Finding healthy food options can be difficult when you’re on the go, but thanks to a partnership between MountainWise and H.T. Hackney Distribution, it just got a little easier for Haywood residents.

Over the past year, select corner stores throughout Western North Carolina have been undergoing changes to promote the introduction of healthy food options and fresh produce in their convenience store through the Mountain Markets initiative.

There are now over 25 stores in Western North Carolina that are participating in this initiative, four of which are in Haywood County. These four stores are Soco Grocery and Meat Market, the Aztex Fuel and Food Center on Jonathan Creek Road, Bethel Grocery and Ferguson’s Supply store.

Melissa Rockett of MountainWise said the organization has been working on this project for over a year and half.

"The goal is to get fresh foods in convenience stores where people aren’t close to grocery stores," Rockett said. "I haven’t seen it done anywhere else. It’s kind of a new thing."

MountainWise and Hackney worked together in what Rockett called “the perfect partnership” to get the initiative started. MountainWise started by identifying local farmers and growers who would be able to meet the demand of selling produce and fresh foods in the stores. Once those growers became partners in the Mountain Markets initiative, Hackney stepped in to deliver the local foods to the stores.

MountainWise also supplied signs and other materials to help the convenience stores market the new initiative. Healthy options provided at MountainMarkets are labeled with “WiseChoice” labels to make healthy shopping quick and easy. Produce, whole wheat bread, eggs, nuts, 100 percent fruit juice, water, low-calorie meats, snacks and dairy are some of the "WiseChoices" customers can expect to find on the shelves of participating stores.

Lisa Trice, manager of Soco Grocery and Meat Market, said the initiative at the store is doing really well.

"We sold produce to start with, but this brings people in,” she said. “They realize we have more healthy things to snack on."

The biggest difference for Soco Grocery and Meat Market is the wider selection of fruit they can offer through the initiative. Trice said when the change took place, customers didn’t notice at first. But with the help of marketing supplies from MountainWise, their customers realized the difference.

“Once they realized, they were excited,” Trice said.

To learn more about the MountainWise initiative, to become a Mountain Market or to find out more about participating, visit mountainwise.org. To learn more about sourcing local produce, contact H.T. Hackney at 456-8692 or visit hthackney.com.

Visit the MountainWise YouTube channel and search for MountainWiseWNC to watch a short video featuring the success story of Caney Fork General Store in Jackson County.