

Salud America!

The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation Research
Network to Prevent Obesity Among Latino Children

ISSUE BRIEF

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How to Achieve Better Food in the Neighborhood for Latino Kids

Introduction

In many Latino neighborhoods, fast food and corner stores often outnumber and are used more than supermarkets and farmers' markets, resulting in inadequate consumption of healthy foods and overconsumption of unhealthy foods—part of the reason Latino kids are more likely to be overweight or obese than their peers.

How can healthy foods and drinks be the available, affordable, and desired choice?

Healthy food financing initiatives can boost access to healthy, affordable foods by offering supermarkets and farmers' markets certain incentives to develop their businesses in underserved areas.

Government financing initiatives also encourage existing corner stores to expand their inventory of healthy, affordable foods. Separate programs allow low-income consumers to use food vouchers when shopping at farmers' markets.

Also, more marketing of healthy foods, and less of junk foods, can help spur desirability.

These efforts can build a culture of health where everyone is empowered to live the healthiest lives they can.

The Evidence

Latino communities often have less access to healthy affordable foods.

- Latino kids are more likely to live in poverty, causing dietary quality to suffer.
- Latino neighborhoods have one-third as many supermarkets as non-Latino ones.
- *Tiendas/bodegas* (Latino markets) offer limited or expensive selections of low-fat dairy or meat products.

Increased supermarket access in Latino communities is linked to healthy body weights.

- In Latino neighborhoods, kids' body weight outcomes improved when the number of chain supermarkets increased, and when in close proximity to grocery stores with healthy options, studies showed.

Adding supermarkets improves access to healthy food and increases economic vitality in underserved areas.



ABOUT THIS ISSUE BRIEF

This issue brief is based on a research review prepared by Allyson Perry, Ph.D., Margie Patak, M.S., MargiePatak.com, and Amelie G. Ramirez, Dr.P.H., and Kipling J. Gallion, M.A., University of Texas Health Science Center at San Antonio. The full research review, which includes citations, is available at <http://bit.ly/SaludFood>.

For more information on Salud America!, visit <http://bit.ly/SaludAmerica>.



- The federal Healthy Food Financing Initiative (HFFI) offers incentives—tax credits, zoning incentives, equipment, and financial, legal, or technical assistance—to encourage supermarkets and farmers’ markets to locate in underserved areas. It has provided 75 grants in underserved communities from 2011-2014.
- An HFFI grantee is creating cooperative grocery stores and two mobile grocery stores that will contract with immigrant vegetable growers in a low-income area of Minneapolis (10.5% Latino), creating 38 new jobs.
- A New York City program is expected to create 15 new grocery stores, upgrade 10 existing stores, and create 1,100 new jobs using zoning and financial incentives in underserved, Latino neighborhoods.
- A Pennsylvania program developed 1.67 million square feet of retail space to improve healthy food access for 500,000 residents using grants and loans to develop grocery stores.

Farmer’s markets have potential to increase Latinos’ healthy food consumption.

- Latinos report a willingness to support farmers’ markets introduced into their neighborhoods.
- Presence of a farmer’s market was linked to greater consumption of fruits and vegetables among immigrant women in New York City.

At corner stores, initiatives that expand healthy food offerings increase healthy food purchases.

- The more fruits and vegetables made available in corner stores, the more likely customers (50% of whom were Latino) were to buy them.
- North Carolina *tiendas* increased the amount of fruits and vegetables in customers’ diets after installing necessary store equipment and training employees to promote fresh produce.
- A New York City program increased the number and promotion of healthy options at 1,000 *bodegas*, leading to 45% more milk sales, 32% more fruit sales, and 26% more vegetable sales. The percentage of customers who bought healthier promoted options rose from 5% to 16%.

Incentives for WIC and SNAP participants can boost availability and consumption of healthy food.

- Because of financial constraints, food purchases are driven almost exclusively by price.
- Latinos comprise 32% of participants in Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) and 19% of participants in Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP).
- When given incentives, such as WIC subsidies for healthy foods at farmer’s markets, low-income Latinos are particularly likely to improve their diets. For example, incentivizing electronic benefit transfer (EBT) purchases at farmers’ markets increased sales of or spending on fruits and vegetables in New York City, Rochester, N.Y., Philadelphia, and Massachusetts.
- After governmental revisions of WIC food packages to offer healthier foods, studies reported improved availability, variety, and sales of healthy foods, particularly vegetables in Latino neighborhoods. Latino kids had a 3% increase in consumption of low- or non-fat milk, significantly increased consumption of dietary fiber and fruits and vegetables, and simultaneously reduced obesity in kids ages 1-4.

Marketing of foods and beverages and restaurants disproportionately focuses on promotion of unhealthy foods, especially among Latino kids.

- Latino youth consume more media and have higher spending power than other youth.
- Studies show that Latino youth influence parental food purchases using “pester power” and thus have become “superconsumers” of soda, candy, and snacks.

- Two studies found that advertisements to Spanish-speaking youth are more likely to promote unhealthy foods (82% of ads) than advertisements to English-speaking youth (72.5%).
- Despite self-regulation of marketing to kids by food and beverage companies, ethnically targeted marketing has increased.

Conclusions and Policy Implications

Conclusions

- Lack of access to healthy, affordable food is especially prevalent in low-income communities, including Latino communities.
- Access to, and purchases of, affordable healthy foods tends to improve when supermarkets or farmers' markets are introduced or when healthy food offerings in corner stores are expanded and promoted in Latino and underserved communities. These initiatives may also improve the diets of these consumers.
- Purchases of healthy food appear to increase when financial subsidies reduce the costs of healthy foods for underserved consumers.
- When the operational and technological capacity of farmers' markets is expanded to accept WIC or SNAP vouchers, the purchases of fresh fruits and vegetables increase among underserved communities.
- Extensive marketing of unhealthy foods and beverages to kids, especially Spanish-speaking youth, increases demand for and consumption of these foods. Regulation of marketing to kids has not been effective thus far.

Policy Implications

- Encourage more supermarkets, farmers' markets or other sources of affordable healthy foods to operate in underserved communities through zoning, land-use planning, and community development efforts.
- Provide incentives for programs to increase the number of supermarkets or farmers' markets in underserved populations and/or expand healthy food offerings in corner stores. Legal, technical and financial support should be provided. The incentives can be grants or loans, tax credits, refrigeration for fresh fruits and vegetables, free publicity and marketing advice, or linkages to wholesale distributors.
- Implement nutritional requirements for foods donated to and distributed from emergency food banks.
- Continue, through the national Healthy Food Financing Initiative, to ensure consistent, sustained funding streams to the state and local level to enhance access to healthy foods.
- Give vendors at farmer's markets financial and logistical support, including reimbursement for wireless or electronic technologies to enable them to accept EBT purchases.
- Provide financial incentives, such as coupons for healthy foods, to WIC or SNAP participants to encourage and enable greater purchases of them.
- Remove sugar-sweetened beverages from SNAP, which could alleviate early childhood obesity in low-income Latino populations.