms with access to otherwise inaccessible markets in rural communities, food hubs enable farmers to sell a diverse array of locally grown fruits and vegetables in food deserts. More than 100 regional food hubs already exist around the country, with 40 percent serving rural food deserts desperate for affordable, locally sourced produce.<sup>122</sup> Food hubs locate all aspects of food sales—including production, aggregation, distribution, storage, and marketing—at a single point of purchase, minimizing transaction costs for farmers and ranchers, and providing fresh wholesale foods to previously untapped markets in rural communities. They can organize through nonprofit and community-based organizations, privately held corporations or cooperatives, or be publicly owned through public markets or farmers' markets.<sup>123</sup>

For low-income rural communities, food hubs can offer fresh food wholesale to institutional customers such as local schools or hospitals, as well as directly to residents through venues like farmers' markets.<sup>124</sup> Food hubs further increase their impact on rural communities by selling to SNAP recipients, providing education courses on nutrition and healthy cooking, and serving as a location for health screenings.<sup>125</sup>

### || POTENTIAL STAKEHOLDERS

#### Policymakers

- ▶ State and local elected and appointed officials

#### Other government and community stakeholders

- ▶ Local small and mid-sized farmers and ranchers
- ▶ School districts
- ▶ Local businesses
- ▶ Community-based organizations and nonprofits
- ▶ Community members
- ▶ Farmers' market associations and vendors

### || RESOURCES

- ▶ USDA Rural Development Grants  
[www.rurdev.usda.gov/RD\\_Grants.html](http://www.rurdev.usda.gov/RD_Grants.html)
- ▶ National Good Food Network, Food Hub Collaboration Webinars  
<http://ngfn.org/resources/ngfn-cluster-calls/ngfn-cluster-calls>
- ▶ USDA, Regional Food Hub Resource Guide  
<http://ngfn.org/resources/ngfn-database/knowledge/FoodHubResourceGuide.pdf>
- ▶ USDA Agricultural Marketing Service, Food Hubs: Building Stronger Infrastructure for Small and Mid-Size Producers  
[www.ams.usda.gov/AMSV1.0/FoodHubs](http://www.ams.usda.gov/AMSV1.0/FoodHubs)

## 5. Farmers' Markets and EBT Transfers

Local and state officials can encourage the establishment of farmers' markets to increase rural access to fresh foods. Not only do farmers' markets present a valuable opportunity for community development, local economic growth, and communal social activity, they represent a valuable way to bring fresh, affordable local foods to rural families.<sup>127</sup>

In particular, policymakers and community leaders can ensure farmers' markets target those who depend upon federal nutrition assistance programs like SNAP or the Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) program by supporting systems to accept benefits from these programs.<sup>128</sup> Policymakers can ensure farmers' markets have the technology to process SNAP benefits by incentivizing the acceptance of Electronic Benefit Transfers (EBT).<sup>129</sup> Though farmers' markets often lack access to electricity, phone lines, or point-of-sale terminals, other methods of accepting SNAP benefits have been developed to compensate for such challenges. Some localities have created a system in which SNAP recipients purchase food tokens for an amount of their choice before visiting the market. Those customers can then trade tokens for food items without having to worry about the vendors' ability to accept EBTs.<sup>130</sup> Other options involve the use of wireless technology to facilitate the use of EBTs at the point of sale.<sup>131</sup>

### || POTENTIAL STAKEHOLDERS

#### Policymakers

- ▶ State and local elected and appointed officials

#### Other government and community stakeholders

- ▶ Farmers' market organizers and vendors
- ▶ City, state, and federal government agencies
- ▶ SNAP administrative agency
- ▶ WIC office
- ▶ Public health departments
- ▶ Local hospitals, clinics, and senior centers
- ▶ Food pantries, anti-hunger and anti-poverty organizations
- ▶ Economic development entities

### || RESOURCES

- ▶ Farmers' Market Promotion Program (FMPP)  
[www.ams.usda.gov/AMSv1.0/FMPP](http://www.ams.usda.gov/AMSv1.0/FMPP)
- ▶ Project for Public Spaces and Wholesome Wave: SNAP/EBT at Your Farmers' Market: Seven Steps to Success  
[www.pps.org/pdf/SNAP\\_EBT\\_Book.pdf](http://www.pps.org/pdf/SNAP_EBT_Book.pdf)
- ▶ Wholesome Wave, Double Value Coupon Program (DVCP)  
<http://wholesomewave.org/dvcp>

### SPOTLIGHT



#### ABINGDON FARMERS' MARKET

In 2007, Abingdon Farmers' Market was transformed from an informal "tailgate" market into an officially established marketplace serving 8,000 people in the town of Abingdon in southwest Virginia. With the help of a local nonprofit, Appalachian Sustainable Development, Abingdon Farmers' Market built a pavilion to provide its vendors and customers with a covered site as well as electricity and water. In addition, Appalachian Sustainable Development awarded the farmers' market funding in 2009 to support Virginia's first SNAP EBT scrip program. Using a wireless point-of-sale device and wooden tokens, SNAP recipients can use EBTs to purchase the fresh, healthy foods sold at the market. Going even further, thanks to a grant to Appalachian Sustainable Development from Wholesome Wave, the farmers' market began offering a Double Value Coupon Program (DVCP), which matches the value of SNAP benefits customers use to purchase fresh fruits and vegetables. By the end of 2009, the farmers' market had awarded \$1,281 in SNAP redemptions, which were then matched 100 percent by the DVCP. Abingdon Farmers' Market has done much to encourage all residents of the town to add locally grown produce to their daily meals. Its efforts to enable low-income customers to increase the healthy foods in their diets stands as an example for other rural communities.<sup>132</sup>



## 6. The 2014 Farm Bill

The 2014 Farm Bill (P.L. 133-79) authorizes grants and incentive programs to improve the availability of healthy foods for rural and low-income families. Local and state policymakers can take advantage of programs like the Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program, Farmers' Market and Local Food Promotion Program, Community Food Project Competitive Grant Program, and the USDA Rural Business and Industry Loan program. These programs provide farmers with funding resources for selling fresh foods locally, including support for the processing, distribution, storage and marketing of local and regional foods. Through these programs, farmers will see more of the economic benefits earned from the local and regional sale of fresh produce, which adds to their financial capacity to sell locally and regionally in the future. As a result, these programs help to increase customer access to fresh foods.<sup>121</sup>

### EXPLAINING THE FARMERS' MARKET AND LOCAL FOOD PROMOTION PROGRAM

A component of the Farmers' Market and Local Food Promotion Program, the Farmers' Market Promotion Program (FMPP) helps local officials start farmers' markets in their communities. FMPP provides grants to agricultural cooperatives, local governments, nonprofit corporations, economic development agencies, and tribal governments to set up farmers' markets, roadside stands, community supported agriculture programs, and other direct farmer-to-consumer opportunities.<sup>133</sup>

### EXPLAINING THE COMMUNITY FOOD PROJECTS COMPETITIVE GRANT PROGRAM

The Community Food Projects (CFP) Competitive Grant Program is the first Farm Bill program designed to build regional food systems.<sup>134</sup> Grants from this program are awarded to private nonprofit groups or coalitions of local government and for-profit entities to carry out projects, such as developing sustainable food systems, community gardens, and farmers' markets that meet the food needs of low-income families.<sup>135</sup> Funding can be used to meet specific agricultural needs, develop infrastructure to assist in the storage and distribution of food, and implement marketing strategies that benefit agricultural producers and low-income consumers.<sup>136</sup>

## EXPLAINING THE USDA BUSINESS AND INDUSTRY GUARANTEED LOAN PROGRAM

Created by the 2008 Farm Bill and expanded in the 2014 Farm Bill, the USDA Business and Industry Guaranteed Loan Program allows the federal government to guarantee loans to small rural businesses.<sup>137</sup> The program works to boost the rural private credit market by guaranteeing loans to rural enterprises, cooperatives, businesses, and individuals. It includes a subprogram directly supporting local and regional food systems and the incomes of farmers and ranchers, with priority given to food enterprises within low-income and other communities that suffer from food insecurity.<sup>138,139</sup>

## || POTENTIAL STAKEHOLDERS

### Policymakers

- ▶ State and local elected and appointed officials

### Other government and community stakeholders

- ▶ USDA officials and program managers
- ▶ Local farmers
- ▶ Grocers and local food markets
- ▶ Schools and school administrators
- ▶ Farmers' markets
- ▶ Community organizations, nonprofits, and food advocates
- ▶ State agencies

## || RESOURCES

- ▶ USDA Announces \$78 Million Available for Local Food Enterprises  
[http://www.usda.gov/wps/portal/usda/usdahome?contentid=2014/05/0084.xml&navid=NEWS\\_RELEASE&navtype=RT&parentnav=LATEST\\_RELEASES&deployment\\_action=retrievecontent](http://www.usda.gov/wps/portal/usda/usdahome?contentid=2014/05/0084.xml&navid=NEWS_RELEASE&navtype=RT&parentnav=LATEST_RELEASES&deployment_action=retrievecontent)
- ▶ USDA Agricultural Marketing Service, Farmers' Market Promotion Program (FMPP)  
[www.ams.usda.gov/AMSV1.0/FMPP](http://www.ams.usda.gov/AMSV1.0/FMPP)
- ▶ USDA National Institute of Food and Agriculture, Community Food Project Competitive Grant Program  
[www.nifa.usda.gov/fo/communityfoodprojects.cfm](http://www.nifa.usda.gov/fo/communityfoodprojects.cfm)
- ▶ National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition, Local and Regional Food Enterprise Guaranteed Loans Program  
<http://sustainableagriculture.net/publications/grassrootsguide/local-food-systems-rural-development/local-food-enterprise-loans>

# Community Health Engagement

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## Involving rural residents in the promotion of healthy eating habits

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### || GOALS

To promote healthy eating habits by improving nutrition education and healthy cooking skills among rural residents.

### 1. Individual and Community Gardens

Gardens provide rural communities with a source of fresh produce often hard to find in rural markets or restaurants, open up new opportunities to educate residents about nutrition, healthy cooking and local food sources, and help reconnect rural communities with traditions of growing and eating locally grown food.<sup>140</sup> In addition, they offer a valuable opportunity for physical activity.

- ▶ A variety of community garden models exist, allowing rural communities to choose which model best fits their needs and available resources.<sup>141</sup>
- ▶ Single-plot gardens for educational or training purposes;
- ▶ Multi-plot gardens for groups of residents to maintain, either independently or through a local entity like a church or apartment complex;
- ▶ School gardens for educational purposes or for students to maintain themselves; and
- ▶ A space for mentorship between experienced growers and interested residents, either on a one-on-one basis or for collective learning.

Successful community gardens take time to establish and require adequate resources, funding, and community motivation. Communities can assess potential challenges beforehand to inform the strategy for their community garden model.<sup>142</sup> State and local policymakers can then mobilize necessary support, funding, and resources to ensure the success of community gardens in those rural localities.

## || POTENTIAL STAKEHOLDERS

### Policymakers

- ▶ State and local elected and appointed officials
- ▶ Tribal leaders

### Other government and community stakeholders

- ▶ Local universities and colleges
- ▶ Schools and student groups
- ▶ Nursing homes
- ▶ Community developers
- ▶ Community organizations
- ▶ Local farmers and other growers
- ▶ Local businesses
- ▶ Community members

## || RESOURCES

- ▶ American Community Gardening Association  
<http://communitygarden.org>
- ▶ Wisconsin Department of Health Services, Got Dirt? Gardening Initiative, Garden Toolkit  
<http://www.dhs.wisconsin.gov/physical-activity/FoodSystem/Gardening/GotDirt/>
- ▶ USDA National Institute of Food and Agriculture, “People’s Garden” Grant Program  
[www.csrees.usda.gov/fo/peoplesgarden.cfm](http://www.csrees.usda.gov/fo/peoplesgarden.cfm)

## SPOTLIGHT



### BRINGING GROWING TRADITIONS BACK TO THE SAN CARLOS APACHE RESERVATION

USDA People’s Garden offers resources, success stories, and grants to communities located in food deserts that want to start gardens to improve food security. One successfully funded garden initiative in southeastern Arizona benefited the San Carlos Apache Reservation, which has largely lost its traditions of growing and eating locally grown produce. As a result, the typical diet of a San Carlos Apache Reservation resident changed dramatically in recent years, leading to high rates of diabetes, obesity, and heart disease. The People’s Garden Grant will support the University of Arizona in establishing five community gardens around the Reservation, as well as in implementing outreach programs to improve nutrition education and healthy eating throughout the Apache community. Ultimately, the project aims to reconnect the San Carlos Apache Reservation with its historical traditions and simultaneously change the way residents think about food and health.<sup>143</sup>

## SPOTLIGHT



### ALGOMA'S FARM MARKET KITCHEN

A local nonprofit opened the Farm Market Kitchen in Algoma, a city of about 3,300 people located 30 miles east of Green Bay, Wisconsin. It provides farmers, chefs, restaurants, bakers, cooking instructors, community groups, nonprofits, and other local entrepreneurs with a space to develop and expand food-related small businesses. Open to residents of the entire northeastern region of Wisconsin, the Farm Market Kitchen offers a fully certified and equipped kitchen space, the Farm Market Kitchen Incubator, for preparing, sourcing, and storing food. The Farm Market Kitchen also provides assistance with marketing, branding and e-commerce to ensure its members have all the resources they need to successfully nurture their businesses. Members can even sell their products at the store located in the same facility.<sup>146</sup>

## 2. Community Kitchens

Community kitchens provide local farmers, gardeners and other food producers with the capacity and space to process, store, and distribute their produce locally. Often operated through joint-use agreements with schools or churches, community kitchens fill a gap in infrastructure by providing a space for growers to prepare fresh produce for sale in local or regional markets.<sup>144</sup> State and local policymakers can increase funding for and facilitate the establishment of community kitchens. Doing so would provide rural areas, which often lack appropriate facilities for the establishment of a local or regional food system, with increased capacity to support local food production.

Community kitchens allow rural residents not involved in the agriculture industry to take part in the handling and preparation of fresh produce that will then be sold to local markets.<sup>145</sup> In addition, community kitchens can serve as a space for educational classes on healthy cooking and nutrition or for the distribution of healthy meals to low-income families. Engaging the community in the production of local foods, through hands-on assistance or joint-use of communal spaces, can expose rural residents to the value of fresh local food and encourage healthy behaviors in their daily lives.

### || POTENTIAL STAKEHOLDERS

#### Policymakers

- ▶ State and local policymakers

#### Other government and community stakeholders

- ▶ Local agriculture advocacy organizations, food policy councils, and community coalitions
- ▶ School districts
- ▶ Local co-op organizations
- ▶ Community education programs
- ▶ Local public health and environmental health departments
- ▶ Land grant universities and researchers
- ▶ Community members

### || RESOURCES

- ▶ Greensgrow Community Kitchen, Policy and Procedure Handbook 2012  
<http://greengrow.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/01/Greengrow-Community-Kitchen-Policy-Handbook-2012.pdf>
- ▶ Manistee Community Kitchen  
<http://manisteeKitchen.org/programs/cookingmatters>



### 3. Nutrition and Healthy Cooking Education

Teaching residents how to shop for and prepare affordable, nutritious meals can help foster daily healthy eating habits. State and local policymakers can encourage local schools and organizations to provide health and cooking education to rural residents and utilize existing venues such as schools, Boy and Girl Scout organizations, Boys and Girls Clubs, community colleges, nursing homes, food pantries, and churches.<sup>147</sup> Local universities and nonprofits can also help to connect nutritionists and chefs with community leaders to facilitate healthy eating and cooking classes.

Hands-on cooking classes can give rural residents direct knowledge of how to prepare healthy meals and provide a valuable way to engage people in learning about nutrition. Trips to local markets, food kitchens, restaurants, gardens, and farms can offer additional opportunities to teach people to identify healthy and unhealthy foods and strategies focused on maximizing nutrition and minimizing cost.

Workplace wellness programs provide another opportunity to improve the health and education of rural residents. Employers can use offices and workrooms to provide information on nutrition and healthy cooking through such programs as lunchtime courses, access to online resources for health information, or daily exercise breaks.<sup>148</sup>

#### || POTENTIAL STAKEHOLDERS

##### Policymakers

- ▶ State and local elected or appointed officials

##### Other government and community stakeholders

- ▶ Schools
- ▶ Community centers
- ▶ Local public health organizations, hospitals, and clinics
- ▶ Nursing homes
- ▶ Fitness and recreation centers, YMCA
- ▶ Community kitchens
- ▶ Local nonprofits
- ▶ After-school programs
- ▶ Boys and Girls Clubs, Girls and Boy Scout troops
- ▶ Public library
- ▶ Farmers' markets and local farmers
- ▶ Local restaurants, food markets, and food pantries

#### || RESOURCES

- ▶ University of Minnesota Extension, Health and Nutrition, Toolkits and Resources  
<http://www.extension.umn.edu/family/health-and-nutrition/>
- ▶ WhyHunger, National Hunger Clearinghouse, Cooking Up Community: Nutrition Education in Emergency Food Programs  
[www.whyhunger.org/uploads/fileAssets/a86cb1\\_10a252.pdf](http://www.whyhunger.org/uploads/fileAssets/a86cb1_10a252.pdf)

#### SPOTLIGHT



#### “HEALTHY EATING EVERY DAY!” AT PORT TOWNSEND PUBLIC LIBRARY

The public library in Port Townsend, a town of 9,000 residents in Washington state, set out to improve the health of its community through a “Healthy Eating Every Day!” program. After conducting an initial assessment of the needs of residents, the Port Townsend Public Library improved its collection of printed materials on health and nutrition, created an online resource for nutrition information, held cooking classes and demonstrations for families, and hosted events featuring authors of books related to healthy eating.<sup>149</sup>

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Advancing Policies to Support Healthy Eating and Active Living

1300 L Street NW, Suite 975

Washington, DC 20005

(202) 265-5112

[www.leadershipforhealthycommunities.org](http://www.leadershipforhealthycommunities.org)



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