



Healthy Food Financing Policy Statement October 2012

AHA Position:

Providing access to healthy foods in all communities across the United States is a priority for the American Heart Association. Several policy strategies attempt to accomplish this important goal, including healthy food financing. In 2009, the US Department of Agriculture mapped out the nation's access to supermarkets and grocery stores and found that about 2.3 million households are in areas considered "food deserts."¹ Healthy food financing addresses this issue and is the effort to bring full-service grocery stores or supermarkets to rural and urban communities to provide equitable access to healthy foods such as fruits and vegetables, low-fat dairy, whole grains, seafood, and lean meats. Led by Pennsylvania's Fresh Food Financing Initiative that began as a result of public/private funding in 2004, other states and cities are now pursuing these programs. The economic impact and community development resulting from these projects has been significant. Since the efforts are relatively new, evidence on the health impact is still accumulating. Several larger cross sectional studies have found that greater accessibility to neighborhood supermarkets is associated with more healthful dietary habits and lower body weight.^{2,3,4,5,6,7,8,9,10,11,12} However, some studies have not found an impact on obesity or other health factors.^{13,14,15,16,17} Further analysis of the health impact of these initiatives should be incorporated into evaluation of healthy food financing projects.

The AHA supports Healthy Food Financing initiatives at the federal, state and local level, especially those that integrate in-store and out of store marketing tactics and strategies to help shoppers choose more nutritious foods once the stores are built or renovated. These marketing techniques incorporate product, pricing, placement, and promotion¹⁸ and would include healthy products placed at eye level, limiting unhealthy options at checkout aisles,¹⁹ promoting quality, affordable, fruits and vegetables and other healthy foods in prominent locations, creating store atmospherics that promote healthy choices, developing consumer familiarity and trust, effective supermarket layout, in-store activities such as cooking demonstrations or tours with a registered dietitian for healthy shopping, menu labeling for ready-to-eat foods, as well as out-of-store shopper marketing for healthy foods, such as coupons, advertisements, and digital and social media. Community residents, including youth and low-income, multicultural shoppers should be engaged in developing these healthy, affordable in-store and out-of store healthy food marketing strategies.

Background:

Urban and community planning are important areas for public health advocacy. Several studies have found that the way communities are designed and developed impacts access to healthy foods and physical activity opportunities and correlates with obesity. There is a disparate prevalence of urban corner stores in low-income and high-minority communities and purchases from these stores contribute significantly to higher energy intake and consumption of less healthy foods and beverages by urban school children.²⁰ Projects such as farmers' markets, community gardens, promotion of culturally specific foods for ethnic minorities and Native Americans, local food production and promotion, and youth agricultural and

