CORNER STORE INITIATIVE ENCOURAGES HEALTHY CHOICES

County program in North Carolina partners with local farmers and corner stores to bring fresh foods to communities.

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LEXINGTON, N.C. – Helping North Carolina residents in Davidson County make better food choices is becoming more of a reality through the Healthy Corner Store Initiative, reports The-Dispatch.com. The program partners with farmers’ markets, corner stores and local growers to encourage healthier eating habits and make fresh foods more affordable and accessible.

“All of Thomasville is considered a food desert, and so is half of Lexington,” Jen Hames, health education supervisor for the Davidson County Health Department, told the news source. “Although the southern part of the county is not considered a food desert there is still limited access to food. We brainstormed what we could do to increase access, and we thought about the corner store concept. We approached several convenience stores and gas stations in the area from both a community issue as well as a business opportunity."

The initiative also recognizes that businesses providing healthier foods need to remain profitable. Funding from the health department helps businesses purchase items such as display units, shelving, carts, produce scales and other items such as banners to advertise, noted Hames.

Matthew Schaffer, owner of the Patriot Market in Silver Valley, was one of the first Healthy Corner Store Initiative participants. For him, offering healthier food options is good for business. “There are other added benefits, but for us it comes down to the bottom line,” he told the news source, adding, “The produce itself is very cost-effective. We sell our produce very cheap, cheaper than the grocery store, but when it all falls into place we have doubled our investment. The money filters back into the community in more ways than one. I encourage other stores to be open to the option. There can be a great reward with minimal investments.”

Schaffer says that one of the reasons the program has been so successful is that residents want to buy local produce. “We buy from local farmers,” he told the news source. “If we can glean a little extra income and at the same time help local farmers and provide healthy choices, then it is a benefit for everyone.”

Now in its third year, notes Hames, the program continues to provide funding for stores to sell fresh produce. These healthier options, she says, also helps curb obesity. “Adding these initiatives that improve the overall health of the community decreases medical costs, increases lifespan and improves quality of life.”

In another part of the country, the Philadelphia Healthy Corner Store Initiative is also getting convenience stores to carry more fresh produce — and is showing retailers that having a more healthy selection can benefit their bottom line as well. Hear what Tom Lees, owner of Pat’s Place in Philadelphia, has to say about how the program has benefitted his business.