

Healthy Corner Store Initiative

PASSAIC
NEW JERSEY

2016



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Corner Stores, also called bodegas or mom-and-pop shops, can be critical partners in improving access to healthy food and creating sustainable healthy environments for underserved communities.

In 2014, the New Jersey Partnership for Healthy Kids and the Food Trust introduced the Healthy Corner Store Initiative in New Jersey to provide training, technical assistance and resources to Corner Stores owners in order to increase fresh produce among other healthy products. In 2015, the New Jersey Partnership for Healthy Kids, the American Heart Association and the Food Trust convened to create a multi-sector task force to strengthen the impact and to further the reach of the healthy corner store initiative throughout the state, as well as for the development of programs and policy to expand the distribution, promotion and sale of healthy foods in New Jersey corner stores.

Key Findings Include:

- 1) Partnering with corner stores can be an effective strategy to improve healthy food access in underserved communities.**
- 2) Corner storeowners are willing to introduce healthy inventory, but they need consistent support and simple steps to follow.**
- 3) Making small investment in equipment for corners stores can significantly increase the stores' capacity to sell healthy products.**

The Healthy Corner Store Initiative has found that building relationships with store owners and working collaboratively with them to make gradual changes with support and training increases willingness and participation to sell healthy products in a profitable manner.

STATEWIDE IMPACT IN NEW JERSEY

The New Jersey Healthy Corner Store Initiative is a collaborative effort by the Food Trust and New Jersey Partnership for Healthy Kids funded by the Robert Wood Foundation. The initiative models the work in Philadelphia and seeks to further the existing efforts to provide resources and support to the communities in New Jersey interested in implementing healthy corner store efforts.

The statewide initiative includes¹:

- **Training workshops:** Interactive training workshops provide an opportunity for community partners involved in implementing healthy corner store projects to share successful strategies and build their capacity to work with store owners in their communities.
- **Technical Assistance:** Partners are eligible to receive on-site support on a variety of programming phases, including: canvassing and recruiting corner stores, training owners on how to profitably stock and sell healthy products, installing marketing materials and conducting in-store nutrition education lessons. Support is customized based on local needs and designed to build local capacity while expanding the network of healthy corner stores in New Jersey.
- **Marketing Materials:** Free marketing materials, including healthy recipe cards, signage to guide customers to healthy products, window decals and toolkits for store owners, are available for partners and participating stores throughout the state.
- **Mini-Grants:** A mini-grant program was developed to support local partners and corner store owners during various phases of development and to increase the corner store's capacity to sell fresh produce and other healthy foods. Mini-grants of up to \$5,000 per city or \$1,500 for individual stores were awarded in 2014 and 2015.

Approximately \$46,000 was distributed to 19 cities and supported 65 stores through this program. Mini-grant funds were used for a range of healthy corner store programming components, including:

- Conversion equipment such as refrigeration, shelving, paint and refurbishing of existing equipment
- Marketing campaigns that included event promotion, and materials such as fliers, newspaper advertisements, brochures, A-frame signs and logo designs
- Increased staff capacity
- Materials for in-store nutrition education lessons

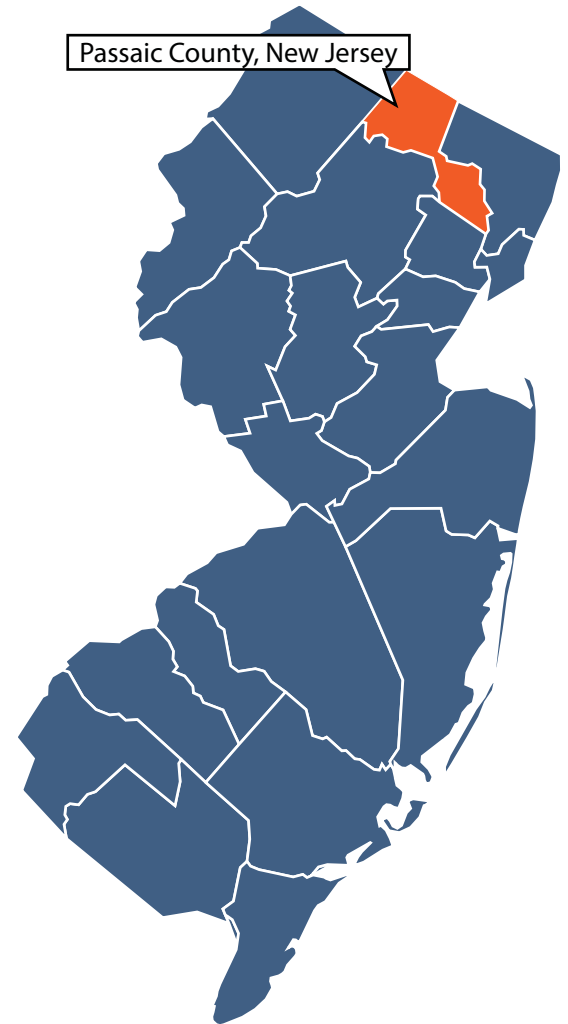
Our State Partners¹

The New Jersey Healthy Corner Stores partners with various organizations state to provide technical assistance their healthy corner store efforts. Partner organizations include:

- American Heart Association
- New Jersey YMCA State Alliance
- New Jersey Health Department
- Montclair Health Department
- New Jersey WIC Services
- Partnership for Maternal and Child Health of Northern New Jersey
- Rutgers University SNAP-Ed

In 2015, Smile for Charity, a non-profit in the city of Passaic, was granted a mini-grant by the New Jersey Healthy Communities Network to implement the Healthy Corner Store Initiative in six corner stores in the City of Passaic, New Jersey over a two year time period. Working in conjunction with Rutgers Cooperative Extension, Department of Family and Community Health Sciences as well as NJ-SNAP-Ed, six stores were recruited in the city of Passaic.

A Community Health Assessment by New Jersey Health Collaborative² in 2016 found that 17.2% of Pre-school children and 24.1% of adults in Passaic County are obese. Obesity in Passaic County has been linked to the built environment, recognizing the connection between access to healthy foods and a healthy diet, as well as poor physical environments for exercise. The mini-grant would offer support and improve the built environment for the people living in Passaic County. Six stores were recruited in the city of Passaic prioritizing stores near schools and in the Local Foods Local Places Initiative priority area.



Local Partners

FCHS: The Family and Community Health Sciences (FCHS) at Rutgers Cooperative Extension works with communities to promote health and wellness through partnerships, education and research with the goal of creating a culture of health.

SNAP-Ed: Through their Policy, Systems and Environmental change support network, SNAP-Ed aims to strengthen their nutrition education by supporting the creation of a healthy built environment where the healthy choice is the easy choice.

WHAT IS A CORNER STORE?

Corner Stores are typically small, independently owned and most often offer a wide range of unhealthy, calorie-dense foods and beverages. Many corner stores may not have the resources or space to offer healthy and fresh options. In many places, corner stores exist in place of a grocery store and serve as a key place where residents shop frequently, often several times a day. These retailers are local businesses and are community assets that may serve as a neighborhood-gathering place.

WHAT IS THE HEALTHY CORNER STORE INITIATIVE?

The goal of the Healthy Corner Store Initiative is to work collaboratively with storeowners and provide culturally competent support and training. It also offers structural equipment to introduce and expand the sale of healthy products in low-income communities, which often have the lowest presence of healthy foods and present the highest rates of diet-related chronic disease.



THE HEALTHY CORNER STORE INITIATIVE MODEL

Phase 1: Inventory Changes

Introduce four new healthy products:
two products from two healthy categories

Phase 2: Marketing Materials

Display a series of marketing materials from the Healthy Food Identification Marketing Campaign

Phase 3: Business Training

Participate in at least one training about selling healthy products and business management

Phase 4: Healthy Corner Store Conversion

Receive equipment (refrigeration, shelving, produce baskets) to stock and display healthy products

THE INITIATIVE IS COMBINED WITH OTHER ACTIVITIES INCLUDING: IN-STORE NUTRITION EDUCATION, COOKING DEMONSTRATIONS, RECIPE CARDS, TASTE TESTING, IN-STORE HEALTH SCREENINGS, AND EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING FIELD TRIPS WITH NEARBY SCHOOLS.

STORE RECRUITMENT & SELECTION

Due to efforts in local schools in the City of Passaic, our recruitment efforts focused on corner stores directly in front or around schools. A team including members of FCHS, SMILE for Charity and a local community member recruited six stores between August 2016 and December 2016. The selected stores agreed to the activities in the four phases and signed a memorandum of understanding, as well as a Rutgers University consent form formally agreeing to participate in the initiative.

IN STORE ACTIVITIES

The purpose of the four phases is to help stores progress slowly from a basic level of change to the highest level of change with customized conversion to help expand the variety of healthy options. The slow progression allows storeowners to receive the training and support to make small, sustainable changes to their store in a profitable manner.



Phase 1: Inventory Changes

Storeowners choose from a list of qualifying products and set their goals of products they would begin stocking from each category. They each had approximately one month to begin stocking and selling the new healthy products.

“I never thought 1% milk would sell in my store”
- Jose, New International

Phase 2: Healthy Food Identification Marketing Campaign

Storeowners learned to identify healthy products and used the marketing materials from the Health Food Identification marketing campaign to advertise healthy products

Messages are designed to:

- Increase awareness of healthy foods
- Guide customers towards buying healthier items at all areas of store
- Friendly reminder that eating healthy is important for the prevention and care of chronic disease



“ People are coming to me and thanking me for helping them shop healthier”
- Maricruz, Doña



Phase 3: Training

One-on-one trainings with storeowners used the “Sell Healthy! Guide” created by the Food Trust to provide useful information in a simple manner on how to sell healthy foods, increase sales and attract customers. The guidebook is available in Spanish and English.

The three main themes of the guide are 1) Products & Displays, 2) Pricing & Promotions, and 3) Store Appearance. The three sections offer important information about reducing fruit and vegetable spoilage, ideas to increase profits on healthy products, pricing formulas, advertising, customer feedback, and steps to make stores more inviting at a lower cost.

“ I learned how to sell fruits and vegetables and make a profit. I also learned new ideas like smoothies and cut up fruit to sell my fruits and vegetables”
-Lino , Izucar

Phase 4: Mini- Conversions

After the first two phases, a needs assessment was conducted for each store to identify the necessary equipment to help stock and display fresh produce and other healthy products.

When equipment arrived, storeowners had one week to stock new items.



“I’ve only had my store for one year. I did not have the money to invest in a fridge. Thanks to the program I can now offer fruits and vegetables.”
-Humberto, Cielo Grocery

MARKET
FRESH MEAT • SANDWICHES • COLD SODA & DRINKS
ICE CREAM - HOT COFFEE 973-685-7700
WE ACCEPT WIC EBT

ERÍA
RTES

SAIC
LORA
ARCIA
LOVE
WARTZ
017

AY
ERE
New Jersey Lottery

wic

SUCCESS STORIES: MEET OUR STORES

Gran
Inauguración

Lottery Tickets
Fruits

WE ACCEPT WIC EBT



“This experience has been great and I’m always learning new things! It is very nice to have someone you can call and ask questions.”



Jose Carreño and his parents **Demetrio Carreño** and **Silvia Benigno** have owned New International for eight years and are very interested in learning new ways of improving their store and bringing products to improve their communities’ health. Jose is very passionate about the Initiative and has gone above and beyond to make huge changes to the interior and exterior of his store. Jose has enjoyed working with the team to bring in new products and equipment to diversify his store. **Jose** received a new fridge, produce baskets, a smoothie blender, an advertising chalk board and an array of marketing materials.





Lino Bustos Santiago,
Store Owner

“The Initiative has helped me put all my dreams into reality. I’ve always wanted to make changes and this initiative has propelled me to actually make them. I have really enjoyed all the new ideas and I think I am starting to learn how to think outside the box.”



Salim Patel School Board President, Zaida Polanco Councilwoman, Ricardo Fernandez City Administrator, Cesar Aguirre Sanchez, Deputy Mayor, Lino Bustos Santiago, Store Owner

Lino Bustos Santiago has owned Izucar for nine years and is passionate about the health of his community. Lino is a strong advocate for educating families about prevention and care of chronic disease. Lino is always willing to take leadership roles in order to implement positive changes to influence healthy choices among his community members. Throughout the initiative, Lino has been very active in building a coalition between the other stores and is interested in piloting a buying club in order to increase fresh produce in the city of Passaic. Lino received shopping baskets; produce baskets, a smoothie blender, an advertising chalkboard and plastic cups and containers for smoothies, added-value products and taste-testings.





LEFT:
Cesar Aguirre Sanchez, Deputy Mayor, Ricardo Fernandez City Administrator, Abraham, Store Owner, Salim Patel School Board President

“ It makes me happy that people have access to healthy food. Instead of chips, people can see beautiful fresh fruit and they buy it. I did this in my store and it worked.”



Abraham has owned Pollito Mini Market for a year. Previously, Abraham worked for different stores helping them introduce new products, organize inventory and create customer friendly bodegas. As an owner, Abraham wants to bring in his experience and ideas, but has encountered challenges. Financial constraints with new ownership have limited the type of products he offers and the investment in equipment he can make. Our initiative was an important resource for him to be able to learn new information and to get help with new equipment. Abraham is excited and proud to be a member store of the Healthy Corner Store Initiative to help prevent and combat chronic disease in his community. Abraham received shopping baskets, produce baskets, a smoothie blender, an advertising chalkboard, plastic cups and containers for smoothies, added-value products and taste-testing. He also received financial aid for a new awning.

KELVIN MINI MART



Eric has owned Kelvin Mini Mart for six years. He has learned the challenges over the years and is always looking for new and innovative changes to offer his community. When asked to be part of the initiative, Eric was excited about the opportunity to bring something new and to work with the local schools to offer experiential learning opportunities. Eric is a strong believer in partnerships and in collaboration and is always willing to try new things and give positive feedback. Eric received refrigerator plastic dividers, produce baskets, a smoothie blender, an advertising chalkboard, plastic cups and containers for smoothies, added-value products and taste testings.

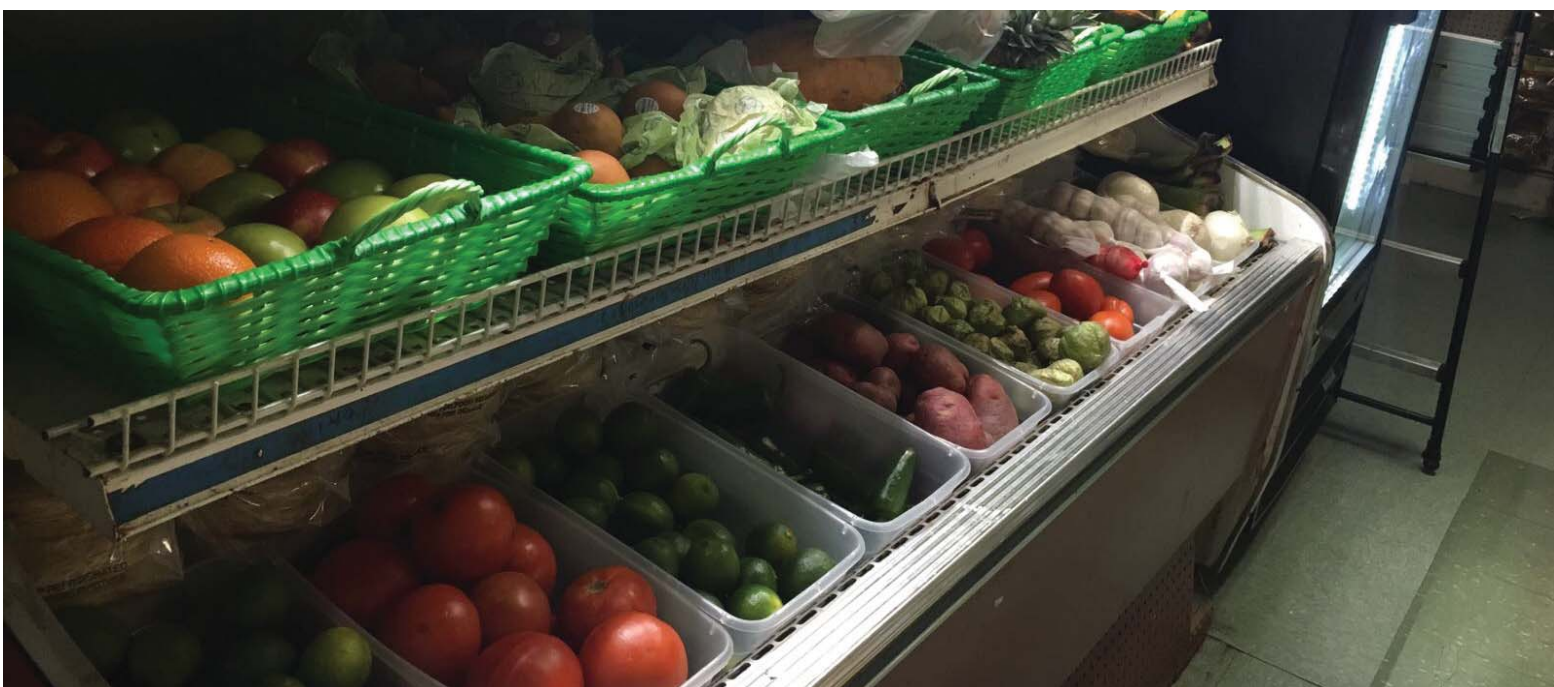
“I had gone to different trainings and heard about these initiatives, but it was really nice to have someone be a support and bring new ideas.”





Maricruz and her husband have owned Doña Chely's for sixteen years. She is a proud parent and community member. She is always attending health fairs and health trainings offered by SNAP, WIC and the Passaic School District to learn new ways of eating healthy and offering healthy in a culturally competent manner. Maricruz joined the initiative to learn new techniques on how to profit from healthy sales. She was also interested in learning how to be an important intervention point with her customers to advise them what products are best depending on their health condition. Maricruz received a **refrigerator, produce baskets, a smoothie blender, an advertising chalkboard, plastic cups and containers for smoothies, added-value products and taste testings.**

"I have really enjoyed being part of the Initiative! I didn't know what I was getting myself into, but it worked out for the best! All I want is to help my community and learn myself."





Above:

Sara Elnakib, FCHS, Mariel Mendez, NJ-SNAP-Ed, Karina, Store Owner, Humberto, Store Owner

“This Initiative has been a great blessing! I don’t know much about the bodega business and I was struggling. This Initiative is helping me apply for Food Stamps and I really appreciate their energy and ideas! ”

Humberto has owned Cielo Grocery for a year and a half and is looking to learn new information associated with the bodega business. Humberto joined the Initiative as a way to learn about nutrition, to learn to give customers healthy eating tips, as well as business tips to increase his profits while increasing access to healthy items. Cielo Grocery was the only store who did not accept SNAP, so this initiative served as a guide to help him stock the necessary products to be eligible to receive SNAP. Hemberto received a refrigerator, produce baskets, smoothie blender, advertising chalkboard, plastic cups and containers for smoothies, added-value products and taste testings.



Passaic City Elected Officials

- Hector Lora, Mayor
- Cesar Aguirre Sanchez, Deputy Mayor
- Jose Garcia, Councilman
- Zaida Polanco, Councilwoman

Passaic Enterprise Zone Development Corporation: Local Foods Local Places Initiative

- Dr. Joseph S. Buga, Project Manager
- Soraya Stam, Zone Coordinator

City of Passaic

- Ricardo Fernandez, Business Administrator
- John E. Biegel III, Health Officer
- Mark Mora, Environmental Health Specialist
- Araceli Pintle, Health Educator
- Jessica Lescano, Superintendent of Recreation

Below:
Hector Lora, Mayor, Eric, Store Owner,
Mariel Mendez, SNAP-Ed



Jose Garcia, Councilman, Salim Patel School Board President, Ricardo Fernandez City Administrator, Sara Elnakib FCHS, Cesar Aguirre Sanchez, Deputy Mayor, Abraham, Store Owner, Mariel Mendez, SNAP-Ed

Passaic City School District

- Salim Patel, Passaic School Board President
- Pablo Muñoz, Superintendent
- Daniel Lungren, School 10 Vice-Principal
- David Mendez, School Teacher

Hospitals

St. Mary's Hospital Community Health

- Sister Anne Moroney, Director
- Luz Flores, Community Outreach Specialist

Pablo Muñoz, Superintendent

Local Non-Profits

United Way of Passaic County

- Yvonne Zuidema, Executive Director
- Mary Celis, Project Director

Children's Day Nursery & Family Center

- Susan Dannemiller, Executive Director
- Victoria Esposito-Novak, Director



Below:
Victoria Esposito-Novak, Mariluz López, Susan Dannemiller, Children's Day Nursery & Family Center, Sara Enakib, FCHS, Joe Buga & Soraya Stam, Passaic UEZ, Jasmine Moreano & Erin McGuire, City Green, Jose Carreño & Silvia Benigno, Store Owners



Mariel Mendez, NJ-SNAP-Ed, Sister Anne Moroney, St. Mary's Hospital Community Health Education

One of the challenges faced was the lack of a vehicle on the storeowner's part to be able to reach different locations for cheaper fresh fruits and vegetables. A couple of the stores rely completely on the availability of local distributors. To offset this challenge, the six corner stores have formed a coalition with a couple of storeowners acting as distributors for fresh produce.

SNAP benefits also played a role in the success of the initiative for most stores. In Passaic County, 102,054⁴ residents rely on SNAP benefits for the majority of their food security needs. One storeowner does not accept SNAP benefits, which posed a serious limitation on his implementation of this initiative. This storeowner saw a lower volume of clients which made him less likely to invest in new products or inventory.

Another important challenge we faced was related to the more recent political climate. Since the early 1900s, Passaic has attracted immigrants from all over the world to work in the local industries including many factories. Starting in the 1970s, Hispanic immigrants from Central America, South America, Mexico and the Caribbean have made Passaic their home. In the 2015 census, 71% of Passaic residents were of Hispanic descent.³ Local data on number of undocumented residents is unavailable. Given the political policies and attitudes toward undocumented immigrants, many storeowners stated a significant decrease in sales; therefore limiting their ability to invest in bringing new products.

FUTURE DIRECTION

Assessments will continue to be collected of the storeowners' sales and inventory, as well as attitudes and beliefs of the community. Nutrition education and taste testing events will continue to be scheduled throughout the upcoming year.

Additionally, we will work with the City of Passaic Health Department to assist them in rolling out their Staple Food Ordinance by using these storeowners as an example of how selling healthy foods can be sustainable.

Works Cited

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CONTACT

Sara Elnakib, RD, MPH, CHES
Family & Consumer Health Sciences Educator
Rutgers Cooperative Extension of Passaic County
1310 Route 23 North
Wayne, NJ 07470
elnakib@njaes.rutgers.edu