

ECONOMIC BENEFITS OF HEALTHY EATING AND ACTIVE LIVING



“Many employers are finding that workplace and community wellness programs offer a win-win way to make a real difference. They can make sense for the health of employees and their families and for the employer’s bottom line.”

--Trust for America's Health.
Healthier Americans for a Healthier Economy. 2011

Municipal leaders work to create livable, prosperous communities – places where people want to live, work, locate and grow their businesses, raise families, and age. Healthy eating and active living (HEAL) policies and practices can improve a community’s health and livability and enhance its local economy. Understanding ways in which HEAL policies contribute to a city’s or town’s economic development can help local leaders generate support for HEAL initiatives and facilitate their efforts to improve and sustain their community’s economy.

HEALTHY EATING Healthy eating policies and practices can increase access to healthy food and stimulate the local economy.

- **Grocery stores**, especially those located in food deserts, can stimulate economic growth by creating jobs, raising the value of surrounding property, and generating tax revenue. For every 10,000 square feet of retail grocery space, an estimated 24 new jobs are created.¹ They can also serve as a community “anchor” that attracts new businesses.
- Grocery stores that purchase food from local suppliers and farmers keep their money in the local economy and provide added income for farmers.

Cities and towns can create a package of incentives and assistance for new grocery store development and renovations:

- Position a “grocery ambassador” within a city’s or town’s administrative office to help grocers navigate through the bureaucratic hurdles of opening new stores;
- Adopt zoning variances and fast track permitting; and
- Offer land tax abatement, stabilization of building taxes, energy efficiency benefits, and exemption from sales tax on materials to construct, renovate or equip facilities.

- **Farmers’ markets** can foster local entrepreneurship, stimulate the regional farm economy, and preserve agricultural land. For every \$100 spent at a farmers’ market, an estimated \$62 stays in the local economy.²
- Governmental food benefits such SNAP and WIC accepted at farmers’ markets can increase the aggregate purchasing power of low-income residents and boost farmers’ market sales.

Cities and towns can provide cost-free space for Farmers’ Markets on city land and aid with branding and advertising. They can encourage the use of SNAP and WIC benefits.

- **Community gardens** can yield between \$500 and \$2,000 worth of produce per family annually. For every \$1 invested in a community garden plot yields around \$6 worth of produce.³ They can also increase property values of nearby homes, generating additional property tax revenues.



- **Urban farms** can create jobs, provide job training (e.g., for people to start their own farm or food businesses), and incubate and attract new businesses.
- Families that eat the food they grow in community gardens and on urban farms have more disposable income that can be spent locally and benefit area businesses.

Cities and towns can repurpose public land for agricultural use, adopt supportive zoning laws, maximize opportunities to incorporate urban agriculture into new development, and incentivize the use of private land for urban agriculture.

ACTIVE LIVING: Making it easier for residents to walk and bicycle and providing well-maintained parks can encourage an active lifestyle and boost economic growth.

- Creating compact, mixed-use communities (residential use combined with civic and commercial uses) that are safe and accessible to pedestrians and bicyclists can increase property values and tax revenues. Home buyers will pay more for houses that are in more walkable and bikeable areas.
- Dense, mixed-use development generates 10 times more tax revenue per acre and saves municipalities an average of 10 percent on police, ambulance and firefighting services⁴
- Slowing traffic and improving the environment for pedestrians and bicyclists can increase sales for businesses due to the increased foot and bicycle traffic.
- People will pay more to rent or purchase a home if it is near a safe and well-maintained park. Parks and recreation areas can also stimulate the local economy by increasing tourism.

Cities and towns can create walkable and bikeable communities by adopting complete streets policies. Complete streets are designed to be safe and accessible to all users, including pedestrians, bicyclists, motorists and transit riders of all ages and abilities. Complete streets principles can also be integrated into a city's or town's comprehensive plan or articulated in bicycle and pedestrian master plans. Developers can be required or incentivized to facilitate access to walking and bicycling in their development plans. Cities and towns can also practice transit-oriented development (TOD) -- development that includes a mixture of housing, office, retail and/or other amenities integrated into a walkable neighborhood and located within a half-mile of public transportation.

WORKPLACE WELLNESS: Promoting healthy eating and active living in the municipal workplace can result in a healthier workforce.

- A healthier workforce can reduce health care costs, lessen absenteeism, increase productivity, and reduce turnover.
- Employers save an average of \$6 (including savings from a decrease in medical costs and reduced absenteeism) for every \$1 spent on wellness programs. Health promotion programs in organizations of all sizes can reduce sick leave, health plan costs, and worker compensation and disability costs by 25%.⁵

Cities and towns can adopt policies and practices that provide healthy food options at workplace meetings and events, make water free and accessible to employees, and that require vending companies to offer healthier food options in municipal vending machines. Walking meetings, activity breaks during meetings, and educational campaigns that encourage employees to use the stairs are ways to encourage workers to be active during the work day.

REFERENCES:

¹ PolicyLink, The Food Trust. *Access to Healthy Food and Why it Matters: A Review of the Research*. 2013. Accessed at: http://www.policylink.org/sites/default/files/GROCERYGAP_FINAL_NOV2013.pdf

² Farmers Market Coalition. *Farmers Markets Stimulate Local Economies*. Accessed at: <https://farmersmarketcoalition.org/education/stimulate-local-economies/>

³ PolicyLink. *Growing Urban Agriculture*. 2012. Accessed at: http://www.policylink.org/sites/default/files/URBAN_AG_FULLREPORT.PDF

⁴ AARP Livable Communities, Walkable and Livable Communities Initiative. *Economic Development: A Livability Fact Sheet*. Accessed at: <http://www.aarp.org/content/dam/aarp/livable-communities/documents-2014/Livability%20Fact%20Sheets/Economic-Development-Fact-Sheet.pdf>

⁵ Robert Wood Johnson Foundation. *Healthy Policy Snapshot: How can wellness programs save employers money while making employees healthier and more productive?* August 2012. Accessed at: http://www.rwjf.org/content/dam/farm/reports/issue_briefs/2012/rwjf401183



The HEAL (Healthy Eating Active Living) Cities and Towns Campaign of the Mid-Atlantic offers free technical assistance to municipal leaders to help them create healthy, prosperous communities. HEAL is a project of the Institute for Public Health Innovation in partnership with the Maryland and Virginia Municipal Leagues and funded by Kaiser Permanente, founding partner. For more information, visit the HEAL Cities and Towns website at www.healcitiesmidatlantic.org and contact HEAL staff at 202-747-3455 or jgroenfeldt@institutephi.org.