ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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Dear Friends,

Some out-of-town friends and I with support from the SC Department of Agriculture, the South Carolina Food Access Task Force was assembled to address the barriers to healthy food access in South Carolina. The Task Force is composed of more than twenty members from the private, nonprofit, government, and academic sectors with representation from a variety of industries including insurance, health, farming, banking, economic development, retail, and research.

Building upon initial findings of the SC Food Policy Council published in the report, “Growing Food and Opportunities”, the primary goal of the Task Force is to expend 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. The Task Force has developed key recommendations for state and local leaders that will enhance the supply of healthy, affordable food in every community.

The recommendations in this document are rooted in a strategy that addresses capital, affordability, supply, planning, and transportation. Recommendations include the creation of a state-funded healthy food financing initiative, increasing farmers’ market participation, food retail opportunities, and transportation options, among others. With an increased sense of urgency based on some of the most alarming health statistics, our state and local leaders must promote policies and actions that increase healthy food access and consumption, and reduce barriers for retailers and grocers.

Every South Carolinian deserves access to fresh and healthy food. On behalf of the South Carolina Food Access Task Force, we are pleased to present to you our recommendations as the foundation, we can work towards an equitable food system for all South Carolinians. In South Carolina Food Access Task Force Steering Committee.

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Why Food Access Matters in South Carolina

Promotes Additional Spending in the Local Market: Research shows agricultural business development designed to serve local communities has the potential to bolster the state’s economy and increase healthy food access concurrently. A study by the University of Minnesota Extension Service revealed that small farms with gross incomes of $100,000 made almost 95% of total expenditures within their local communities. Large farms spent less than 20% locally. Presently, large-scale farming provides relatively few rural jobs, whereas public policy and technology have favored the replacement of human labor with chemicals and machinery. However, with more sustainable farming practices, product diversification, and opportunities for a guaranteed market, rural residents can begin to profit from their land.

With opportunities for local processing and adding value to raw materials, farmers will enjoy higher earnings on their products. Increased farmer earnings will lead to an increased quality of life in our rural communities. And healthier food will become more accessible.

Spurs Community Development: The USDA reports 1,031,861 low-income individuals statewide live in food deserts, areas more than one mile from a grocery store that have limited access to other outlets such as corner stores, farmers markets, food banks, and mobile markets. These communities exist in every corner of the state, from the Pee Dee to the Lowcountry, to the Upstate, resulting in untapped economic development opportunities across South Carolina. Residents of food deserts in the state spend approximately $311 million annually on groceries outside of their local communities, commonly referred to as grocery store leakage. Pictures of food deserts.

Lower the Risk for Diet Related Disease: Research has shown that adults living in neighborhoods with a grocery store have lower obesity rates compared to those living in neighborhoods without a grocery store.2,3 Further, adults and youth who have healthy food options within a mile of their homes are less likely to become obese or overweight.4 South Carolina is the 7th most obese state in the country and lags behind the rest of the nation in overall health measures. According to America’s Health Rankings 2013, published by the American Health Foundation, South Carolina ranked 43rd on standard public health measures, including the prevalence of obesity, heart disease and diabetes.5 The South Carolina Department of Health and Environmental Control reports the state spends an estimated $2.1 billion on diet related health care. If South Carolina could halt the increase in prevalence of obesity at today’s levels, it would save South Carolinians a total of $3 billion over 10 years.7

The recommendations set forth within this report challenge state and local leaders to make access to healthy food a top priority by addressing five core issues at the heart of the problem: capital, affordability, supply, planning, and transportation.

There are also other ways in which food access improves health: it increases access to quality food, provides a source of income, improves mental health, and builds community. Access to quality food is fundamental for healthy living and allows individuals and families to get the most from their limited incomes. Access to food reduces the incidence of poor health outcomes associated with diet-related diseases such as diabetes, heart disease, and hypertension, which account for a majority of the state’s out-of-pocket health care spending. Improving access to health care is one of the biggest challenges the state faces today, and improving access to healthy food is one of the most effective ways to prevent illness and reduce health care costs.

Recommendations

1. Support approximately 480,000 acres of farm land which supply approximately 16,000 square feet of grocery retail – directly translating into jobs, transportation, cost savings, citizen engagement, economic development, increased tax revenue, and most importantly, improved access to healthy food.

Underserved, local markets could support approximately 480,000 acres of farm land which supply approximately 16,000 square feet of grocery retail – directly translating into jobs, transportation, cost savings, citizen engagement, economic development, increased tax revenue, and most importantly, improved access to healthy food.

By 2020, 70% of our state’s adults will be overweight or obese, 39% of South Carolina children will be overweight or obese, and 31% of adults will die from obesity-related diseases. These statistics show that we must take action to improve the health of our state Agenda.

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The recommendations set forth within this report challenge state and local leaders to make access to healthy food a top priority by addressing five core issues at the heart of the problem: capital, affordability, supply, planning, and transportation.
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:** Develop a healthy food financing initiative to provide capital to support the establishment, renovation, or expansion of different food projects, including food hubs, farm businesses, mobile markets, small food stores, and full-service grocery stores that make available affordable, local, and healthy food.

2. **AFFORDABILITY:** Ensure SNAP recipients are able to utilize farmers markets to purchase fresh, affordable South Carolina grown produce by expanding and sustaining the SNAP Healthy Bucks program.

3. **SUPPLY:** Support existing and create new economic development programs that expand the supply of fresh, nutritious food in underserved communities and food deserts throughout the state. These programs should increase both the demand for and the supply of locally-sourced produce and meats so as to promote healthy lifestyles and eating habits for individuals and families within these communities.

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:** Encourage partnerships to develop affordable transportation services for communities without convenient access to a full-service grocery store.

THE DATA

**South Carolina Food Deserts**

![Figure 1: South Carolina Food Deserts](Source: USDA)

In South Carolina’s food deserts and Low Supermarket Access Areas, there is over $300 million in grocery store leakage, or money spent on groceries outside of these communities. This is enough to support 529,000 square feet of retail space.

**South Carolina Obesity Prevalence Among Adults by Education and Income Levels, 2012**

![Figure 2: SC Obesity Rates by Education Level and Income](Source: DHEC)

Persons of lower socio-economic status are more vulnerable to obesity. Further, low-income neighborhoods have about 25% fewer supermarkets as middle income zip codes.
RECOMMENDATION 1: Capital
South Carolina should develop a healthy food financing initiative (HFFI) to provide 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 make available affordable, local, and healthy food. This should be a public-private partnership.

Funding will be used to provide working capital for the start-up of new businesses or the continued operation of existing businesses; acquisition and/or improvement of land, buildings, plant and equipment, including new construction or renovation of existing facilities, demolition and site preparation; and soft costs including feasibility and market studies.

Eligible projects should include an evaluation component; serve low to moderate-income communities; and maximize the amount of local product being provided.

Success Story: South Carolina Community Loan Fund
Across the country, partnerships with Community Development Financial Institutions (CDFIs) have been an effective model for state funded healthy food financing initiatives. CDFIs are experts in leveraging state, federal, and private dollars; additionally, CDFIs have existing relationships with underserved communities, community development experts, and other community organizations. These relationships help ensure that funding is directed to areas of true need.

The South Carolina Community Loan Fund (SCCLF), a statewide CDFI, provides specialized loans to increase healthy food options in South Carolina food deserts and other underserved neighborhoods. SCCLF has raised over $1.5 million to support these efforts.

RECOMMENDATION 2: Affordability
Ensure SNAP recipients are able to utilize farmers markets to purchase fresh, affordable South Carolina grown produce by expanding and sustaining the SNAP Healthy Bucks program.

The Midlands Family Study found that SNAP recipients want to purchase produce at farmers markets. Out of the 361 SNAP recipients who participated, 97% said they would use their SNAP benefits at a farmers market if a participating market was located in close proximity to their home. Shopping at farmers markets may help alleviate child hunger, too, as families that shopped at farmers markets reported being more food secure, and thus, able to better protect their children from hunger.

The SNAP Healthy Bucks program provides a match, up to five dollars, for benefits spent at local farmers markets. As the managing agency, the Department of Social Services should do the following to ensure program success and full deployment of allocated funding:

- Provide outreach to inform the public that SNAP benefits are accepted at farmers markets;
- Publicize where participating farmers markets are located;
- Provide technical assistance and outreach to farmers markets to ensure the acceptance of SNAP and participation in the SNAP Healthy Bucks program; and
- Partner with SNAP recipients, farmers market managers, and other stakeholders in implementing and expanding the SNAP Healthy Bucks program.

Success Story: Right Choice, Fresh Start
The South Carolina Cancer Prevention and Control Research Network (SC-CPCRN), in partnership with Family Health Centers, Inc., formed the first federally-qualified health center-based farmers market in South Carolina – the Right Choice, Fresh Start market located in Orangeburg. The market introduced an incentive program that for the first $5 a person used of their SNAP or other nutrition assistance program benefits to purchase produce, they could receive an additional $5 to support additional produce purchases. After this healthy incentive program was implemented, four times more SNAP dollars were spent at the farmers market, increasing access to produce for low-income South Carolinians, income for small-scale farmers, and food dollars kept in the local economy.
State and local governments should foster existing and create new economic development programs that expand the supply of fresh, nutritious food in underserved communities and food deserts throughout the state and promote opportunities for new and beginning farmers. These programs should increase both the demand for and the supply of locally-sourced produce and meats so as to promote healthy lifestyles and eating habits for individuals and families within these communities.

Developing markets for locally-sourced produce is a critical component of creating a solid food economy, in both underserved and adequately served areas of South Carolina. Economic development strategies, such as those laid out in the 2013 report “Making Small Farms Into Big Businesses” created by the SC Department of Agriculture, SC Department of Commerce, Carolina Farm Stewardship Association, and the Coastal Conservation League, should be implemented. The strategies presented in the report foster the production, processing, and sale of locally-produced fruits and vegetables in local markets. The strategies should be implemented.

Success Story: GrowFood Carolina

With the help of a USDA Rural Business Enterprise Grant and a SCDA Specialty Crop Block Grant, and more than $2 million in private funding, the Coastal Conservation League launched GrowFood Carolina – the state’s first and only local food hub – in the fall of 2011. GrowFood is located in Charleston and is housed in a warehouse renovated to LEED specifications. It provides local farmers the sales, marketing, logistics, warehousing and distribution functions they desperately need, and provides a wholesale source of local fruits and vegetables from within 120 miles of Charleston to communities, including food deserts in the region. GrowFood aims to positively impact the local food system, to change food distribution to provide that supports small farmers and healthier communities, and ultimately, to protect farmland by making local agriculture profitable throughout the state. Since opening its doors, GrowFood has expanded from working with five farmers to more than 50 today. More than $700,000 has been channeled back into farmers’ pockets as a result of GrowFood’s services, and the number of customers has increased twenty-fold.

Success Story: Charleston County

Preservation of Charleston County’s natural resources and rural and agricultural areas has been one of the main goals of the Charleston County Comprehensive Plan since its original adoption in 1999. The many strategies to implement this goal and support healthy eating principles include:

• Support individuals, farmers, and organizations involved with local food production;
• Partner with local organizations focused on promoting and supporting local food production and consumption;
• Establishment of the Agricultural Issues Advisory Committee, whose mission is to identify ways to foster agriculture, agri-business, and forestry in the County and across South Carolina, including but not limited to supporting state and local enabling legislation such as the Tourist-Oriented Directional Signage Program and the voluntary agricultural and forested areas; and
• Establishment of an Urban Growth Boundary, coordinated between the County, the City of Charleston, and the Town of Mount Pleasant, that promotes higher intensity growth in the urban/suburban area where infrastructure and services exist, and preserves the rural area for agricultural and forestry uses with very low levels of residential development.

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

In South Carolina, comprehensive plans are required by state law and help local governments define their vision for future growth and change. Comprehensive plan policy that addresses public health can be used to support decisions about private development, public infrastructure and services. Additionally, it can be used to support changes to zoning or capital improvement programs. Local policy decisions that rely on a comprehensive plan can, and do, impact public health. Integration of policies that support the production and availability of healthy food into these plans helps to lay the groundwork for creating healthier communities.

The SC Department of Health and Environmental Control (DHEC) and Eat Smart, Move More South Carolina ($MMSC) have collaborated with Alta Planning + Design and other partners on a healthy, comprehensive planning initiative for the state. The SC Health + Planning Toolkit: A Healthy Eating and Active Living Policy Guide was developed to assist communities with integrating healthy eating and active living principles into comprehensive plans. Regional trainings on the toolkit have been conducted to provide stakeholders an in-depth understanding of how to improve public health. DHEC, $MMSC, and partners are looking at the next phase of the healthy comprehensive planning initiative, which will include more targeted outreach and technical assistance to local level stakeholders to support the integration of policies that promote healthy food production, processing, distribution, and access.
The Northside Healthy Food Hub is a hybrid business that includes the Hub City Farmers Market, the Butterfly Foundation and its culinary arts training program, and a community cafe and garden located in Sparktown’s Northside neighborhood. The project, which is a significant development for a community long categorized as a food desert, is poised to create jobs, renew and grow vital community connections, and provide access to healthy food. Some of the produce grown in Sparktown’s community gardens and produce in a community that is severely lacking healthy food options.

South Carolina Community Loan Fund’s Feeding Innovation is a comprehensive technical assistance program designed to support entrepreneurs interested in growing or expanding healthy food businesses in underserved areas of the state. Framed as a business plan competition offering technical assistance, entrepreneurs have an opportunity to receive a seed capital award to implement their business plan.

RECOMMENDATION 5: Transportation

Encourage partnerships to develop affordable transportation services for communities without convenient access to a full-service grocery store.

Low-income neighborhoods often lack a grocery store or other market that sells fresh produce. This lack of access to healthy food is exacerbated when people in these neighborhoods lack transportation. In a preliminary analysis of the Midland Family Study data - a study that examined the differences within households that are experiencing child hunger versus those who are not - over 72% of food secure families said they had reliable transportation for the whole previous year while only 33% of families experiencing child hunger did. This could mean that a household lacking reliable transportation increases the likelihood of children within the household having the size and quality of their food diminished, sometimes to the point of having to go whole days without eating. Research has shown that people with access to a full-service grocery store have healthier diets and decreased risk of obesity.

Edgewater’s Garden of Hope is located in the small town of Edgewater. Jasper County Neighborhoods United’s Gardens of Hope are located at two affordable housing projects in the area - Deerfield Village and Mercy Circle Apartments - and provide those communities with direct, consistent access to nutritious fruits and vegetables. Residents also help cultivate the crops and harvest the produce within these communities, thereby promoting youth development and workforce training for community members that volunteer their time.

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The recommendations in this document are rooted in a comprehensive statewide food access strategy that addresses capital, affordability, supply, planning, and transportation. Working together, we can ensure that every South Carolinian has the ability to access affordable, healthy food. We encourage state and local leaders to implement these recommendations, as they represent a comprehensive approach to addressing the lack of healthy food retail options in South Carolina.

Members of the South Carolina Food Access Task Force are confident these strategies will help address barriers throughout rural and urban parts of the state. Working together—for all South Carolinians—we can create a physically and economically healthier state.

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This report was produced by the South Carolina Food Access Task Force and the South Carolina Community Loan Fund, with funding provided by the Kresge Foundation.

Learn more at:
www.scfoodaccess.com
www.sccommunityloanfund.org