A young girl with her hair in a bun, wearing a patterned top, looks upwards in a grocery store aisle. The background shows shelves of products, including a sign for '1491'. The entire image is overlaid with a semi-transparent orange filter.

ROADMAP FOR  
ENCOURAGING  
**GROCERY**  
DEVELOPMENT  
IN HOUSTON AND TEXAS

*A report of the  
Houston Grocery Access  
Task Force*

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This report was prepared by Miriam Manon and Julia Koprak at The Food Trust; it was released December 2012. Members of the Houston Grocery Access Task Force provided valuable input. Support for this report was provided by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation. The Food Trust's Supermarket Campaign in Texas is made possible by generous support from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, the Mondelēz International Foundation (formerly known as Kraft Foods) and the Michael & Susan Dell Foundation. Cover photo by Ryan Donnell.

Suggested citation: Manon, M. and Koprak, J. (2012). *Roadmap for Encouraging Grocery Development in Houston and Texas: A Report of the Houston Grocery Access Task Force*. Philadelphia, PA: The Food Trust.

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## CITY OF HOUSTON

**Annise D. Parker**

Mayor

P.O. Box 1562

Dear Friends,

The obesity epidemic is a pressing public health problem, costing millions of dollars and impacting the lives of children and families across Houston. For adults, obesity rates rose from 61% in 2002 to 66% in 2009 while a study of high school students showed an increase from 29% in 1999 to 34% in 2007. Similar to other cities, poor diet due to the inaccessibility of fresh, affordable produce is a key contributing factor to overweight or obese individuals living in low-income areas.

The City of Houston acknowledges that supermarkets and grocery stores play an important role in the health of our community. Studies show that supermarkets help people eat better and maintain a healthy weight with the additional benefits of creating jobs, sparking complementary economic development, and boosting nearby housing values. Unfortunately, many of our communities do not have nearby grocery stores, making it difficult to have access to healthy, affordable foods.

That is why the City of Houston held Houston's first Supermarket Summit, which addressed barriers and opportunities as well as heard from retailers about the challenges of investing in underserved neighborhoods. As a result, the City convened the Houston Grocery Access Task Force to develop a public-private response to this issue. In addition, the City, through the Mayor's Council on Health and the Environment, launched Healthy Houston, an initiative designed to reduce obesity and increase healthy eating and exercise. Other efforts include the City Gardens and Farmers Market initiative, as well as the new Urban Grows initiative. All of these programs focus on improving access to healthy, affordable and locally produced food for all neighborhoods.

The recommendations presented by the Houston Grocery Access Task Force will do more than promote the health of our communities and bring good jobs to local residents—they also mark an important step in our efforts to build partnerships between city and state government, the supermarket industry, and the nonprofit sector. On behalf of the City of Houston, I thank Council Member Stephen Costello, The Food Trust, the Houston Health and Human Services Department and the Houston Food Bank for the important leadership role they have played in the task force. I also thank all the task force members, particularly the co-chairs from Children at Risk and Mondelēz International Foundation (formerly known as Kraft Foods), for providing their invaluable assistance and expertise.

Working together, we can build a stronger, healthier future for all the residents of Houston.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Annise D. Parker".

Annise Parker, Mayor



## Houston Grocery Access Task Force

Dear Neighbors,

As co-chairs of the Houston Grocery Access Task Force, we are honored to present this report outlining our task force's recommendations for developing healthy, affordable food retail in underserved communities in Houston and across the state.

Texas has fewer supermarkets per capita than any other state. Supermarkets play a vital role in providing healthy food to residents in Texas, yet in some communities residents have difficulty accessing a local grocery store. These same communities also suffer from high rates of obesity and other diet-related disease. While supermarkets are not the only answer for promoting healthy eating, they provide the greatest variety of healthy, affordable food while creating jobs and opportunities for economic development.

Representing leadership from the grocery industry, public health, economic development, government and civic sectors, our 40 members met to explore barriers to supermarket and grocery store development in communities that lack access to nutritious foods. As a group we ultimately identified nine recommendations to drive change at both the state and local levels. We are thankful for the dedicated energy of this group, which blended diverse perspectives to create realistic and effective solutions. We also would like to extend our gratitude to the Houston Food Bank, the City of Houston and The Food Trust and to the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, the Mondelēz International Foundation (formerly known as Kraft Foods) and the Michael and Susan Dell Foundation for their support.

Every child deserves to have convenient access to high-quality, nutritious food. We look forward to bringing these policies to fruition and supporting the expansion of healthy food retail in Houston and across Texas. Implementing the recommendations outlined in this report will require committed, broad-based leadership to attract new supermarkets and to work with existing retailers to upgrade existing facilities and expand healthy offerings.

Together, we can make healthy, affordable food available for all children and families in Houston and across Texas.

Sincerely,

Dr. Robert Sanborn  
Executive Director  
CHILDREN AT RISK

Steven Holdiman  
Sr. Director, Industry Affairs  
Mondelēz International

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Council President  
Texas Retailers Association

# INTRODUCTION

Supermarkets play a vital role in providing healthy food to Texas residents, yet in some communities residents face difficulty accessing a local grocery store. Despite being one of the fastest growing metropolitan areas, Houston has fewer supermarkets per capita than most major cities. This situation is reflective of a statewide problem; Texas has fewer supermarkets per capita than any state in the country. This lack of healthy, affordable food undermines the health of children and families in Houston and across the state.

*Obesity cost Texas businesses \$9.5 billion in 2009, with annual costs project to rise to \$32.5 billion by 2030 if current trends continue.*

Recognizing that these issues provide a unique opportunity for public-private partnerships to help businesses innovate and expand in these underserved markets, the City of Houston, CHILDREN AT RISK and The Food Trust convened key food access stakeholders. Invited by city leaders and elected officials, leaders from the grocery industry, government, economic development, public health and civic sectors came together at the Houston Supermarket Summit to examine the challenges facing

supermarket operators, developers and residents in underserved communities. This led to the formation of the Houston Grocery Access Task Force to create a roadmap to stimulate grocery investment and increase access to healthy foods for residents in Houston and Texas.

The Houston Grocery Access Task Force's roadmap calls upon the state, the City of Houston and local governments across Texas to prioritize the development and expansion of grocery stores selling high-quality, healthy and affordable foods. Improving grocery access will improve the health of children and families, create jobs and support long-term economic growth. Economically, this situation is pressing: obesity cost Texas businesses \$9.5 billion in 2009, according to the Comptroller of Public Accounts, with annual costs projected to rise to \$32.5 billion by 2030. These estimates include direct obesity-attributable insurance costs as well as indirect costs from absenteeism, reduced productivity and disability. Experts project that if obesity rates continue on their current trajectories, by 2030 Texas will have an obesity rate over 57 percent.

Studies show that residents of communities without a local grocery store suffer from disproportionately high rates of obesity, diabetes and other diet-related health problems. In 2010, The Food Trust, a nationally recognized nonprofit, released *Food for Every Child: The Need for More Supermarkets in Houston*. Through mapping, this report concluded that many neighborhoods in Houston and communities across Texas with poor supermarket access also have high incidence of diet-related deaths. While supermarkets alone will not solve the obesity epidemic facing our state and nation, public health experts, including the Institute of Medicine and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, agree that bringing supermarkets and other stores selling high-quality, healthy and affordable foods to underserved communities is critical to the success of any effort to help people eat healthier and live healthy lives.

Increasing access to healthy, affordable foods also complements Houston and Texas's greater economic development agenda. If given the means to overcome the high preliminary costs associated with the development of a grocery store, retailers can thrive in lower-income communities as sustainable enterprises and serve as economic anchors, attracting complementary development nearby. Supermarkets and grocery stores create quality jobs and contribute to the revitalization of urban and rural communities.

The Houston Grocery Access Task Force recognizes initiatives to provide nutrition education, increase enrollment and utilization of the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) and Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children (WIC) and develop healthy food incentive and promotion programs are critical to increasing the demand for healthy foods and supporting the task force's broader goals of improving health and promoting economic development in Houston and throughout Texas.

The task force also recognizes that there is no one-size-fits-all solution for every community. Food retail projects can take on myriad different forms, including new supermarket developments, expansion or renovation of existing grocery stores and alternative models, such as farmers' markets, healthy corner stores and mobile markets that promote the sale of locally grown foods.

States and cities across the country have implemented similar recommendations by providing financial and civic support to healthy food retail programs. Successful financing programs in states such as Pennsylvania, Illinois and Louisiana, among others, have included the strategic investment of public funds to reduce the risks associated with the development and expansion of supermarkets and other retailers selling healthy and affordable foods in lower-income communities. The federal government has confirmed its commitment to making nutritious food available to all with the creation of the Healthy Food Financing Initiative, a national grants and loans program for projects that increase access to healthy foods in underserved communities.

*Grocery stores create quality jobs and contribute to the revitalization of urban and rural communities.*

This task force builds upon the groundwork laid by a variety of government, private and civic sector leaders in Houston and across the state. The recent launch of the Healthy Houston Initiative and the city's identification of four target areas for grocery investment are positive first steps. These efforts demonstrate that Houston is well positioned to address the need for more supermarkets and grocery stores that provide healthy, affordable foods and create jobs for local residents. Houston can serve as a model for other cities, in Texas and elsewhere.

Houston Grocery Access Task Force members and The Food Trust are committed to working with the City of Houston and state and local policymakers throughout Texas to implement these nine recommendations for children and families in Texas who deserve the opportunity to lead healthier lives.

# SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

*We, the Houston Grocery Access Task Force—a public-private partnership of leaders from the grocery industry, economic development, public health and civic sectors—present this roadmap for encouraging grocery investment in Houston and Texas to improve health, create jobs and support long-term economic growth.*

- 1 Local governments and other economic development entities in Texas should identify target areas for investment—including publicly owned properties—and aggressively promote them to real estate developers and grocers. Economic development programs should be made available for the development of new supermarkets and grocery stores offering a full selection of healthy foods and for the expansion, renovation and rehabilitation of existing grocery stores in these underserved communities.
- 2 Texas should develop a business financing program that can support the development, expansion and renovation of supermarkets and grocery stores offering a full selection of healthy foods.
- 3 State and local governments in Texas should assist healthy food retailers with infrastructure needs—including roads, sidewalks, lighting and other quality of life issues—to support new or existing grocery developments in underserved areas.
- 4 The City of Houston and other local governments in Texas, in partnership with local transit authorities, should conduct a transportation needs assessment to explore transportation barriers to accessing existing supermarkets and grocery stores and develop safe, affordable and convenient transportation services for neighborhood residents.
- 5 The City of Houston should prioritize increasing enrollment in and utilization of the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) and Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children (WIC) and invest in outreach efforts citywide.
- 6 A partnership of hunger advocates, the grocery industry and other public, private and civic sector leaders should work together to develop and pilot a self-service kiosk to streamline the enrollment process for SNAP and other public benefits in Texas in a cost-effective manner. Additionally, healthy food incentive programs should be promoted to encourage shoppers to utilize SNAP benefits for fresh fruits and vegetables and other healthy foods.
- 7 State and local governments in Texas, in partnership with local nonprofit organizations and public health professionals, should promote nutrition education in schools and communities and support best practices to encourage shoppers to select and purchase healthy foods.
- 8 Nonprofit advocacy organizations, in partnership with the grocery industry and other stakeholders, should work together to identify local, state and federal legislators who can provide leadership to advance policies that encourage economic development and the provision of healthy, affordable foods in their respective districts.
- 9 Leaders from the Houston Grocery Access Task Force should work in partnership with existing coalitions, including the Healthy Houston Task Force, to guide the implementation of these recommendations.



## RECOMMENDATION 1:

Local governments and other economic development entities in Texas should identify target areas for investment—including publicly owned properties—and aggressively promote them to real estate developers and grocers. Economic development programs should be made available for the development of new supermarkets and grocery stores offering a full selection of healthy foods and for the expansion, renovation and rehabilitation of existing grocery stores in these underserved communities.

The food retail industry needs public sector support to overcome the high costs of development, particularly in urban areas. Existing economic development programs are often not available to food retailers or grocers are not aware of how to access these resources. Business tools, such as sales tax abatements on equipment purchases, property tax abatements, tax exempt financing bonds and low-cost financing, can encourage supermarkets to invest in underserved areas. Houston has taken a positive first step in this direction, identifying four priority neighborhoods for grocery investment and promoting an economic development incentive, known as the 380 Agreement, to grocers for projects in these communities. The city should aggressively market the available incentives to grocers and developers and identify sites in priority areas to ensure that the goals of the program are met. Houston can serve as a model for other municipalities in Texas looking to encourage grocery development in areas of need.

## Success Stories

**New York:** In response to a study by the New York City Departments of Health and City Planning and the New York City Economic Development Corporation that found that many neighborhoods across the city were underserved by grocery stores, New York City launched the Food Retail Expansion to Support Health (FRESH) program. The initiative provides zoning and financial incentives—including real estate tax reductions, sales tax exemption on construction materials and equipment and additional development rights—to promote the establishment and retention of neighborhood grocery stores in underserved communities throughout the five boroughs. The FRESH program provides financial support to grocery store operators for renovations of existing stores and to developers constructing or renovating retail space for a full-service grocery store. Since the program's launch, 11 stores have been approved for FRESH incentives, improving healthy food access for residents across the city.

**Kentucky:** A combination of city loans, federal grants and tax credit financing helped to bring First Choice Market to the Park DuValle neighborhood in southwest Louisville. The \$4.4 million project included a \$3.2 million loan from the city, funded with Community Development Block Grant Recovery (CDBG-R) funds, two \$100,000 city loans, \$35,000 for infrastructure improvements from a local councilmember and a nearly \$1.2 million New Markets Tax Credit equity commitment by local banks. By utilizing a variety of economic development tools, the city was able to meet a key priority in the city's redevelopment plan. First Choice Market, an independently operated grocery store, opened in 2012, creating more than 150 construction jobs, 40 permanent jobs and bringing fresh produce to a neighborhood that had been without a full-service supermarket for over a decade.



## RECOMMENDATION 2:

### Texas should develop a business financing program that can support the development, expansion and renovation of supermarkets and grocery stores offering a full selection of healthy foods.

The state should develop a grant and loan program to bring new and expanded supermarkets and grocery stores selling healthy and affordable foods to underserved communities. Funding should be available to support a variety of costs, including feasibility studies, workforce training, equipment and other development and construction costs. The program should be flexible enough to meet the needs of new retailers interested in locating new stores in underserved areas and to support existing retailers in these communities with upgrades or expansions to increase healthy offerings. Public-private partnerships with Community Development Financial Institutions (CDFIs) have proven to be a successful model for the creation of similar programs across the country. CDFIs have the knowledge and capacity to leverage state seed funding with additional public and private investment and are well positioned to tap into existing resources available at the federal level through the Healthy Food Financing Initiative.

### *Success Stories*

**Pennsylvania:** In 2004, Pennsylvania created the nation's first statewide program to address the lack of fresh food availability in its communities: the Pennsylvania Fresh Food Financing Initiative (FFFI). The initiative was seeded with \$30 million in state funds and a CDFI, The Reinvestment Fund, leveraged an additional \$146 million in public and private investment. The initiative was designed to accommodate the diverse needs of large supermarkets, small family-owned grocery stores and other fresh food retailers located in high-density cities, small towns and rural communities. The program has had tremendous impact statewide: nearly 90 new and expanded fresh food retail projects have been approved for funding, creating or retaining over 5,000 jobs and increasing healthy food access for an estimated 500,000 people. The success of the Pennsylvania program influenced the creation and design of similar initiatives in Illinois, New Orleans, New York, New Jersey and California.

**Louisiana:** Along the Gulf Coast, the flooding and damage caused by Hurricane Katrina in 2005 resulted in the closure of many supermarkets. Without convenient access to a nearby supermarket, many New Orleans residents relied on convenience stores that carried little, if any, fresh produce. In 2011, the City of New Orleans launched the Fresh Food Retailer Initiative, seeded with \$7 million dollars of Disaster Community Development Block Grants. Hope Enterprise Corporation (HOPE) and The Food Trust were contracted by the city to manage the program. HOPE matched the city's pledge, creating a \$14 million financing platform to assist healthy food retailers. Since the launch, the program has funded a new small grocery, DaFresh Seafood and Produce Store, and the planned 2013 reopening of the iconic Circle Food Store. The Circle Food Store, incorporated in 1938, was a historic mainstay in the community for decades before it closed after Hurricane Katrina. The financing bridged a critical funding gap for the store's redevelopment which will create an estimated 75 new jobs for the local community.



## RECOMMENDATION 3:

State and local governments in Texas should assist healthy food retailers with infrastructure needs—including roads, sidewalks, lighting and other quality of life issues—to support new or existing grocery developments in underserved areas.

Many communities that are underserved by supermarkets also lack other important amenities and services needed to attract and retain retail investment, such as sidewalks, lighting and good transportation networks. Security concerns, real or perceived, can also be a problem for grocers, discouraging customers from walking to a neighborhood store and possibly from shopping there altogether. Economic development officials in Texas should prioritize investment in long-needed infrastructure improvements in neighborhoods to improve quality of life, ensure that existing grocers can succeed and create a fertile environment for new investment.



### *Success Stories*

**Massachusetts:** The Boston Transportation Department is working with the Roxbury community to redesign a main thoroughfare to create a pedestrian-friendly environment, ensure efficient traffic flow, accommodate public transit vehicles and bicycles and promote economic development. The city's initial investment in roadway and streetscape designs is supported by matching state and federal funds for construction. These infrastructure improvements are a key component of a broader plan to rejuvenate Dudley

Square, a once-thriving retail district, which includes the expansion of Tropical Foods, a popular local supermarket.

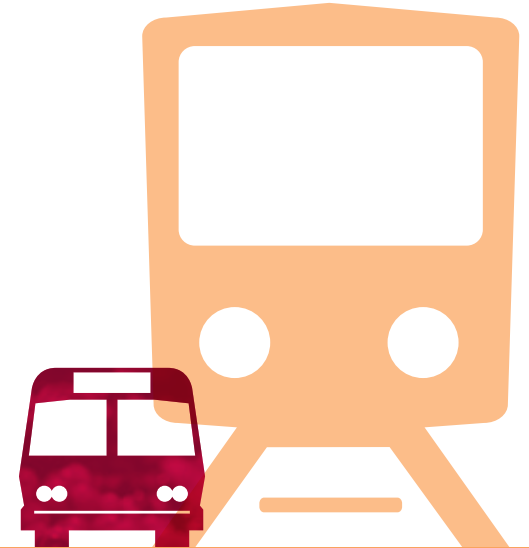
**California:** The Coalition for Responsible Community Development partnered with the Los Angeles Police Department to promote neighborhood security and improved quality of life, particularly in regard to retail and economic development. The organization hired local youths and young adults to improve public safety and the appearance of local streets in South Los Angeles by abating 80,000 square feet of graffiti per week. The graffiti made people feel

unsafe in this commercial district and provided reasons for businesses to disinvest. The graffiti abatement crews follow a 30- to 50-mile daily route covering 12 square miles including commercial corridors with high crime rates and 55 known gangs. The community partnership served to tackle difficult economic and social problems resulting in an increased perception of safety in the neighborhood and the creation of a better retail business environment. Similar types of linkages between community development, police and commercial partners can provide safer communities surrounding grocery stores.

## RECOMMENDATION 4:

The City of Houston and other local governments in Texas, in partnership with local transit authorities, should conduct a transportation needs assessment to explore transportation barriers to accessing existing supermarkets and grocery stores and develop safe, affordable and convenient transportation services for neighborhood residents.

Good transportation policy should plan for ways to transport area residents to nearby grocery stores and should encourage development of new stores in convenient locations. Lower-income households are less likely than other households to own a car and less likely to live in a neighborhood with a nearby supermarket. Many lower-income families, as well as the elderly, disabled and other public transit-dependent consumers, have to take multiple bus rides to access the nearest supermarket. In rural communities, transportation is also a concern as residents often travel long distances to reach the nearest grocery store. Lack of convenient and affordable transportation makes it difficult for these shoppers to purchase healthy, affordable foods. Regional and local transportation agencies—such as the Metropolitan Transit Authority of Harris County, Houston—should examine where better services are needed and create efficient ways to transport shoppers to full-service grocery stores.



### *Success Stories*

**Connecticut:** In Hartford, the L-Tower Avenue bus route plays an important role in increasing access to major supermarkets for public transit-dependent residents. Designed as part of the Jobs Access program to link lower-income residents with jobs, shopping and medical services, the L-Tower Avenue bus route saw its ridership double after a year, with grocery shopping cited by one-third of ridership as the primary reason to take the bus.

**Texas:** In Austin, Capital Metro, working with the Austin/Travis County Food Policy Council, started a “grocery bus” line in 1996 with the intention of providing improved food access to residents of the primarily lower-income, Latino Eastside. The bus route, which continues to run four days a week, was designed to link neighborhoods with two nearby supermarkets.

**Massachusetts:** In Springfield, community members, public officials and store management developed a free, once-a-week shuttle service in an effort to improve residents’ access to healthy foods and ensure that the one supermarket serving 26,000 people did not close.

**Tennessee:** In Nashville, the Metropolitan Planning Organization’s 25-year Regional Transportation Plan included an analysis of how roadways in the Nashville area can better connect residents to food retailers. The analysis used overlay maps to identify lower-income, minority and predominantly elderly neighborhoods that would benefit from public transportation routes that provide better access to food retailers. The Metropolitan Planning Organization used the analysis of food environments and community populations when ranking and funding transportation projects as part of a comprehensive approach to promote the health and wellness of residents in Nashville.

## RECOMMENDATION 5:

### The City of Houston should prioritize increasing enrollment in and utilization of the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) and Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children (WIC) and invest in outreach efforts citywide.

Working to expand grocery access should be part of a broader initiative to increase the demand for healthy foods. Increasing enrollment in the SNAP, also known as food stamps, and WIC increases the buying power of lower-income communities, thereby improving the long-term viability of local grocery stores. Texas has one of the lowest SNAP participation rates in the country among eligible residents and Houston in particular lags behind other major cities in Texas. In Houston alone, under-participation has resulted in \$142 million of unclaimed SNAP benefits, dollars which could be spent at grocery stores in the community. The City of Houston's recent investment in SNAP outreach, in partnership with the Houston Food Bank, is a positive step to help residents eat healthier while generating significant economic development. Investment in SNAP outreach and enrollment can bring returns as high as \$1.4 million in SNAP dollars for each outreach worker.

### *Success Stories*

**Ohio:** Ohio developed an integrated, effective system for outreach, enrollment and maintenance of SNAP. The Ohio Benefit Bank, an internet-based, counselor-assisted service, connects lower- and moderate-income families to tax credits and work supports, including SNAP benefits. The program is implemented through a public-private partnership of over 1,100 faith-based, nonprofit, government and private organizations. The creation of this system to assist those in need has helped the state to consistently achieve participation rates above the national average and has put Ohio at the forefront of fighting hunger and poverty.

**Texas:** The Texas Food Bank Network Association and Texas Department of Health and Human Services launched the Social Service Outreach Program statewide in 2006 to raise awareness of available social services and provide application assistance for state benefit programs, including SNAP. In Houston, the Houston Food Bank is contracted with the state to screen applicants and issue benefit cards. The Houston Food Bank is now focused on increasing enrollment through a variety of proven outreach strategies, with the goal of being first in SNAP participation among major cities by 2017. These efforts received a boost in 2012 with the announcement of funding from the City of Houston and are starting to make an impact by reducing the stigma associated with SNAP and other public benefits, training additional social service providers in the community in application assistance, encouraging use of the state's online system and reaching residents at new venues throughout the community.



## RECOMMENDATION 6:

A partnership of hunger advocates, the grocery industry and other public, private and civic sector leaders should work together to develop and pilot a self-service kiosk to streamline the enrollment process for SNAP and other public benefits in Texas in a cost-effective manner. Additionally, healthy food incentive programs should be promoted to encourage shoppers to utilize SNAP benefits for fresh fruits and vegetables and other healthy foods.

In recent years, Texas's Health and Human Services Commission has made significant improvements in streamlining the benefits application process, with the development of [YourTexasBenefits.com](http://YourTexasBenefits.com), a combined, electronic application for SNAP and other state-administered public benefits. This electronic system offers new opportunities to make enrollment more convenient by allowing residents to apply for benefits at any computer. New venues in the community—such as grocery stores or health clinics—can provide a place for residents to use the state's web portal and receive application support. The self-service kiosk, proposed by the Houston Food Bank, is one such model that should be explored and could be piloted in local grocery stores. In addition to increasing rates of enrollment, Texas would also benefit from the development of healthy food incentive programs to encourage SNAP recipients to purchase fresh fruits and vegetables and other healthy items. Such programs have been successfully implemented at farmers' markets and should be made available at supermarkets and grocery stores.

## Success Stories

**National:** The Food, Nutrition and Conservation Act of 2008 (also known as the Farm Bill) authorized \$20 million for pilot projects to evaluate health and nutrition promotion in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP). The Healthy Incentives Pilot, developed by the United States Department of Agriculture and currently being implemented in Hampden County, Massachusetts, enrolls 7,500 randomly selected SNAP households to receive incentives at the point of sale. For every dollar participants spend on fruits and vegetables using their SNAP electronic benefit transfer cards, 30 cents is added to their benefit balance—thus cutting the cost of fruits and vegetables by almost one-third. State and local governments across the country have partnered with private industry and non-profit organizations to offer similar incentive programs for SNAP participants shopping at local farmers' markets. Programs such as Minnesota's Market Bucks, Austin's Double Dollar Incentive Program and Philadelphia's Philly Food Bucks which offer similar rebates have shown substantial increases in the purchase of fresh fruits and vegetables at participating farmers' markets. This model should be expanded to encourage SNAP participants to purchase fruits, vegetables and other healthful foods at supermarkets and grocery stores.



## RECOMMENDATION 7:

State and local governments in Texas, in partnership with local nonprofit organizations and public health professionals, should promote nutrition education in schools and communities and support best practices to encourage shoppers to select and purchase healthy foods.

Residents in underserved communities can benefit from nutrition education programs in local schools and community institutions. Families may not be fully aware of the nutritional requirements needed to achieve good health or how to prepare and cook healthy foods. Educational efforts are needed to generate interest and demand for healthier options and help drive customers to retail outlets that provide these healthier foods. Food retailers can also take steps to promote healthy eating in their stores through product placement, marketing and in-store education. Studies increasingly demonstrate the important role that the physical store environment and consumer education can play in encouraging shoppers to make healthy choices.



### **Success Stories**

**New York:** The 2012 establishment of the New York Healthy Food & Healthy Communities (HFHC) Fund, a statewide grant and loan program to support new or renovated healthy food retailers, prompted the administrators of the fund to advocate for nutrition education in the underserved communities the program served. Goldman Sachs, a partner in the fund, provided

\$50,000 for the creation of the Community Health and Nutrition Outreach Initiative which provides complementary nutrition education for selected neighborhoods with HFHC-funded grocery stores. With support from the Low Income Investment Fund and The Reinvestment Fund, The Food Trust created *Supermarket Strategies to Encourage Healthy Eating*, a toolkit to provide retail operators with nutrition education information and tools to promote healthy

eating in their stores. Food retail operators can employ a variety of strategies—including store tours, nutrition education seminars and materials, taste test events and health screenings—to change food environments and help consumers to make healthy choices in their stores. This effort ensures community members realize the full health and wellness benefits of the increased local access to fresh and nutritious food.

## RECOMMENDATION 8:

Nonprofit advocacy organizations, in partnership with the grocery industry and other stakeholders, should work together to identify local, state and federal legislators who can provide leadership to advance policies that encourage economic development and the provision of healthy, affordable foods in their respective districts.

A diverse, broad-based approach is necessary to implement policies at the local and state level. It is essential to educate and inform public leaders, including those that have been charged to study this issue by state leadership, and others in positions to influence policy. Support from the Houston's Health and Human Services Department, Harris County Public Health and Environmental Services, Texas Health and Human Services Commission, Texas Department of State Health Services, Texas Enterprise Fund and legislative committees such as House Committee on Public Health, House Committee on Agriculture and Livestock, House Committee on Urban Affairs, House Committee on Human Services, Senate Committee on Agriculture and Rural Affairs and Senate Committee on Economic Development can be crucial to implementing the recommendations in this report.



### *Success Stories*

**Illinois:** Members of the state legislature, along with leaders in the governor's office, have taken a leadership role in addressing the food access challenges facing many lower-income residents in Illinois. In 2009, Governor Pat Quinn, State Senator Jacqueline Collins and State Representative Will Davis took a stand to

improve healthy food access across Illinois. These policymakers championed the work of the Illinois Food Marketing Task Force, ultimately helping to secure a state commitment of \$10 million to create the Illinois Fresh Food Fund, a financing program to encourage grocery development in underserved communities. The program launched in 2012 and offers grant and loan funding to grocery operators or developers to

purchase land, build a new facility or renovate an existing grocery store in an underserved community. The support of elected officials was integral in bringing this recommendation to fruition for residents in Illinois.



## RECOMMENDATION 9:

### Leaders from the Houston Grocery Access Task Force should work in partnership with existing coalitions, including the Healthy Houston Task Force, to guide the implementation of these recommendations.

The active participation of leadership from the grocery retail industry, public officials and the health and civic sectors is essential to the successful development and expansion of supermarkets and other stores selling high-quality, healthy and affordable foods across the state. A small group of committed public and private sector leaders—working closely with the City of Houston’s Healthy Houston Task Force and other permanent bodies of key food access stakeholders—can provide guidance and assistance to guide the implementation of these nine recommendations.

### *Success Stories*

**Louisiana:** The New Orleans Fresh Food Retailer Initiative was launched in 2011 to increase access to healthy, affordable foods in underserved neighborhoods in the city through the development of supermarkets and grocery stores. Seeds for the program were planted years earlier.

In 2007, several groups working on food policy in New Orleans, including public health, economic development and supermarket industry leaders, joined to form the New Orleans Food Policy Advisory Committee (FPAC). FPAC developed 10 policy recommendations addressing ways that the city and state could encourage supermarket and other fresh food retail development in underserved communities. City council supported these recommendations and adopted a resolution creating a task force to develop strategies for implementation. The task force was organized by Tulane University’s Prevention Research Center and included, among many other stakeholders, staff from the City’s Office of Recovery and Development Administration who eventually identified \$7 million in disaster relief funds to seed the Fresh Food Retailer Initiative. A local community development organization, Hope Enterprise Corporation, pledged to match the city’s investment and was contracted to manage the initiative, which provides direct financial assistance, in the form of forgivable and interest-bearing loans, to supermarkets and other fresh food retailers locating in underserved neighborhoods.

Collaboration among public and private leadership has been one of the main drivers of success behind the effort to create the Fresh Food Retailer Initiative in New Orleans and similar projects across the country. FPAC continues to work on food policy issues in the city. In 2009, the group launched its second major initiative, focused on improving school food and child nutrition.





# CONCLUSION

Providing better access to healthy and affordable food will help to improve the health of residents and revitalize communities in Houston and Texas. When people have convenient access to supermarkets, they eat more servings of fruits and vegetables and are more likely to maintain a healthy weight. Furthermore, bringing more supermarkets and healthy food resources to underserved communities will create quality jobs and contribute to the revitalization of urban and rural communities.

The nine recommendations developed by the Houston Grocery Access Task Force are achievable steps toward creating healthier and more vibrant communities in Houston and Texas. States and cities across the country have implemented similar changes to public policies and practices, attracting new and expanded grocery stores to areas of need. The stores supported by the successful public-private financing programs

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in states such as Pennsylvania, New York and Louisiana continue to thrive and make the case that after an initial infusion of funds, profitable supermarkets and grocery stores can be operated in lower-income neighborhoods.

With the creation of the Healthy Houston Initiative and the identification of four priority neighborhoods for grocery investment, the City of Houston has demonstrated its commitment to advancing this roadmap and improving food access for its residents. We encourage

local leaders to build on the groundwork that has been laid and expedite the implementation of these recommendations. Houston can serve as a model for other municipalities and for leaders at the state level in Texas. By working together, we can bring quality jobs to our communities and ensure that all children in Texas can live healthy and active lives.

## Selected Resources

American Journal of Preventative Medicine, "Understanding Policy Enactment: The New Orleans Fresh Food Retailer Initiative" Authors: Ulmer, V., Rathert, A., Rathert, D

Center for Science and the Public Interest, Nutrition Policy  
[http://www.cspinet.org/nutritionpolicy/nutrition\\_policy.html#eat](http://www.cspinet.org/nutritionpolicy/nutrition_policy.html#eat)

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), Recommended Community Strategies and Measurements to Prevent Obesity in the United States: Implementation and Measurement Guide  
[http://www.cdc.gov/obesity/downloads/community\\_strategies\\_guide.pdf](http://www.cdc.gov/obesity/downloads/community_strategies_guide.pdf)

City of Louisville, Economic Growth and Innovation Newsroom  
<http://www.louisvilleky.gov/economicdevelopment/News/2012/FirstChoiceMarketOpensinParkDuValle.htm>

Community Redevelopment Agency of Los Angeles  
<http://www.crala.org/internet-site/About/index.cfm>

DevelopSpringfield  
<http://www.developspringfield.com/>

Food Marketing Institute, Access to Healthier Foods: Opportunities and Challenges for Food Retailers in Underserved Areas  
[http://www.fmi.org/docs/health-wellness/Access\\_To\\_Healthier\\_Foods.pdf](http://www.fmi.org/docs/health-wellness/Access_To_Healthier_Foods.pdf)

Health Affairs, "Policy Solutions to the Grocery Gap" Authors: Allison Karpyn, Miriam Manon, Sarah Treuhaft, Tracey Giang, Caroline Harries, and Kate McCoubrey  
<http://www.rwjf.org/pr/product.jsp?id=55729>

Houston Food Bank, Social Services Outreach Program  
<http://www.houstonfoodbank.org/socialservicesoutreach.aspx>

Initiative for a Competitive Inner City, The Changing Models of Inner City Grocery Retailing  
[http://www.icic.org/ee\\_uploads/publications/TheChangingModels-02-July.pdf](http://www.icic.org/ee_uploads/publications/TheChangingModels-02-July.pdf)

Institute of Medicine, Local Government Actions to Prevent Childhood Obesity  
<http://www.iom.edu/Reports/2009/Local-Government-Actions-to-Prevent-Childhood-Obesity.aspx>

International City/County Management Association, Community Health and Food Access: Local Government Role  
<http://bookstore.icma.org/freedocs/E43398.pdf>

PolicyLink and The Food Trust, The Grocery Gap: Who Has Access to Healthy Food and Why It Matters, Authors: Sarah Treuhaft and Allison Karpyn  
<http://www.thefoodtrust.org/pdf/GroceryGap.pdf>

PolicyLink, Grocery Store Attraction Strategies: A Resource Guide for Community Activists and Local Governments  
<http://www.policylink.org/site/apps/nlnet/content2.aspx?c=klXLbMNJrE&b=5136581&ct=6994695>

PolicyLink, Healthy Food, Healthy Communities  
<http://www.policylink.org/site/apps/nlnet/content2.aspx?c=klXLbMNJrE&b=5136581&ct=10958405>

Public Health Law & Policy, Getting to Grocery: Tools for Attracting Healthy Food Retail to Underserved Neighborhoods  
<http://www.phlpnet.org/healthy-planning/products/getting-to-grocery>

Texas Comptroller of Public Accounts, Gaining Costs, Losing Time: The Obesity Crisis in Texas  
<http://www.window.state.tx.us/specialrpt/obesitycost/index.php>

The Benefit Bank, Connecting Communities to Resources  
<http://www.thebenefitbank.com/TBBOH>

The Food Trust  
<http://www.thefoodtrust.org/>

The Low Income Investment Fund, New York Healthy Food & Healthy Communities Program  
<http://www.liifund.org/programs/healthy-food/>

The Reinvestment Fund, Healthy Food Retail Financing at Work: Pennsylvania Fresh Food Financing Initiative  
[http://www.cdfifund.gov/what\\_we\\_do/FinancingHealthyFoodOptionsResourceBank.asp](http://www.cdfifund.gov/what_we_do/FinancingHealthyFoodOptionsResourceBank.asp)

Trust for America's Health, F as in Fat: How Obesity Threatens America's Future  
<http://healthyamericans.org/report/100/>

United States Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Services, Healthy Incentives Pilot  
<http://www.fns.usda.gov/snap/hip/default.htm>

Uplift Solutions  
<http://www.upliftsolutions.org/>

## Ensuring That Everyone Has Access To Affordable, Nutritious Food

The Food Trust, a nationally recognized nonprofit founded in Philadelphia in 1992, strives to make healthy food available to all. Research has shown that lack of access to healthy food has a profound impact on food choices and, therefore, a profound impact on health.

For 20 years, The Food Trust has worked with neighborhoods, schools, grocers, farmers and policymakers to develop a comprehensive approach to improving the health of America's children. The Food Trust's innovative initiatives integrate nutrition education with increased availability of affordable, healthy foods.

This approach has been shown to reduce the incidence of childhood overweight; a study in the journal *Pediatrics* found that the agency's School Nutrition Policy Initiative resulted in a 50 percent reduction in the incidence of overweight among Philadelphia school children.

The Food Trust is recognized as a regional and national leader in the prevention of childhood obesity and other diet-related diseases for this and other notable initiatives to increase food access in underserved neighborhoods, including the Healthy Corner Store Initiative and the Pennsylvania Fresh Food Financing Initiative, a public-private partnership which has approved funding for nearly 90 fresh food retail projects across Pennsylvania.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention honored the Fresh Food Financing Initiative in its Showcase of Innovative Policy and Environmental Strategies for Obesity Prevention and Control, and the program was named one of the Top 15 Innovations in American Government by Harvard University. For more information or to order additional copies of this report, visit [thefoodtrust.org](http://thefoodtrust.org) or contact The Food Trust.

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