



Module 11: Food

Part 3: Healthy Corner Stores

All right, so part three will cover a little bit about healthy corner stores. Thinking about how corner stores can be changed in communities to increase access to healthy food and the role that corner stores really have as part of consumer buying patterns and some of the research that we know to date.

In Philadelphia the Food Trust has worked with the health department to create the Philadelphia Healthy Corner Store Network, emblemized by the depiction here on the screen. The goal is to provide support and to profitably introduce healthy changes. We say profitably because we don't want the changes to incur any cost. In fact, we can't afford to subsidize the products in the store over the long haul. What we wanted to do was identify a reasonable strategy to introduce new products, healthier products, into stores in a way that the retailer would understand the value of the product, both in terms of value to the community but also the value to his or her bottom line. Then to provide the training and support and potentially equipment that would be needed in order to support those changes and continue to build on the early changes that happened at enrollment.

What happens in Philadelphia is initially a store owner will be approached. They will be invited to participate. Part of the participation includes the requirement that they select from a menu of items for new products they would like to introduce. In return we begin to provide training and workshops on how they can sell healthier items effectively, how they can market them, how they can handle them, which pieces of produce you should put next to each other and which ones you shouldn't, how to display it.

Ultimately, they may become eligible for a conversion which is a fancy term to describe the opportunity to get some infrastructure or equipment changes. Things like refrigeration, shelving, baskets to help display items.

What we know about shopping behaviors is that youth and adults shop very regularly at their local corner store. In fact, it's a primary location for using WIC dollars and it's also an important part of the community for using everyday, stop in shopping trips. Early data, this is from a study that was done a few years ago, looking at shopping behaviorism among children, students, they spend about a dollar on average on two items per purchase and that the number of calories that they buy is around 360 calories. When we talk about the obesity epidemic and the opportunity to influence consumption it is clear that the corner store is a location that's worth some time and investment.



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What we've begun to do is also think about marketing and how marketing efforts in corner stores can promote healthier items and potentially educate consumers about alternatives. For example around beverages you might want to think about having soda, fruit drinks and sport drinks less often, they're sugar sweetened beverages, having diet drinks or 100% juice sometimes and thinking carefully about having water and fat free, low fat milk often.

I mentioned earlier the opportunity for conversions. Here is an example of small changes we've been able to make in stores that have resulted in increase sales of produce in those stores. You can see before, very typical looking store. We had introduced some produce and then after we supported them with some if the tags and displays to add sort of an additional level of marketing professionalism to the display.

Here is another example of a conversion that was more significant. To anyone who goes into corner stores on a regular basis, a very typical looking corner store and really transforming it with support from a variety of different resources into a store that sold a lot of healthy food.

What's in it for the store owner? We see is that there is really an opportunity for them to make some money. If they are able to move the product, the profit margins on produce is as good as or better than what you get on packaged foods. The trick is being able to display the price and move the product. They also become eligible for the conversions on our program which may help them reduce the refrigeration costs if they are operating off of older refrigeration. Also the youth and marketing and outreach work that's done.

So what's happening now on the ground? What we know is that a lot of the data that has been collected on corner store programs to date has been collected either through self support mechanisms, the owner, operator themselves, through tabulations of sales for specific items, where they record pen and paper primarily, what was sold. When you are doing research on that then it really requires you to limit your data collection to a specific set of items.

In Pennsylvania here, Gary Foster and others have spent time thinking about how you can intercept individuals who are leaving the store to ask them what it is they purchased. What we're doing now is taking that to a new level, thinking about installing, we actually have installed six new systems in corner stores across the city to record on a sale by sale basis, what is being sold, how much it's selling for. Then that information can be compiled over time and tracked over time to get real time data on sales.



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This is a really exciting new investment that the Food Trust and the corner stores have made to be able to not just track what's being sold but to potentially test the power of new interventions, marketing or otherwise. These are happening primarily in level three stores, those ones that have already had a good bit of time with us.

The challenge in POS operations is not for the lighthearted. We know that it requires regular maintenance, it requires ongoing usage. And for stores that are used to a more informal and cash-based operations this could be a really difficult thing for them to adopt. We are in the early stages of this. The six stores that we have doing it are very committed and have demonstrated a great deal of promise. However, it's something to consider as people rule out similar mechanisms of data collection.

This is some early, early data from our system and we continue to get data every minute of every day. It shows how much people rely on the corner store especially for those snacks, beverages and grocery items. In addition to tobacco which has really been a benefit too for our public health department to understand. You'll see produce there is at 1.3% which may seem really, really low. I will remind you that in almost all of our stores it was 0% when we started off. As we begin to expand more and more the marketing efforts we hope to see that number rise.

The fourth part of the conversation today is about farmers markets.