

# The Art of Helping Communities Feed Themselves

## HEALTHY COMMUNITIES STRATEGY

Increase the number of community or small retail venues providing access to healthy foods.

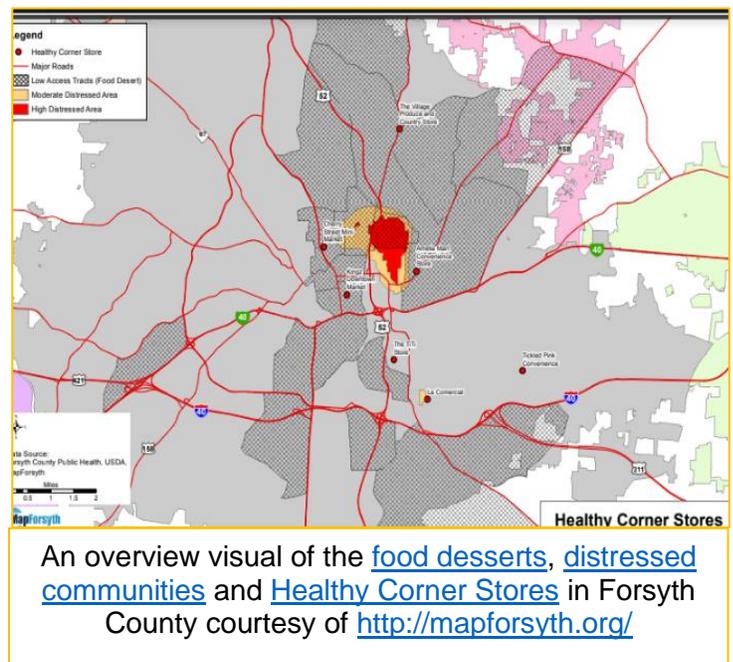
## Public Health Problem/Issue

According to the U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) 2015-2020 Dietary Guidelines for Americans, access to foods that support healthy eating patterns contributes to an individual's health throughout his or her life. Research shows that there are barriers and disparities in the accessibility and availability of foods that support healthy eating<sup>1</sup>. Individuals without a vehicle or access to convenient public transportation, or who do not have food venues with healthy choices within walking distance, have limited access to foods that support healthy eating patterns<sup>2</sup>. Data from 2012—2013 show that the average distance from U.S. households to the nearest supermarket was 2.19 miles<sup>3</sup>.

Food deserts are defined by the USDA as census tracts in which at least 33 percent of the population lives more than a mile from a large grocery store or supermarket. Winston-Salem in Forsyth County, NC has 21 food deserts and is ranked seventh on a national list of metropolitan statistical areas with the highest rate of food hardship according to the 2018 Food Research & Action Center report.

To address the problem of food insecurity and food deserts, the North Carolina Healthy Food Retail Collaborative developed the [NC Healthy Food Retail Designation](#) which recognizes small food stores that stock healthier options. Any small food store in North Carolina that meets the criteria established by the Collaborative is eligible to receive a "Healthy Food Sold Here" certificate of designation and a door decal.

In an effort to address the Healthy People 2020 objective – Reduce household food insecurity, and in doing so reduce hunger, the Forsyth Public Health Department worked with local residents and organizations to develop innovative ways to assist local store owners in providing healthier food choices in areas of Forsyth County with limited access to supermarkets or large grocery stores.



## Taking Action/Intervention

The Forsyth County Health Department used Preventive Health and Health Services Block Grant (PHHS) funding to provide staff support that focused on working with small retail store owners to stock healthier options in their stores and assisting them in reaching the NC Healthy Food Retail Designation. Staff began by developing a network of partners, called the Healthy Corner Store Network, which included representatives

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.healthypeople.gov/2020/topics-objectives/topic/social-determinants-health/interventions-resources/access-to-foods-that>

<sup>2</sup> Ploeg MV, Breneman V, Farrigan T, Hamrick K, Hopkins D, Kaufman P, et al. Access to affordable and nutritious food: measuring and understanding food deserts and their consequences: report to Congress. Washington: USDA Economic Research Service; 2009 Jun. 160 p.

<sup>3</sup> Ver Ploeg M, Mancino L, Todd JE, Clay DM, Scharadin B. Where do Americans usually shop for food and how do they travel to get there? initial findings from the national household food acquisition and purchase survey. Washington: USDA Economic Research Service; 2015 Mar. 27 p. EIB-138.

from small store owners/managers, county health coalitions, food policy councils, non-profit agencies and ministries, food banks/food pantries, local agriculture agencies, local businesses and community members.

The Healthy Corner Store Network developed and implemented a detailed plan for making successful store changes. This consisted of the following:

- Connecting small store owners with sources of local produce from an urban farm/community garden
- Assisting store owners in securing grants funding
- Educating store customers on healthy food and food preparation
- Improving the aesthetics of the exterior of the stores and its grounds

“Only through working collaboratively to build networks and steer resources to community leadership in traditionally underserved areas have we been able to begin making progress,”

-- Marcus Hill, Lead Coordinator of Forsyth Foodworks and Healthy Corner Store Network member

## Results

The Healthy Corner Store Network worked with East Winston residents to accomplish their vision of creating a healthier community with increased food accessibility. Five stores in this community received the Healthy Small Food Retail Designation. These included:

- ❖ Cherry Street Mini Market
- ❖ The TiTi Store
- ❖ Amelia Mart Convenience
- ❖ La Comercial
- ❖ Kingz Downtown Market

The Healthy Corner Store Network members overseeing the urban farm/community garden supplied approximately 500 pounds of produce to be used by the local food markets, the soup kitchen and by partners for healthy cooking demonstrations.

The Cherry Street Mini Market received a grant from the NC Dept. of Agriculture & Consumer Services Healthy Food Small Retailer Program to purchase refrigerators and coolers. This enabled the store owner to stock perishable healthy food options.

The Healthy Cornerstone Network partners provided cooking demonstrations with healthy recipes featuring ingredients found in the convenience stores. Local residents were able to taste the recipes, take home recipe copies and information on nutrition and how to cook healthy meals for their families.



Healthy Communities staff harvesting produce from the Forsyth Public Health Department Community Garden to provide fresh produce to East Winston Community



Beautification of the environment outside of the stores played a big role in fostering a sense of security in the neighborhoods surrounding the stores. Healthy Communities staff coordinated the "Healthy Message Through the Arts Event" which consisted of the creation of murals for participating healthy corner stores not only as a way to market the businesses but also to beautify



areas in need of revitalization. The event consisted of 200 painted canvases by youth that displayed their vision of a healthy community. Approximately 400 participants attended.

"I appreciate the Forsyth County Health Department for providing a whole new way of supporting fruits and vegetables in the community. I have visited three of the Healthy Corner Stores, which all shared the same outlook for the community-- to supply fresh fruit/vegetables and a good pathway for the community to support each other."

*--Fredo Felix, creator of healthy corner store murals*

