

# Healthy Foods in Alabama Corner Stores Help Fight Food Deserts

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## At A Glance

The Wellness Coalition of Montgomery County (WCMC) is working with five corner stores in food deserts – areas where access to fresh fruit and vegetables are limited – to offer Alabama residents fresh produce close to home. For many residents living in food deserts, full service grocery stores that carry healthy foods can be more than a mile away and many households do not have access to a car. By partnering with these corner stores, nearly 16,000 residents are expected to have increased access to quality fruits and vegetables near their home. The stores' profits increased by an average of 28% in a 4-month period.



## Public Health Challenge

Over the last three decades, obesity has doubled in Alabama's children and quadrupled in adults, making the state third in the country in child obesity, and highest in adult diagnosed diabetes. Over 1.8 million Alabama residents, including half a million children, live in areas with no full service grocery, a store that carries a variety of fresh fruit and vegetables. Often, corner stores offer residents in food deserts convenient

access to primarily low cost processed foods. Regular consumption of these foods can lead to diet-related conditions like obesity, type 2 diabetes, and high blood pressure. Healthy retail programs show store owners how to profit from adding fresh produce to their inventory, and bring awareness to new offerings at healthy corner stores to help residents make the healthy choice an easy choice.

## Find Out More

Visit the Wellness Coalition's website at <http://thewellnesscoalition.org> / for more information about the corner store program and where, in Alabama, to find healthy corner stores. Spread the word to store owners about profits that can be achieved by making fresh fruits and vegetables available to residents at corner stores. This project is supported by CDC's Racial and Ethnic Approaches to Community Health (REACH) cooperative agreement.

*Reversing obesity trends in Alabama could position the state to save over \$3 billion in obesity-related health care costs by 2020.*

- From, "Food for Every Child: The Need for Healthy Food Financing in Alabama."

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### Approach

According to Feeding America, nearly 56,000 people across Montgomery, Macon and Lowndes counties, Alabama, live in food deserts. WCMC partnered with Central Alabama Regional Planning and Development to encourage corner and gas store owners to stock their shelves with fresh produce from local farms, display signs to alert shoppers to healthy food options, and offer residents recipe cards containing healthy meal options. Educate Act Transform South, a local farm and school garden program, joined in to provide customers cooking demonstrations, food tastings, and lessons on buying healthy foods. Store owners were provided trainings on stocking, tracking, and managing inventory.

### Results

As of December 2015, five corner stores in all three Alabama counties offered fresh produce to over 120,000 customers. In a 4-month period, the stores' profits increased by an average of 28% (range 4% to 32%). All five stores continue to offer a variety of fruits and vegetables and are committed to stocking their shelves with at least three different types of fruit and vegetables.

### What's Next

Increased profits have prompted store owners to take the program into their own hands, and one owner is planning to expand into six more healthy stores. This will give another 31,000 people access to fresh foods, reaching nearly 48,000 food insecure Alabama residents. The continued availability of fresh produce can help customers, who previously had little to no access to healthy foods, to start making better food choices.