

2016 FOOD ACCESS UPDATE

EVALUATING
ACCESS TO
HEALTHY
FOOD IN
SOUTH
CAROLINA

A REPORT UPDATE BY THE SOUTH CAROLINA FOOD ACCESS TASK FORCE

The South Carolina Food Access Task Force was borne out of the SC Food Policy Council with support from the SC Department of Agriculture, to address the barriers to healthy food access in South Carolina. The Task Force is composed of members from the private, nonprofit, government, and academic sectors with representation from a variety of industries including transportation, health, farming, economic development, retail, and research.

The primary goal of the Task Force is to expand the availability of nutritious food by developing and equipping healthy food retail and wholesale markets in underserved communities through the formulation and implementation of key policy recommendations focused on reducing critical barriers to food access.

In 2014, the Task Force developed five key recommendations for state and local leaders that would enhance the supply of healthy, affordable food in every community and delivered them in a report titled "Access to Healthy Food in South Carolina." The recommendations in this document were rooted in a strategy that addresses capital, affordability, supply, planning, and transportation. This update will provide a summary of the progress that has been made since the initial report was released along with updated recommendations, success stories, and calls to action.

View the original report "Access to Healthy Food in South Carolina" at scfoodaccess.com/resources.

SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

In an effort to expand the availability of healthy food in our state, the South Carolina Food Access Task Force recommends policies to support the following areas:

1 CAPITAL: The General Assembly should continue to provide funding to support the healthy food financing initiative, which provides capital to support the establishment, renovation, or expansion of different food projects, including food hubs, farm businesses, mobile markets, small food stores, and large grocery stores that increase access to healthy food.

2 AFFORDABILITY: Ensure healthy foods are affordable to low-income individuals and families through expanding the number and reach of farmers markets and other healthy food outlets (e.g., direct marketing farmers, produce box programs) that accept SNAP, SNAP Healthy Bucks, WIC and Senior Farmers Market Nutrition Program vouchers, and WIC fruit and vegetable vouchers. Ensure these locations are welcoming and accessible to people of all racial and socioeconomic backgrounds.

3 SUPPLY: Support existing and create new initiatives across the state recruiting, training, and stewarding food-producing farmers. Increase the coordination and support of existing businesses, nonprofits, and organizations in SC that are working on local food production, aggregation, processing, and distribution. This includes technical assistance for researching, writing, and applying for potential funding opportunities as well as increased outreach efforts and communication from sources offering funding and support. Increase opportunities to access capital for businesses and nonprofits bringing SC produced food to under-served populations and food deserts. Educate farmers on how to make their businesses sustainable and educate consumers on the benefits of supporting local, food-producing farmers and how to feasibly attain these products. Institutional markets using tax dollars to purchase food should be given supports to be able to feasibly obtain and use food produced in South Carolina.

4 PLANNING: Encourage local governments to integrate planning and zoning regulations into comprehensive plans that promote healthy food production, processing, distribution, and access.

5 TRANSPORTATION: Build collaborative relationships between healthy food advocates, community planners, and transportation agencies to identify and support a wide range of policies and projects that increase food security in communities with limited access to transportation.

RECOMMENDATION 1: CAPITAL

Summary of Progress

Based on the recommendation of the 2014 Food Access Task Force Report, in 2015, South Carolina Community Loan Fund (SCCLF) partnered with the South Carolina Coastal Conservation League, Eat Smart Move More SC, and the Carolina Farm Stewardship Association to advocate for state funding to support the Healthy Food Financing Initiative. As a result of these efforts, the South Carolina General Assembly included \$250,000 in the state budget for the Healthy Food Financing Initiative. This allocation was vetoed by the Governor, and not enough votes were secured to override the veto.

SCCLF continued its advocacy efforts in the 2016 session, and was able to secure \$250,000 in the budget approved by the South Carolina General Assembly. This time the Governor's veto of these funds was overridden, and the SCCLF was successful in obtaining state funds for the SC Healthy Food Financing Initiative in the state budget.



Update to Recommendation

The General Assembly should continue to provide funding to support the healthy food financing initiative, which provides capital to support the establishment, renovation, or expansion of different food projects, including food hubs, farm businesses, mobile markets, small food stores, and large grocery stores that increase access to healthy food.

Call to Action

South Carolina Food Access Task Force should support advocacy efforts to continue the successful work of the SC Healthy Food Financing Initiative, specifically:

- 1 mobilize their network of supporters to provide outreach to the public and to elected officials about the need for and benefits of healthy food financing;
- 2 publicize the success of projects that increase access to healthy foods; and
- 3 communicate with their legislators during the budget process about the need for funding for healthy food projects.

Success Story: Healthy Food Financing Initiative (HFFI)

In 2011 South Carolina Community Loan Fund received a \$500,000 Healthy Food Financing Award from the US Department of Treasury, making it one of twelve Community Development Financial Institutions (CDFI) to receive Healthy Food Financing Initiative funding in the inaugural year of the program. Since that time, SCCLF has leveraged the award into more than \$2 million for its HFFI from foundations, individual investors, and financial institutions. SCCLF's \$2.98 million in financing has facilitated the development of \$15.3 million in healthy food projects throughout South Carolina.

SCCLF will revolve the funding from the state through its revolving loan fund, which means that these dollars will be recycled for new projects after being repaid by the borrower.

RECOMMENDATION 2: AFFORDABILITY

Summary of Progress

Vendors offering the SNAP Healthy Bucks program increased from 6 pilot farmers market sites in 2014 to 21 sites that include farmers markets, direct marketing farmers, farm stands, and a produce box program in 2016. SNAP redemptions at these sites totaled \$51,227.04 between January to December 2015; additionally, \$17,060 worth of Healthy Bucks incentives were redeemed during the same time-frame. The number of farmers markets accepting SNAP increased from 41 to 54, and the number of direct marketing farmers accepting SNAP increased from 32 to 152 from 2014 to 2016. A farmers market inventory was conducted to determine locations, hours of operation, and acceptance of SNAP. Two entities in the state – Hub City Farmers' Market (with subawards going to Travelers Rest and Johns Island Farmers Markets) and Diane's Call – received United States Department of Agriculture Farmers Market SNAP Support Grants to increase outreach of and capacity to accept and redeem SNAP.

Call to Action

- 1 The General Assembly should continue to provide funding to support the SNAP Healthy Bucks Program.
- 2 State agencies, nonprofits, and grassroots food policy councils should develop a coordinated effort to expand and market healthy food retail options that participate in nutrition assistance programs.
- 3 Farmers markets and other community-based healthy food retail outlets should ensure that people of different races/ethnicities and socioeconomic backgrounds are represented within their decision making structures (e.g., advisory boards), and that their vendors are also representative of different demographics.

Update to Recommendation

Ensure healthy foods are affordable to low-income individuals and families through expanding the number and reach of farmers markets and other healthy food outlets (e.g., direct marketing farmers, produce box programs) that accept SNAP, SNAP Healthy Bucks, WIC and Senior Farmers Market Nutrition Program vouchers, and WIC fruit and vegetable vouchers. Ensure these locations are welcoming and accessible to people of all racial and socioeconomic backgrounds.



Success Story: FoodShare SC

FoodShare SC is a program dedicated to ensuring good healthy food to all. Customers are able to purchase a Fresh Food Box every other week filled with 12 to 16 varieties of fruits and vegetables for either \$20 in cash or \$10 in SNAP; SNAP customers receive a \$10 Healthy Bucks incentive for the remainder of the cost. Since its launch in April 2015, over 5,000 boxes have been purchased, with over 50% of sales coming from SNAP. The main hub for the program is the Booker Washington Heights Cultural Arts Center, located in a part of the city that experiences high health disparities. There are also 6 satellite locations throughout Richland and Lexington Counties where people can place and pick up their orders. FoodShare SC recently expanded to Fairfield County, and with the support of a USDA grant that is allowing the program to purchase a refrigerated truck, will soon expand to Marlboro, Dillon, and Marion Counties. Learn more about the program at <http://foodsharesc.org/>

RECOMMENDATION 3: SUPPLY

Summary of Progress

Food systems work to support food-producing farms has increased over recent years in South Carolina, and several food policy councils have organized to foster this activity. From 2011-2015 SC's Farm to Institution Program has grown from 52 to 231 schools, and in 2014 the program began expanding beyond schools and preschools in efforts to engage hospitals, businesses, government agencies, and other organizations. Grow Food Carolina, the state's first food hub which opened its doors in Charleston in 2011, has grown to support 75 farmers across the state. Additional food hubs are currently being organized in other regions, and programs training new and beginning farmers have expanded. Funding for the Healthy Food Financing Initiative was secured through the state budget giving enterprises which increase food access, including food-producing farmers, opportunities to utilize this funding. Several organizations such as the Swamp Rabbit Café and Grocery and Sustainable Midlands in conjunction with the Midlands Food Alliance secured Local Food Promotion Program or Farmers Market Promotion Program grant funding through the USDA. The SC Farm Aid Bill also became law, showing SC's support for the agricultural community and giving financial assistance to farmers who were affected by the 2015 flood.

Update to Recommendation

1. Support existing and create new initiatives across the state recruiting, training, and stewarding food-producing farmers. Increase the coordination and support of existing businesses, nonprofits, and organizations in SC that are working on local food production, aggregation, processing, and distribution. This includes technical assistance for researching, writing, and applying for potential funding opportunities as well as increased outreach efforts and communication from sources offering funding and support.
2. Increase opportunities to access capital for businesses and nonprofits bringing SC produced food to under-served populations and food deserts.
3. Educate farmers on how to make their businesses sustainable and educate consumers on the benefits of supporting local, food-producing farmers and how to feasibly attain these products. Institutional markets using tax dollars to purchase food should be given supports to be able to feasibly obtain and use food produced in South Carolina.

Call to Action

Potential focus areas for advocacy include: increased funding and support for local food aggregation, processing, and distribution; increased funding and support for new and beginning farmer training; incentives to encourage food producers to accept SNAP; supports for institutional markets who utilize tax dollars for food purchases to be able to prioritize and feasibly purchase food produced in South Carolina.



Success Story: New Farmer Programs

With the average age of SC farmers now up to 59 years, SC puts its largest industry at risk if it does not invest efforts into encouraging and training the next generation of successful agripreneurs. Many of those entering agriculture have very little direct experience.

The SC New and Beginning Farmer Program is the only statewide emerging farmer program in SC and achieves its objectives through collaboration with other statewide organizations and agencies who share their mission. The program began in 2010, has graduated over 200 participants, and hopes to secure state funding for the program within the next two years.

Lowcounty Local First's Growing New Farmers Program has trained over 130 new farmers and food systems leaders since 2011. In this five-month introductory-level program, participants receive curriculum-based instruction and experiential, hands-on field learning at DirtWorks Incubator Farm. Graduates receive a Certificate of Sustainable Agriculture from the College of Charleston.

Greenville Technical College's Sustainable Ag Certificate in Applied Science was developed in response to a need expressed by leaders of the region's agribusiness. The group had seen the surge in the number of start-ups in a variety of related ventures, and too often the passion and enthusiasm wasn't rounded out by the business knowledge needed to make the business itself sustainable. GTC's certificate program is structured to provide a solid foundation in farming as a profession and will begin fall of 2016.

RECOMMENDATION 4: PLANNING

Summary of Progress

The SC Health + Planning Advisory Committee partners have continued to promote the *SC Health + Planning Toolkit: A Healthy Eating and Active Living Policy Guide* as a key resource to assist communities with integrating healthy eating and active living principles into comprehensive plans. Over the past two years, numerous trainings on the Toolkit have been conducted to a wide variety of audiences, including the SC Chapter of the American Planning Association, SC Association of Counties, SC American Society of Landscape Architects, Urban Land Institute, and SC Obesity Summit.

The Advisory Committee has recently analyzed all current SC county comprehensive plans for overall trends and policy best practices related to healthy eating and active living as outlined in the Toolkit. The evaluation results, included in the *SC Healthy Comprehensive Planning Project Baseline Report*, create a baseline measurement of healthy eating and active living principles in county comprehensive plans. To date, a minimum number of counties are accounting for healthy eating and active living in comprehensive plans (only 2 counties are accounting for healthy eating and only 12 counties are accounting for active living in their comprehensive plans).

Targeted outreach and technical assistance to local level stakeholders in Aiken, Berkeley, Darlington, Florence, Greenwood, Orangeburg, Spartanburg, and York Counties has been conducted to encourage the integration of policies that promote healthy food production, processing, distribution, and access in county comprehensive planning.

Update to Recommendation

The Task Force upholds its initial recommendation to encourage local governments to integrate planning and zoning regulations into comprehensive plans that promote healthy food production, processing, distribution, and access.



Success Story: City of Florence

The City of Florence, in an effort to integrate healthy eating and active living into the community, is creating a zoning overlay district targeted at allowing specialty manufacturing and sales of foods and beverages. To coordinate and promote this district, Florence has hired a part time professional whose sole responsibility is making this district successful. Another key component of the district will be the location of the local food hub and farmer's market within its boundaries, which are strategically located adjacent to Florence's food desert. It is the intention of the City to promote locally sourced food products in this effort.

Call to Action

- 1 Counties should utilize the Toolkit to integrate healthy eating and active living principles when updating county comprehensive plans. A re-analysis of county comprehensive plans should be conducted to compare to the baseline evaluation to monitor the state's progress with integration of these best practice indicators into planning efforts.
- 2 While the focus of the *SC Health + Planning Toolkit* is on county comprehensive plans, the Toolkit should also be used in municipal comprehensive plans as well as in a wide range of local government planning efforts to develop policy related to planning and public health.
- 3 Planning partners have recently been working with local communities in select areas of the state to develop pedestrian plans in support of increased opportunities for active living. Specific regulatory recommendations are being provided to the communities, not only to promote walkability, but also improve access to healthy foods. These type of planning efforts at the local level should be expanded throughout the state.

RECOMMENDATION 5: TRANSPORTATION

Summary of Progress

In the past several years mobile markets and food trucks have emerged as a popular and effective short term intervention strategy for providing healthy food options in communities without reliable access to personal and public transportation options. New mobile market businesses and programs are being implemented in a number of communities across the state.

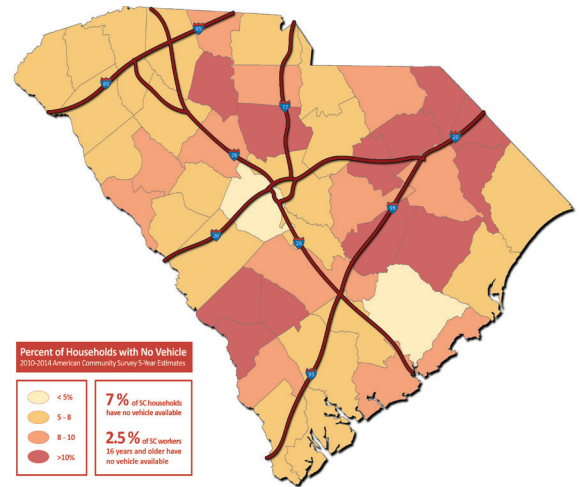
Food advocates, community planners, and representatives from transportation agencies have also been working together to better understand and frame the longer term issues surrounding the complex and interdependent relationships between land use, transportation, job security, and food security.

Call to Action

1 Despite the growing popularity and success of mobile markets as a means for increasing access to healthy foods, longer term policy based strategies are also needed to address food security issues in urban and rural communities with limited transportation access.

2 Food advocates, planners, and transportation agencies need to develop better interdisciplinary communication networks to build awareness and identify common ground. Facilitating an ongoing, open dialogue around transportation, food access, and job security issues will help to build collaborative, resource leveraging relationships and strengthen support for mutually beneficial policy, program, and project recommendations.

3 Potential focus areas for advocacy include: increased funding for transit, promotion of ridesharing programs, coordination between human service transportation providers, supporting development of mobile markets, subsidizing personal vehicle ownership in rural communities, and encouraging mixed-use, transit oriented development in urban areas.



Update to Recommendation

Build collaborative relationships between healthy food advocates, community planners, and transportation agencies to identify and support a wide range of policies and projects that increase food security in communities with limited access to transportation.



Success Story: Mobile Markets

In the Upstate, The Mill Village Mobile Market continues to bring farm fresh foods into “food-desert” communities where it sets up shop at local churches, businesses, and community centers throughout the Greenville area. Since 2010, the Hub City Mobile Market has steadily expanded its service in the Spartanburg area using a retrofitted step-van. In 2016 it plans to make over 400 stops at local churches, schools, community centers, corporate offices, and special events.

In the Midlands, Richland-Lexington School District Five has deployed a summer food truck to designated locations within the district as part of a continued effort to provide healthy meal options to students in need during the summer months.

In the Lowcountry, the Lowcountry Street Grocery is a new mobile farmers’ market designed to make healthy, local food affordable and accessible to Charleston area residents. Service will be provided by a classic retrofitted school bus that will set up shop at multiple convenient locations six days a week.

WORK GROUP MEMBERS

Capital:

Anna Hamilton Lewin, *SC Community Loan Fund*

Emily Pineda, *SC Department of Health and Environmental Control*

Lowell Atkinson, *SC Association for Community Economic Development*

Affordability:

Carrie Draper, *Center for Research in Nutrition and Health Disparities*

Coleman Tanner, *Eat Smart Move More SC*

Jamie Gibson, *Hub City Farmers Market*

Krystal Chapman, *Department of Social Services*

Sandra Spann, *SC Department of Health and Environmental Control*

Supply:

Katie Welborn, *CopaSCities Project at the University of South Carolina*

Dave Lamie, *Clemson REC & SC New and Beginning Farmer Program*

Lowell Atkinson, *SC Association for Community Economic Development*

Stephen Slice, *Darla Moore School of Business & the South Carolina Agricultural Council*

Planning/ Transportation:

Teresa Hill, *SC Department of Health and Environmental Control*

Gregory Sprouse, *Central Midlands COG*

Bob Schneider, *the Comet*

Dan Weidenbenner, *Mill Village Farms*

DaVeda Sistrunk, *the Comet*

Coleman Tanner, *Eat Smart Move More SC*

John Newman, *John M Newman Planning*

Kaitlyn Flanagan, *Central Midlands COG*

Kat Moreland, *Clemson University Parking and Transportation Services*

Kate DeWitt, *Lowcountry Street Grocery*

Keith Scott, *City of Anderson*

Lynn Stockman, *Newberry County Council on Aging*

Pam Dukes, *Senior Resources*

Phillip Lookadoo, *City of Florence*

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