

# Make sure children's schools and communities have healthy foods.



Children are better nourished in environments where affordable, healthy foods abound.

Good nutrition sets a foundation for children to grow into healthier, more secure adults. Healthy foods not only help fight off diet-related diseases, such as diabetes and heart disease, and prevent obesity; these foods also help children develop and grow, perform better in school, and get into healthy habits to last a lifetime.<sup>1</sup> In many parts of Texas, rural and urban communities face challenges finding fresh, healthy, affordable foods nearby. Having good foods readily available ensures more children grow up with a healthy diet and weight.<sup>2</sup>

## What to Know:

- **Texas has the second-highest rate of children who are food insecure,**<sup>3</sup> meaning that their families report it isn't always possible to have an adequate meal available for their children.<sup>4</sup>
- **Texas has a severe shortage of supermarkets** — in fact, fewer per capita than any state.<sup>5</sup> A scarcity of affordable, healthy food is linked to poorer health, especially diet-related illnesses in many areas.
- Having fresh, affordable food options leads to



healthier eating and less weight gain. One study found **the presence of grocery stores or fresh food retailers can increase fruit and vegetable consumption by up to 32%.**<sup>6</sup>

- Texas schools, with the support of the legislature and Texas Department of Agriculture, are helping address gaps through farm-to-school initiatives, which increase the availability of fresh, healthy foods in school cafeterias from Texas farms<sup>7</sup> in all 1,200 of the state's school districts.<sup>8</sup> According to the National Farm to School Network, **Texas is among the top eight states for farm-to-school efforts.**<sup>9</sup>
- Another innovative effort, underway in Houston, is looking into a **public-private financing effort that would stimulate supermarket development** in places that need grocery stores.<sup>10</sup> The initiative in Pennsylvania that served as a model for the Houston effort received an award from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention for its contribution to obesity prevention efforts, after it improved over 500,000 people's access to healthy food.<sup>11</sup> Attracting farmers markets and "healthy corner stores" (i.e., convenience stores that sell fruits and vegetables) also fits in with the healthy food financing approach.
- **School and community food gardens and urban agriculture increase the availability of fresh produce** in underserved areas, while giving communities a role. For example, school garden programs aim to teach children about nature and plants, alongside the importance of growing and eating nutritious foods.<sup>12</sup>

## How to Make it Happen:

- **Fight food insecurity and child obesity at the same time** by improving access to affordable, healthful foods, a solution which is easier, better for families, and more cost-effective than trying to change what low-income families can purchase with federal food assistance funds.
- **Expand access to farmers markets** and other retailers offering fresh fruits and vegetables, with support for innovative and effective public-private efforts like healthy food financing.
- **Continue to strengthen farm-to-school** linkages as an effective way to bring healthy foods into the school environment.
- **Support the growth and sustainability of local community food gardens**, for example, by establishing a process for cities to apply to use available state land for community gardening purposes and by continuing to support efforts to have gardens at schools.

For more information, visit: <http://tinyurl.com/FoodEverywhere>

## Thinking About Costs

Obesity and child hunger cost Texas billions of dollars each year, as they contribute to lost productivity, higher health care costs, and children missing more school. Efforts to bring healthy foods to communities lower these costs and can provide a boon to local economies. Such an effort in one state involved public-private financing to stimulate supermarket development in areas without access to healthy, fresh foods. The effort did more than prevent obesity for over a half-million people. It created and saved an estimated 5,000 jobs.

## Sources



### Thinking about Costs

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