Southern Support for Healthy Food Access

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Photo Credit: Flickr User DC Central Kitchen

Across the country, support is building for Healthy Corner Store Initiatives and Healthy Food Financing programs. These types of programs designed to bring healthier options into areas like food deserts that lack supermarkets, and which have few or no options for fresh, healthy produce.

“Programs such as a Healthy Corner Store Initiative and Healthy Food Financing improve availability, affordability and accessibility of healthy foods at food retailers within areas of poor food access,” explained Sarah Jacobson, Healthy Food Access Coordinator for the North Carolina Alliance for Health (NCAH).

Philadelphia in particular has seen great success with their Healthy Corner Store Initiative. With help from The Food Trust, more than 600 corner stores have joined the cause and about 83 percent of stores are already meeting participation requirements.

At least two recent polls, one in North Carolina and the other in Alabama, show widespread support for Healthy Corner Store Initiatives as well as funding for training and incentives for store owners. A poll conducted in North Carolina shows that a vast majority of people understand that childhood obesity and unhealthy eating are serious problems, and recognize that not having access to affordable, healthy options, was a major part of the problem. Additionally, 70 percent of voters support the creation of an initiative similar to Philadelphia’s.

In Alabama, a recent poll from VOICES for Alabama’s Children found that 70 percent of voters support giving incentives for opening grocery stores in neighborhoods where kids don’t have access to healthy options. And, support for this vision can be seen across every demographic.

“In all my years of polling, I have not seen support for a public policy issue as overwhelming and widespread as this one,” said Dr. Jerry Ingram of Southeast Research, the company behind the poll. “Alabamians are truly not divided when it comes to supporting initiatives that improve the health of the state’s children.”

But even with the astounding support for healthier corner stores, change can be difficult. Many stores don’t have the funds to replace inventory and market healthier options. And in some cases, they lack the physical infrastructure to stock certain goods – for example, coolers suitable for fruits and vegetables.

“Several barriers prevent small store owners from stocking and selling healthy and local foods,” Jacobson said. “The Healthy Corner Store Initiative can help lower these barriers.”