



# North Carolina Alliance for Health

*Advocating for Policies that Promote Wellness and Reduce the Impact of Tobacco and Obesity*



## North Carolina Statewide Survey

### Perceptions on Access to Healthy Food

For additional information contact Sarah Jacobson of the North Carolina Alliance for Health at 919.463.8329 or [sarah@ncallianceforhealth.org](mailto:sarah@ncallianceforhealth.org)

## Methodology

These are the results of the statewide telephone survey measuring the opinions of North Carolina registered voters on access to healthy foods and possible solutions to food insecurity. The poll was funded the American Heart Association.

The survey was completed by Public Opinion Strategies on November 10-12, 2014, among 500 registered voters, including 150 cell phone respondents, and has a margin of error of +4.38%.

Glen Bolger and Jim Hobart were the principal researchers on this project. Caitlin Reed was the project director, and Alex Geroux provided analytical support.

# Statewide Poll Conducted to Gain a Deeper Understanding of How North Carolinians View Food Access in their Communities

## Summary of Findings

North Carolina voters recognize that childhood obesity and a lack of access to healthy foods present a problem for many across our state. As a result, there is strong bipartisan support among registered voters for the Healthy Corner Store Initiative. **The Healthy Corner Store Initiative receives broad support, with 70% of registered North Carolina voters supporting or strongly supporting a Healthy Corner Store Initiative.** A majority (54%) of registered voters in North Carolina say that state and local governments should do more to improve access to healthy foods in neighborhood stores, where people often shop for groceries.

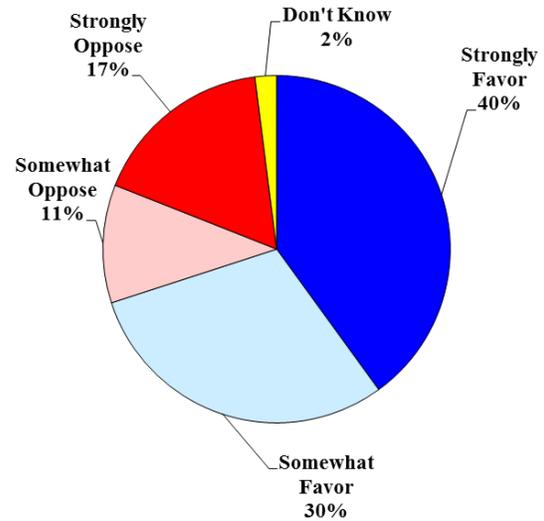
According to this poll **North Carolinians view unhealthy eating and childhood obesity as the most serious problems facing children in the United States**, above physical activity, quality of education, and children not spending enough time outdoors.

One half of registered voters view **access to grocery stores in low to moderate income areas in both urban and rural communities as a serious problem.**

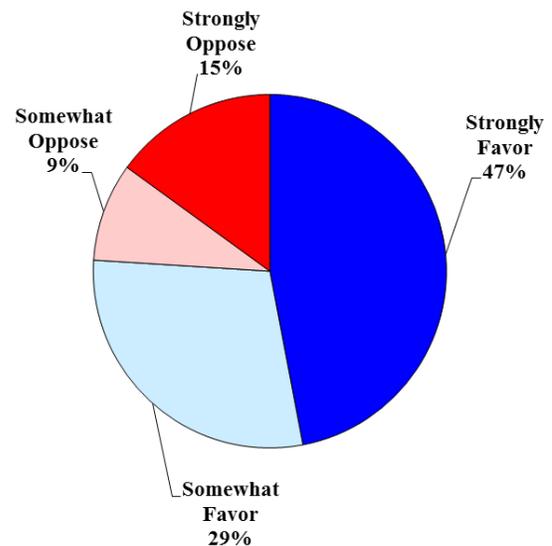
North Carolinians believe that in both urban and rural areas of the state **the most significant barrier to improving access to healthy foods in low to moderate income areas is that healthy foods are not affordable.** Lack of nutritional education and poor economic conditions are also seen as significant barriers.

## North Carolinians Strongly Support a Healthy Corner Store Initiative

A significant majority of registered North Carolina voters would support a Healthy Corner Store Initiative.



A significant majority of registered North Carolina voters say that state and local governments should provide training and incentives to encourage corner store owners to stock healthy foods.



## What is a Healthy Corner Store Initiative?

A Healthy Corner Store Initiative would assess communities for access to healthy foods, engage interested small retail store owners to offer healthier options, and provide participating retailers with marketing and technical assistance (signage, cooking demonstrations, etc.) to help them promote the healthy foods they sell. The Initiative would work to connect these store owners with North Carolina farmers, benefiting local farmers by expanding their market opportunities. The Initiative coordinates with SNAP and WIC to ensure underserved communities can maximize their utilization of these programs in the healthy corner store locations.

A North Carolina Healthy Corner Store Initiative would include the following components:

- The establishment of a Healthy Corner Store Fund to provide funding for county-based programs to provide assistance to existing corner stores to increase the availability and sales of fresh and nutritious food in low or moderate income areas.
- Through the fund, mini-grants and/or loans would be provided to local health departments or non-profit(s) to aid existing corner store owners in acquiring refrigerators, displays or other one-time capital expenditures necessary for stocking health foods and fresh produce.
- To maximize community support for purchasing the healthier fresh food, Healthy Corner Store Grantees would be provided technical assistance, education, advice or other assistance regarding food safety and handling, business operations, help connecting to North Carolina farmers and local resources, as well as marketing and promotion (including materials and supplies for nutrition education and healthy food promotion).
- An evaluation component would be included to measure the health and economic impact of the Healthy Corner Store Initiative.

# What would a Healthy Corner Store Initiative do for North Carolina?

## Help Small Farms and Farmers

With agriculture comprising more than \$78 billion of North Carolina's economy, it is important to ensure the survival of our farms. There are 52,218 farms in North Carolina.<sup>1</sup> Most farms in this state are very small; nearly half of all North Carolina farms sit on fewer than 50 acres of land.<sup>2</sup> For small, family farmers it has been increasingly difficult to find markets in which to sell their goods. In fact, only 249 farms account for 75% of the vegetables grown for sale in North Carolina.<sup>3</sup> Additionally, it is currently very difficult to become a farmer due to lack of available land to rent or buy and high start-up costs.<sup>4</sup> This makes finding reliable retail markets crucial to the survival of the farm.

Our state's proud agricultural history makes it clear that North Carolinians care about supporting local farmers, large and small. The Healthy Corner Store Initiative can help increase demand for local fruits and vegetables by creating additional markets for these goods.<sup>5</sup> This initiative would help enhance the local distribution systems necessary for small farmers to thrive by connecting store owners and farmers and providing corner stores with the infrastructure necessary to sell fresh produce. The Healthy Corner Store Initiative would also expand local market opportunities, therefore making it possible for young and minority farmers to enter the field.

## Help Corner Store Owners

Several barriers prevent small store owners from stocking and selling healthy and local foods. Owners face a supplier-retailer gap that can make finding local produce to sell at affordable prices very difficult.<sup>5</sup> Further, these stores have small square footage with limited shelving and refrigeration, which can make it difficult for them to expand their inventory or stock perishable items. Many store owners do not have the time or resources to invest in store upgrades and are not aware of financing options.

---

<sup>1</sup>"North Carolina Agriculture Overview." North Carolina Department of Agriculture & Consumer Services, 24 July 2014. Web. 9 Feb. 2015. <http://www.ncagr.gov/stats/general/overview.htm>.

<sup>2</sup>"Census of Agriculture: North Carolina State and County Data." United States Department of Agriculture, 2012. Available at [http://www.agcensus.usda.gov/Publications/2012/Full\\_Report/Volume\\_1,\\_Chapter\\_1\\_State\\_Level/North\\_Carolina/ncv1.pdf](http://www.agcensus.usda.gov/Publications/2012/Full_Report/Volume_1,_Chapter_1_State_Level/North_Carolina/ncv1.pdf).

<sup>3</sup>"Census of Agriculture: North Carolina State and County Data." United States Department of Agriculture, 2012. Available at [http://www.agcensus.usda.gov/Publications/2012/Full\\_Report/Volume\\_1,\\_Chapter\\_1\\_State\\_Level/North\\_Carolina/ncv1.pdf](http://www.agcensus.usda.gov/Publications/2012/Full_Report/Volume_1,_Chapter_1_State_Level/North_Carolina/ncv1.pdf).

<sup>4</sup>"Young People Face Barriers to Enter Farming." Farm Futures, June 10, 2011. Web. 9 Feb. 2015. <http://farmfutures.com/story-young-people-face-barriers-to-enter-farming-17-50185>.

<sup>5</sup>"Healthy Corner Stores Q & A." Healthy Corner Stores Network, February 2010. Web. 9 Feb. 2015. <http://www.healthycornerstores.org/healthy-corner-stores-q-a>.

<sup>5</sup>"Healthy Corner Store Issue Brief." The Food Trust for the Health Corner Stores Network, 2012. Available at [http://thefoodtrust.org/uploads/media\\_items/winter2012issuebrief.original.pdf](http://thefoodtrust.org/uploads/media_items/winter2012issuebrief.original.pdf).

The Healthy Corner Store Initiative would increase the ability of corner store owners to sell and market healthy food options in their store and would assist store owners with training and technical assistance to make healthy changes profitable. The Initiative would also provide opportunities to be part of the Healthy Corner Store Designation Program, which would highlight participating corner store owners, thereby helping owners advertise their stores.

When compared to non-local produce, local produce tends to have a longer shelf life and fresher taste.<sup>6</sup> Thus, stocking local, fresh produce can reduce costs from quick spoilage, as well as attract customers seeking high-quality produce. In an early point-of-sale system study data showed that increases in healthy food choices, when combined with educational materials about the healthy changes in their corner store, had a positive impact on healthy food sales.<sup>7</sup> Additionally, store owners reported improved perceptions about the profitability of healthier items. Further, increased profits from healthy food sales have allowed store owners to invest further in their businesses.

## Help Decrease Childhood Obesity and Chronic Disease

More than 31% of North Carolina children ages 10 to 17 are overweight or obese.<sup>8</sup> Obesity can lead to a number of chronic diseases. For instance, research suggests that overweight children triple and obese children quadruple their risk of developing high blood pressure in adulthood.<sup>9</sup>

Obesity and diet-related diseases such as diabetes, cardiovascular diseases, and certain kinds of cancer disproportionately impact communities without access to healthy foods. People living in such communities—known as food deserts—often shop for food at corner stores, which commonly sell highly processed foods that are high in fat and low in nutrients. In fact, youth who live near convenience stores have higher Body Mass Indices (BMIs) and consume more sugary drinks than their peers who live closer to full-service grocery stores.<sup>10</sup> Additionally, one study showed that more than 40% of elementary school students shopped at a corner store twice daily, often purchasing chips, candy, and soda.<sup>11</sup>

Because youth who live in food deserts often shop for food in corner stores it is extremely important that these retail outlets offer healthy food options. The Healthy Corner Store Initiative would do just that by providing corner stores with the infrastructure to stock fresh fruits and vegetables. Decreases in obesity and chronic disease can be linked to increased consumption of

---

<sup>6</sup> "Healthy Corner Store Issue Brief." The Food Trust for the Health Corner Stores Network, 2012. Available at [http://thefoodtrust.org/uploads/media\\_items/winter2012issuebrief.original.pdf](http://thefoodtrust.org/uploads/media_items/winter2012issuebrief.original.pdf).

<sup>7</sup> "Healthy Corner Stores: Positive Impacts and Profitable Changes." The Food Trust, 2014; 5. Available at [http://thefoodtrust.org/uploads/media\\_items/healthier-corner-stores-positive-impacts-and-profitable-changes.original.pdf](http://thefoodtrust.org/uploads/media_items/healthier-corner-stores-positive-impacts-and-profitable-changes.original.pdf).

<sup>8</sup> "What is the weight status of children based on Body Mass Index (BMI) for age? 4 categories." *National Survey of Children's Health (2011-12)*. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Health Resources and Services Administration, Maternal and Child Health Bureau, 2012. Web. 9 Feb 2015. <http://childhealthdata.org/browse/survey/results?q=2462&r=35>.

<sup>9</sup> "Childhood obesity may quadruple high blood pressure risk in adulthood." American Heart Association, 12 Sep. 2013. Web. 9 Feb. 2015. <http://newsroom.heart.org/news/childhood-obesity-may-quadruple-high-blood-pressure-risk-in-adulthood>.

<sup>10</sup> Laska Melissa N., et al. "Neighbourhood food environments: are they associated with adolescent dietary intake, food purchases and weight status?" *Public Health Nutrition* 13.11 (2010): 1757–1763. Available at <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3119051/>.

<sup>11</sup> Borradaile, KE, et al. "Snacking in Children: The Role of Urban Corner Stores." *Pediatrics* 124.5 (2009): 1293–1298. Available at <http://pediatrics.aappublications.org/content/124/5/1293.full.pdf+html>.

fruits and vegetables.<sup>12</sup> Thus, the Healthy Corner Store Initiative has the potential to decrease the percentage of youth that are overweight, obese, or are suffering from chronic diseases such as cardiovascular disease and diabetes.

## Help Reduce Healthcare Costs

A healthy diet is crucial for both the prevention and treatment of costly chronic diseases. Healthcare costs continue to rise in North Carolina and across the country. Excess weight has been estimated to cost North Carolina \$17.6 billion each year in medical costs and lost employee productivity.<sup>13</sup> Diabetes alone, which has been linked to an unhealthy diet, costs North Carolina \$4.4 billion yearly.<sup>14</sup>

There is strong evidence that increased fruit and vegetable consumption can decrease the risk of high blood pressure, stroke, heart disease, and certain types of cancer, which are all diseases associated with a poor diet.<sup>15</sup> In fact, a population-wide shift in just one extra portion of fruits and vegetables could save the United States \$2.7 trillion in medical costs.<sup>16</sup> Therefore, the Healthy Corner Store Initiative, by ensuring that healthy produce and meats are accessible and affordable, would be expected to provide North Carolina with immense healthcare savings.

---

<sup>12</sup> "The \$11 Trillion Dollar Reward: How Simple Dietary Changes Can Save Lives and Money, and How We Can Get There." *Union of Concerned Scientists*, 2013; 1–7. Available at [http://www.ucsusa.org/sites/default/files/legacy/assets/documents/food\\_and\\_agriculture/11-trillion-reward.pdf](http://www.ucsusa.org/sites/default/files/legacy/assets/documents/food_and_agriculture/11-trillion-reward.pdf).

<sup>13</sup> "Tipping the Scales: The high cost of unhealthy behavior in North Carolina." *Be Active North Carolina*, 2012; 2. Available at <http://www.forprevention.org/prevention/Document/Download?id=34e9eb7c-236b-4b74-915b-7513f733bd91>.

<sup>14</sup> "Tipping the Scales: The high cost of unhealthy behavior in North Carolina." *Be Active North Carolina*, 2012; 16. Available at <http://www.forprevention.org/prevention/Document/Download?id=34e9eb7c-236b-4b74-915b-7513f733bd91>.

<sup>15</sup> Boeing H.A., et al. "Critical review: vegetables and fruit in the prevention of chronic disease." *European Journal of Nutrition* 51 (2012) 637-663.

<sup>16</sup> "The \$11 Trillion Dollar Reward: How Simple Dietary Changes Can Save Lives and Money, and How We Can Get There." *Union of Concerned Scientists*, 2013; 2. Available at [http://www.ucsusa.org/sites/default/files/legacy/assets/documents/food\\_and\\_agriculture/11-trillion-reward.pdf](http://www.ucsusa.org/sites/default/files/legacy/assets/documents/food_and_agriculture/11-trillion-reward.pdf).