

Meeting Notes

Access to Healthy Foods Subcommittee Meeting

Thursday, March 8, 2012

12:00-2:00 PM

Harford County Health Department, Suite 200

120 S. Hays Street

Bel Air, MD 21014

Attendees: Linda Ames, Heidi Brady, Gary Childress, Bruce Clarke, Meg Deem, Erin Ferriter, Beth Hendrix, Susan Kelly, Bari Klein, Judy Mason, Laura McIntosh, Karin Milton, Andrea Pomilly, Rob Reier, John Sullivan, Andrew Walsh, Cindy Weyant

1. Welcome and introductions
2. Review of purpose of the workgroup
 - Access to Healthy Foods is one of three subcommittees of the Obesity Task Force. Two other subcommittees are Community Engagement and Built Environment. The Obesity Task Force will provide the County Council with recommendations in May and a final report in October, 2012.
3. Presentation of demographic data
 - Beth Hendrix gave a PowerPoint presentation on demographic data in Harford County. Presentation can be found online:
<http://www.harfordcountyhealth.com/?p=6057>
 - Population has grown steadily over past 10 years
 - Majority of the population is between 20 and 64
 - 83% of the population is Caucasian, 12% African American
 - Most households have two income earners
 - More people own a home than rent
 - 90% of Harford County residents have graduated from high school
 - Poverty rate in Harford County is 4%
 - Poverty found predominately in households with a single female head of household
 - Senior population has doubled between 2005 and 2010
4. Presentation of access to food data

- Cindy Weyant reviewed food access information. Presentation can be found online: <http://www.harfordcountyhealth.com/?p=6057>
 - Mapped locations of supermarkets, farmers markets, farm stands, CSA's, food banks, food pantries and soup kitchens.
 - Low-moderate and minority populations are most heavily concentrated along the Route 40 corridor.
 - The Route 40 corridor is also where public transportation is most accessible and the greatest number of after school snack programs, summer meals and congregant senior center meals can be found.
- Group added input based on their own knowledge of food access.
 - Judy Mason of Community Action Agency (CAA) explained that the number of people accessing the food pantry has gone up over the last 6-9 months from an average of 750 families per month to currently 850-875 families being served per month.
 - Gary Childress of Harford County Public Schools (HCPS) Food and Nutrition Office noted that three years ago 23% of families received free and reduced price meals; currently 27.6% of families do so. Summer meals are at-risk this year due to Title I funding cuts.
 - Bruce Clarke of Laurrapin Grill added that the cost of food is rising. In particular, the costs of healthy foods such as protein, grain, dairy and produce have gone up.
 - Karin Milton of Brad's Produce explained that rising gas costs have had an impact on their farm. Brad's offers food market stands around the county from July to October, dependent on weather. They also offer community supported agriculture (CSA) opportunities. It is most cost-efficient to have a central location to deliver to, for instance CAA purchases 20 shares of fresh fruits and vegetables per week.
 - John Sullivan of the Harford County Division of Agriculture noted that his department hosts farmers markets in Bel Air, Edgewood and Havre de Grace. A farmers market has been tried in the northern part of the county; however the number of customers and farmers was not great enough to make it sustainable.

5. Defining food desserts/gaps in Harford County

- Food insecurity refers to not knowing where your next meal will come from and not having food within a reasonable distance of your home.

- Food desert is federally defined as “a low-income census tract where a substantial number or share of residents has low access to a supermarket or large grocery store.”
 - The only area within Harford County that meets the specific criteria is Perryman, a predominately industrial area in the county with a very small population.
- Group discussed coming up with its own definition of a food desert:
 - Access to fresh fruits and vegetables
 - Consistent physical access (transportation/walking)
 - Consistent access 7 days per week

6. Current projects happening around food access

- HCPS – fresh fruit and vegetable tastings (2 schools), also provide education around healthy foods and making good food choices at the elementary level. At Harford Glen children plant and harvest lettuce. Some elementary schools are adding food gardens.
- Maryland Cooperative Extension Food Educator is working with CAA to offer cooking classes and nutrition education
- Boys & Girls Club starting a food garden
- Library’s Grow it Eat it Program – vegetable gardening for beginners
- SNAP (food stamp) machine at Bel Air Farmers market
- Healthy Harford website offers nutrition information
<http://www.healthyharford.org/>

7. Brainstorming additional ideas

- Incentives for restaurants to offer healthy alternatives. Expectation should only be a percent of the menu. Give a designation (i.e. Green Star Award) and market this to the community.
- Encourage restaurants to post nutritional information on their menus.
- Healthy food options at community events such as recreational and school sports events.
- Nutrition and cooking classes at the library.
- Coordinate with “Buy Local, Eat Local” week.
- Provide recipe cards with fruits and vegetables at CAA.

- Offer classes at supermarkets. Stores like Weis and Wegmans have dieticians on staff.
- Offer cooking classes at Brad's Produce.
- Utilize schools (and PTA's) as a central way to reach families - teach meal planning and ways to exercise outside of school day.
- Education around calories consumed versus calories burned through exercise (i.e. how much exercise needed to burn off an unhealthy food).
- Education on how to grocery shop and read a food label.
- Harford Cable Network cooking show.
- Advertise Healthy Harford website.
- Use billboard and bus ads as visual reminders of making healthy choices.
- Include education information with government assistance mailings.
- Promote farmers market at senior centers – public assistance coupons available.
- Purchase SNAP machine for Have de Grace Farmers Market and advertise this service.
- Pamphlet showing healthy options at fast food, chain restaurants and local restaurants with the Green Star designation; "Eat This, Not That" format.
- "Cook This, Not That" recipe information.
- Senior Center trips to local farms or truck to the centers.
- Educate church groups on meal planning, such as when serving homeless population.

8. Next steps

- Group agreed to review and rate ideas via email. After this information is compiled the next meeting date will be established and sent out.