

Topic Area: Wellness and Public Health

Abstract Title

Ottawa Good Food Corner Store Initiative: A pilot project to increase access to fresh vegetables and fruit and healthy staple foods

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Abstract

Introduction: Healthier corner store (CS) initiatives are gaining popularity as a population health strategy to improve access to nutritious food. Ottawa Good Food Corner Store (GFCS) Initiative aimed to increase access to fresh vegetables and fruit (VF) and healthy staple foods (HSF) in priority neighbourhoods.

Objectives: The objectives of the GFCS pilot were to: 1) understand current CS practices, challenges and opportunities to stock healthier inventory; 2) inform development GFCS resources; and 3) engage community and increase consumer demand.

Methods: GFCS Pilot implementation included branding, promotion, resources, and community support. Participating CS operators committed to meet minimum inventory of VF and HSF. Observational surveys, interviews, sales data and experiential knowledge were collected before, during and at end-of-pilot.

Results: Eight diverse CS participated in the GFCS pilot. Continuous improvement of processes, tracking and resources occurred during the pilot. Key challenges included inconsistency in variety, quality and quantity of VF. Most operators shopped in discount stores or supermarkets for VF instead of wholesaler. Other challenges were: limited refrigeration, waste management and low consumer demand. Furthermore, sales data collection was inconsistent due to lack of point-of-sale tracking. Successes include increased inventory and prominence of VF, improved operators' skills and confidence around tracking sales, waste management and handling fresh VF. All CSs reported satisfaction with the GFCS model. One CS closed and remaining CS continue selling VF and use GFCS branding.

Conclusions: An innovative sustainable model needs to be developed to strengthen consumer demand and improve procurement options for small businesses. This Pilot informed the development of key resources including GFCS Guide for CS operators.

Significance to the field of dietetics: This experience contributes knowledge of successes and challenges of engaging with community and small retail businesses to find viable options to improve healthy food access in neighbourhoods.