

Healthier meals for a thriving community

How municipalities can leverage food procurement dollars to support healthier diets, economies, and environments

PROCUREMENT REFERS TO THE PROCESS of finding, contracting for, and acquiring goods and services. One of those “goods” procured by municipalities is the food for vending machines and concession stands on government property; the meals served in employee cafeterias, schools, or senior centers; and even options provided at catered meetings and events. We all know that food, whether purchased for a municipality or one’s family, can add up to a significant monetary expense. Not as often considered, at least at the municipal level, are the calories associated with consuming the food – which can really add up as well. A recently released Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) funded study, published in the *Journal of the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics*, showed that employees buy an average of 1,080 food calories at work each week. Soda, sandwiches, chips, donuts, and pastries accounted for more than one-third of those calories, along with burgers, burritos, and candy.

It should come as no surprise that regular overconsumption of such foods can contribute to increased rates of diet-related chronic disease and unhealthy weights. What may come as a surprise, however, is that full-time workers who are overweight or obese and have other chronic health problems miss about 450 million more days of work each year than healthy workers. A 2016 article by the National Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion estimated that more than \$153 billion in productivity is lost each year due to employee illness.

Moreover, according to a 2010 Snack Food Association report, 74% of consumers are trying to eat healthier pushing the sales growth of healthier snacks ahead of traditional snack foods by 4 to 1.

The bottom line for municipalities: If healthy options aren’t part of your food procurements, you may not only be contributing to higher costs and leaving revenue on the table, you may also be failing to offer the types of foods consumers increasingly prefer.

The good news

With only modest investments of start-up time and money, municipal leaders can use food purchasing dollars to create a more equitable food system and promote good health. The advantages include reduced health care costs and improved diets and health outcomes for employees and citizens. Furthermore, redirecting dollars to invest in local, sustainably grown and produced foods advances a more equitable food system (which can increase a community’s healthy food options and health outcomes), stimulates the local economy, and reduces a municipality’s carbon footprint.

Elected officials and municipal staff have an array of tools available to advance healthier food procurement, including executive orders, legislation, contracts, permits, rules, and/or regulations. Of course, since food is often purchased, distributed, and sold via differing municipal agencies and staff members, restrictions, regulations,

What is health equity?

“Health equity means that everyone has a fair and just opportunity to be healthier. This requires removing obstacles to health such as poverty, discrimination, and their consequences, including powerlessness and lack of access to good jobs with fair pay, quality education and housing, safe environments, and health care.”

– Robert Wood Johnson Foundation

and jurisdictional control may vary depending on the setting and population served. Suffice it to say, it can get complicated!

To help, HEAL has compiled resources, including a roadmap, to help municipalities identify where to focus energy when launching a successful healthy and equitable food procurement policy.

What is a food system?

A “FOOD SYSTEM” is the process that food undergoes to reach our plates. It is a complex web of interlocking processes that combine production, processing, distribution, consumption and waste recovery. It also includes all the inputs, like infrastructure and people, that interact with our food at each stage in the process and all the outputs that are generated, like waste.



Seven questions to get started

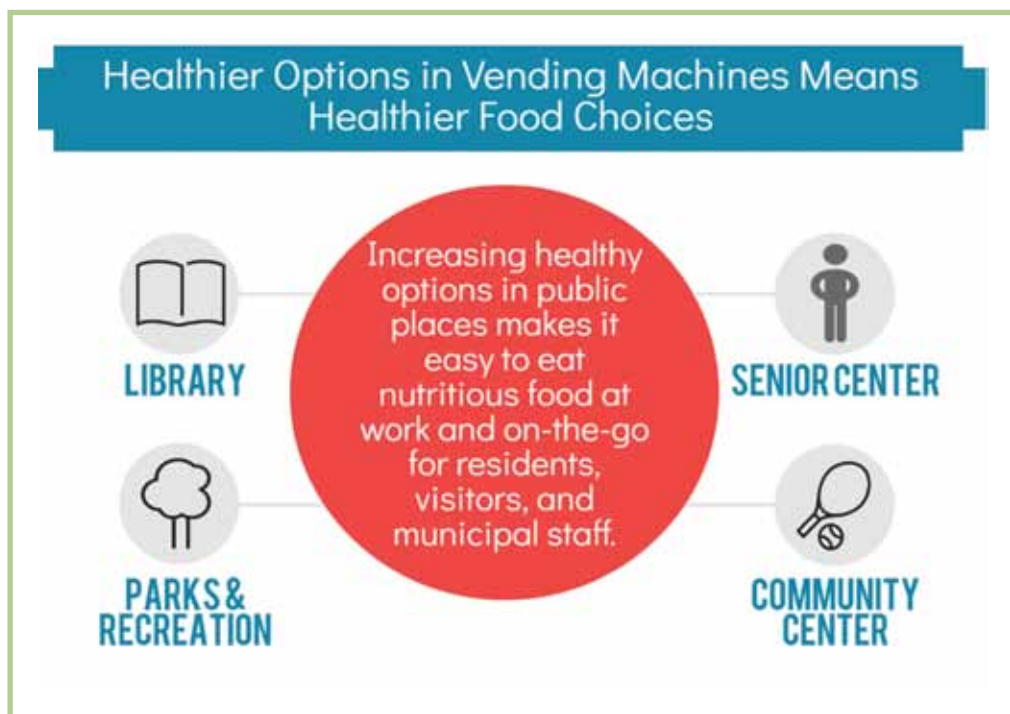
To better assess where they stand and to chart a path forward, we encourage municipalities to consider the advice of Nessia Berner-Wong, a Senior Policy Analyst at ChangeLab Solutions, a nonprofit that works to advance equitable laws and policies. Berner-Wong recommends taking the following steps:

- 1. Take Inventory:** Assess who currently purchases, distributes, or vends food within your municipality. What do they buy? How much? From whom? What policies and contracts exist? Are there new policies and standards that need to be created to address gaps? Can various standards be streamlined into jurisdiction-wide policy to maximize your impact on resident and employee health?
- 2. Find Your Partners:** Who cares about healthy food procurement and needs to be at the table? Who are the key staff members responsible for putting procurement policies into effect? Who can support your efforts down the line and during implementation? Consider those partners as you develop your taskforce for researching, adopting, and implementing new food procurement policies.
- 3. Identify Control Levers:** Who officially has the authority to change food procurement and does this person vary depending on the program and setting? These staff should become part of your taskforce. Interview them to determine where you actually have jurisdiction to make changes. Some food programs may have regulatory “ceilings” that prevent you from enacting stricter guidelines.
- 4. Select Standards:** There are many nutritional and sustainability guidelines for different programs and settings. Based on your earlier research, which standards make sense for the areas you have jurisdiction over? What does healthy and equitable mean to your community and what other values (e.g. good local jobs or environmental sustainability) are you interested in addressing through your policy?
- 5. Adopt a Policy:** What level will you set your procurement policy at? What will the associated fiscal impact be? Will you provide rewards or incentives for participation? How will you monitor progress and ensure compliance?
- 6. Implement:** How will you keep your taskforce of supporters involved? How will you get buy-in from staff and the public? The taskforce should be actively engaged in implementation and monitoring. You will need to create new contracts and may need to identify new vendors – will you do this immediately or take a phased-in approach?
- 7. Enforce:** You want to educate your suppliers, vendors, staff, and clients (e.g. residents) about your new standards and ensure there is a process in place for monitoring and reporting progress over time. You also need to communicate up front how you will address non-compliance.

Although the first three “steps” of food procurement policy change may seem time-consuming, they are important to follow. A robust internal assessment enables municipalities to make the best decisions about where to focus resources and serves as an excellent baseline against which to measure progress to promote “wins” to staff, elected officials, and the public.

HEAL can help: Healthy vending and values-based procurement

Staff at the HEAL Cities and Towns Campaign of the Mid-Atlantic provide free technical assistance to Virginia municipal leaders who want to adopt Healthy Eating and Active Living (HEAL) policies and practices. The HEAL Cities and Towns Campaign provides healthy vending policies and toolkits to help Virginia’s localities successfully launch healthy procurement initiatives. For municipalities interested in creating deeper impacts with their food procurement dollars, HEAL staff are happy to provide guidance on integrating values-based procurement principles into policies and contracts.



Healthy Vending

Providing healthier vending machine options is low-hanging fruit (pardon the pun) since many municipalities already provide vending machines in buildings for the convenience of their workers and residents. Since our launch in 2012, the HEAL Cities and Towns Campaign has helped municipalities get started with healthy food procurement for vending machines. Oftentimes, it’s as simple as mandating that a certain percentage of the snacks and beverages offered meet nutritional standards when negotiating vending contracts.

For example: In 2014, Leesburg’s Parks and Recreation Department (PRD) adopted nutritional guidelines for its vending machines. The PRD viewed its healthy vending options as consistent with its goal of combating childhood obesity. Leesburg, a Silver Level HEAL town, received technical assistance from the Campaign through a webinar, fact sheets and in-person meetings.

As with most new initiatives, Leesburg’s PRD faced some initial apprehension that they were able to overcome. “The town



incorporated a gradual increase to the percentage of healthy options over a period of time, as opposed to an immediate drastic change,” explains Rich Williams, Director of Parks and Recreation. “This was acceptable to our vendor and they were able to see over a period of time that their bottom line was not being impacted.”

The City of Richmond, a Gold HEAL City, has also taken steps to provide

healthier vending options. Michael Winborne, PhD, who serves as a Management Analyst II in the City of Richmond’s Human Services Department, became concerned about the City’s vending machines after seeing one too many “Honey Buns” on his coworkers’ desks and realizing that vending machines were serving as a meal replacement for some of the staff. Dr. Winborne explains that for city employees, “depending on the weather outside, we really don’t want to leave the building to go find food for lunch...so, we use the vending machines.”

The city partnered with its vendor and reviewed six months of sales data. After seeing high sales of calorie-dense, nutrient-poor items, they decided to launch a healthy vending program. “We had to make better choices and give people that option,” said Dr. Winborne. Staff reviewed healthy vending guidance from the American Heart Association and found that its vendor already offered many compliant items. Armed with the sales data, nutritional guidelines, and a strong vendor partner, they piloted a year-long process to swap out their vending machine offerings with healthier choices. After an initial adjustment period, staff and residents started enjoying the healthier options. “I had no idea how much people loved white popcorn,” said Mr. Winborne of an early healthy vending machine favorite. “Small changes matter,” he concludes.

Values-based Procurement

For those municipalities that have embraced the healthy vending machine and are looking to achieve the next level of economic revitalization, food system and public health improvements, and environmental benefits to their community, we suggest you consider values-based procurement.

The Center for Good Food Purchasing (CGFP) is a pioneer and leading non-profit that supports public institutions that pursue values-based procurement. The CGFP model uses a flexible, metrics-based, framework of five “Core Values” to direct institutional buying power in support of a more transparent and equitable food system:

- **Local Economies:** Support small and mid-sized agricultural and food processing operations within the local area or region.
- **Nutrition:** Promote health and well-being by offering generous portions of vegetables, fruit, whole grains and minimally processed foods, while reducing salt, added sugars, saturated fats, and red meat consumption, and eliminating artificial

additives. Improve equity, affordability, accessibility, and consumption of high quality culturally relevant Good Food in all communities.

- **Valued Workforce:** Provide safe and healthy working conditions and fair compensation for all food chain workers and producers from production to consumption.
- **Environmental Sustainability:** Source from producers that employ sustainable production systems that reduce or eliminate synthetic pesticides and fertilizers; avoid the use of hormones, routine antibiotics and genetic engineering; conserve soil and water; protect and enhance wildlife habitats and biodiversity; reduce on-farm energy and water consumption, food waste and greenhouse gas emissions; and increase menu options that have lower carbon and water footprints.
- **Animal Welfare:** Provide healthy and humane care for farm animals.

When fully adopted, procurement centered on these values can have a positive and transformative impact on the local food system and community. To date, Washington, DC is the only jurisdiction on the East Coast that has adopted the Good Food Purchasing Program framework. Will your municipality be the next?

About the author: Sydney Daigle, HEAL Cities and Towns Campaign Manager, Institute for Public Health Innovation. Sydney provides technical assistance to municipal leaders to adopt policies and practices that make it easier for their residents and employees to eat healthier and move more.

Resources on healthy vending and equitable procurement:

More information on healthy vending standards and tips to get started can be found on HEAL’s Workplace Wellness page at www.healcitiesmidatlantic.org.

In addition, the HEAL Cities and Towns Campaign recommends resources from the following sources:

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Health Food Service Guidelines: www.cdc.gov/obesity/strategies/food-serv-guide.html

Center for Good Food Purchasing, Values-Based Procurement Framework: <https://goodfoodpurchasing.org/>

ChangeLab Solutions Procurement & Healthy Vending Resources:

<http://changelabsolutions.org/tools-policy-change>

<http://changelabsolutions.org/publications/making-change-healthier-vending-municipalities>

Exceed: The Tool for Using Healthy Food Service Guidelines, Resource Library: www.exceedtool.com/resources

Become a HEAL City or Town:

For model policies and practices and more information about becoming a HEAL city or town, contact Sydney Daigle, HEAL Cities and Towns Campaign Manager, at sdaigle@institutephi.org or 240-253-1036. HEAL Cities & Towns Campaign of the Mid-Atlantic is a project of the Institute for Public Health Innovation, in collaboration with strategic partner the Virginia Municipal League and funded by Kaiser Permanente, founding partner.

