

## National Collaborative on Childhood Obesity Research (NCCOR)

### Moving from Test Market to All Markets: Translating Food Purchasing Research into Evidence-based Strategies to Improve the Purchase of Healthier Items

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#### Guests

Alice Ammerman, Guadalupe Ayala, Barbara Baquero, Teresa Blanco, Jon Blitstein, Mary Bohman, Andrew Burns, Tom Cosgrove, Lorelei DiSogra, Sheila Fleischhacker, Sue Foerster, Tracy Fox, Alice Ann Gola, Christopher Gustafson, Joanne Guthrie, Andrew Hanks, Beth Hopping, Bailey Houghtaling, David Just, Usha Kalro, Kimberly Keller, Laura Kettel Khan, Lisa Lachenmayr, Kara Lubischer, Matthew MacDonald, Lisa Mancino, Elissa McLerran, Marchello Middlebrooks, Ruth Morgan, Mihai Niculescu, Angela Odoms-Young, April Oh, Collin Payne, Tricia Psota, John Reich, Eric Rimm, Pasquale Rummo, Jackie Saumweber, Colin Schwartz, Caitlin Simon, Betsey Anderson Steeves, Linden Thayer, Claire Uno, Jay Variyam, Tracy Vericker, Antonia Violante, Ellen Vollinger, Michelle Waters, John Weidman, Emily Welker, Maggie Wilkin, Katie Wilson, Amy Yaroch, Rob Ybarra, Eliana Zeballos, Kelleen Zubick

#### NCCOR Coordinating Center

Elaine Arkin, Todd Phillips, Michelle Putnam, Amanda Samuels, Namita Vaidya, Yany Valdes

#### Background

This workshop brought together interested researchers, food retailers, and practitioners working via the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program–Education (SNAP–Ed) and other public and private programs that promote healthy food purchasing by low-income consumers to engage in dialogue and form working relationships to enhance each other’s work.

The workshop presented the latest data from USDA’s National Household Food Acquisitions and Purchases Survey (FoodAPS), the most comprehensive look at what food assistance and other low-income consumers buy, where they shop, the prices they pay, and the nutritional quality of their purchases. The workshop also presented information on how public nutrition education programs, such as SNAP–Ed, operate and what types of educational interventions they can support in retail settings. Additionally, the workshop shared food retailers’ perspectives on healthy retail research and interventions and included a panel that discussed funding and other support for healthy retail research.

#### Opening Remarks

*Elaine Arkin, National Collaborative on Childhood Obesity Research (NCCOR)*

Attendees introduced themselves. E. Arkin then introduced Joanne Guthrie to introduce the first two speakers.

#### Introduction and Welcome

*Joanne Guthrie, Economic Research Service, USDA*

J. Guthrie began by reviewing the workshop series’ initial focus: research development of strategies to

encourage healthier food purchasing. Other NCCOR workshops in this series focused on additional topics related to food purchasing. This workshop will unite these threads and bring together researchers, practitioners, and retailers. Improving communication between these groups benefits all: Researchers can design studies that are practical and that can be translated into practice to support SNAP-Ed, and retailers can build healthier clientele by improving upon these evidence-based practices.

Communication can accelerate the adoption of research-based strategies as they are developed. This workshop will build on this exchange of ideas, help form new partnerships, and culminate in table talks to identify next steps for how these new ideas and partnerships can be result in better research and improved community practice.

### **Uniting Research and Practice to Promote Healthy Purchasing**

*Katie Wilson, Food Nutrition and Consumer Services, USDA*

K. Wilson stated her excitement at finding such synergy in the room. As a group, it is important that stakeholders assess the programs that are available, particularly at the USDA. One in four Americans are touched by a USDA program. More than 44 million people in 22 million households use SNAP in 2016. Over 41 million students attend schools operating a national school lunch program. Government can make regulations, but it has to filter down to people; retailers, practitioners and researchers help ensure that outcomes are understood and dissemination happens. This begins by looking at the language used around childhood obesity. Kids don't get the concept of "reducing obesity," but they do understand the concept of wellness. USDA envisions that when SNAP participants walk in a retail store, they can have the same choices as everyone else; and it will be cool to eat from a "rainbow of colors," (i.e., produce, whole grains, dairy).

USDA is publishing a new rule to enhance the depth of stock at the 260,000 outlets accepting SNAP benefits; this means there are more healthy food choices for SNAP participants. For example, a small convenience store in Romance, Mississippi, can stock fresh fruits and vegetables and fresh meat from a local farm. After reading over 1,000 comments, USDA expects to release the final rule later this year. Since 2008, USDA has seen a 900 percent increase in farmers markets nationwide, up to about 7,000, many of them mobile. USDA also began its Healthy Incentives pilot, which includes the double-up buck, and Food Insecurity Nutrition Incentive (FINI) grants. In 2015, USDA invested \$31 million in small pilot projects in 26 states to help increase intake of the double-up bucks. \$414 million was allocated to states for FY 2017 for SNAP-Ed, with the program taking a more systems-based approach and engaging participants where they live, work, and play. Many times, the retail environment is a place where people access these interventions.

### **Uniting Research and Practice to Promote Healthy Purchasing**

*Mary Bohman, Economic Research Service, USDA*

The Economic Research Service (ERS) is responsible for research that informs public and private policy. ERS is increasingly committed to working on an evidence-based agenda (for an example, see the FoodAPS Survey flyer in the workshop folder). ERS is very interested in research on how behavioral economics concepts can be used to develop strategies to increase program effectiveness. According to research done by the Behavioral Economics in Child Nutrition Center at Cornell University (BEN), 16 percent of students participating in USDA school meal programs were more likely to choose hot

vegetable dishes when they had more fun names, like “x-ray vision carrots.” A variety of strategies have followed from this original research agenda. Schools are a starting point, but two years ago ERS wanted to expand behavioral economics to look at the retail sector. Research needs funding. With The Food and Nutrition Service (FNS), ERS funded the Behavioral Economics and Healthy Food Choice Research Center at Duke University and University of North Carolina (BECR), which launched research within the food retail sector. This research focused on WIC in the first year and is now looking at SNAP. These programs are slowly building the evidence base; there is more work to be done, but as effective strategies are identified, implementation policies can be rolled out and widely applied.

## Q&A

**Question: What more can be done to help opponents of proposed regulations in small stores see that this is in their self-interest?**

- K. Wilson explained that we need success stories from the many convenience stores that have implemented these programs and need to communicate those to policy makers. Stakeholders can also remind people that there is a one-year time period in which this can take place, which will give them time to comply. There is also a waiver for extremely small stores.

## Understanding Food Purchasing Behavior of Low-Income Households: Findings from FoodAPS

*Lisa Mancino, Economic Research Service, USDA*

L. Mancino gave an overview of the FoodAPS surveys, work that she has completed with J. Guthrie. FoodAPS gives information on every item acquired by all family members over one week (from April 2012 through January 2013). It includes household-level information, including demographics, and geographic and nutrition information. It provides the number of food stores close to the home, how many times the family has food away from home, and information on some prices. Each item is then matched to USDA nutrient data to come up with measures of nutritional quality. An overall measure of nutritional quality—the Healthy Eating Index—was computed for this study; it measures the overall quality of the food bought or otherwise acquired (for example, from a food bank) by each household over the course of the study week.

It is generally thought that as people age, they make better food choices. SNAP household heads are younger and less educated than those higher income households. They have more children and are juggling many demands. Like all households, SNAP households struggle to meet dietary guidelines. SNAP households score significantly lower on the Healthy Eating Index (HEI) than other groups but acquire about as many total calories as non-SNAP households.

Examining food that is not part of the grocery portion of food acquired, SNAP households are more likely to get calories from family and friends who serve meals, and from school, but higher income households get more calories from restaurants and work. Across incomes and SNAP participation status, households acquire about the same amount of calories per person weekly but SNAP households spend \$55 per week per person, while higher income non-SNAP households spend \$88 per week per person.

Price is a major driver of where people shop. Lower income households put price first as opposed to proximity, but the inverse is true with higher income households. Price also affects what SNAP

participants choose to buy; for those with financial concerns, nutrition is a lower priority. That said, SNAP households are aware that their diets need improvement and are more likely to say that they don't have a good diet. They are less aware of the tools available for assistance, such as MyPlate, and many do not read nutrition facts panels.

In summary, the bulk of food dollars are spent at big grocery stores. Like most households, SNAP participants do have room to improve nutritional quality and are aware of this need to improve nutrition. Well-designed nudges may help make choosing healthy and affordable options a little easier.

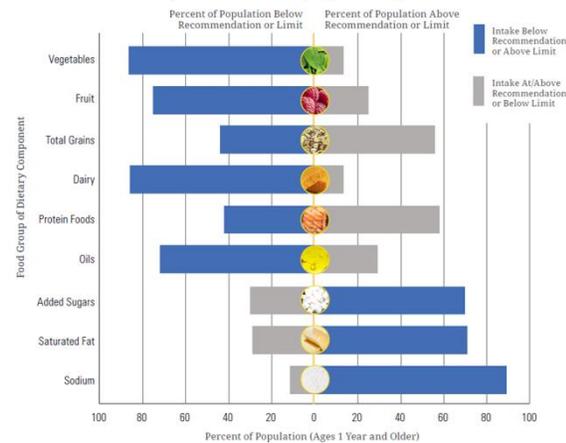
**Panel 1: Understanding Food Purchasing Behavior of Low-Income Consumers**

*Tricia Psota, Center for Nutrition Policy and Promotion (CNPP), USDA*

Current eating patterns in the United States do not align well with dietary guidelines. When compared to recommended dietary guidelines, about three-fourths of the population does not eat enough fruits, vegetables, dairy, and oils and exceeds recommendations for sugars, saturated fats, and sodium.



**Current Eating Patterns in the United States**  
Percent of the U.S. Population Ages 1 Year and Older Who are Below, At, or Above Each Dietary Goal or Limit (Figure 2-1)



Note: The center (0) line is the goal or limit. For most, those represented by the blue sections of the bars, shifting toward the center line will improve their eating pattern.  
Data Source: What We Eat in America, NHANES 2007-2010 for average intakes by age-sex group; Healthy U.S.-Style Food Patterns, which vary based on age, sex, and activity level, for recommended intakes and limits.

There are five dietary guidelines for Americans: 1) follow a healthy eating pattern across the lifespan; 2) focus on variety, nutrient density, and amount; 3) limit calories from added sugars and saturated fats and reduce sodium intake; 4) shift to healthier food and beverage choices; and 5) support healthy eating patterns for all.

But what do consumers already think about their diets? According to the 2015 Food & Health Survey from the IFIC Foundation, 91 percent of consumers think about the healthfulness of foods and beverages they consume. We know that small changes may resonate with the majority of consumers and help them achieve dietary goals.

The purpose of MyPlate is to translate dietary guidelines to resonate with the general public. CNPP performed its own consumer research, performing focus groups across the country and conducting a national survey in order to test language to communicate healthy eating patterns and to make shifts in behaviors.

As a result, CNPP developed the MyPlate, MyWins campaign to help consumers develop their own healthy eating style. The campaign emphasizes social support, inspirational content, and personalized tools for success. Resources include testimonial videos, healthy eating tips, interactive challenges, educational materials, and opportunities to share successes. Many resources are now launching with the

guidelines, (this includes a style guide, a communicator's guide for a variety of audiences, and pre-populated social media).

Additional resources: [www.cnpp.usda.gov](http://www.cnpp.usda.gov); [www.dietaryguidelines.gov](http://www.dietaryguidelines.gov); [www.choosemyplate.gov](http://www.choosemyplate.gov); [www.supertracker.usda.gov](http://www.supertracker.usda.gov)

## Q&A

**Question: Regarding the FoodAPS data, what percentage of households are eligible for SNAP but are not participating?**

- L. Mancino explained that the survey included four different income categories and did attempt to find eligible non-participants.

**Question: Who makes up lower income non-participants?**

- L. Mancino stated that this group is mostly made up of older adults. Jessica Todd at ERS released an Economic Information Bulletin that has a table that summarizes this information: [http://www.ers.usda.gov/webdocs/publications/err161/41995\\_err161.pdf](http://www.ers.usda.gov/webdocs/publications/err161/41995_err161.pdf)

**Question: Do the FoodAPS data include the issuance aspect of SNAP or what week it captures?**

- L. Mancino offered a Travis Smith study that shows how calories acquired change over the SNAP cycle. The HEI was calculated from acquisitions that week. That study: "[The Effects of Benefit Timing and Income Fungibility on Food Purchasing Decisions among Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program Households](#)"—by Travis Smith, Joshua P. Berning, Xiaosi Yang, Gregory Colson, and Jeffrey H. Dorfman, *American Journal of Agricultural Economics* 98 (2): 564-80, along with other FoodAPS studies is summarized at: <http://www.ers.usda.gov/data-products/foodaps-national-household-food-acquisition-and-purchase-survey/research-projects-and-publications/>

**Question: Are there demographics on unmarried households or non-traditional co-parents?**

- L. Mancino replied that questions do include whether participants are living with people, but she is not sure about the specific breakdown of unmarried versus co-parents.

**Question: When segmenting SNAP audiences, do you have very low income information on those under 138 percent of the federal poverty level (FPL) who do not participate? And then compare their choices with those who are up to 185 percent FPL who aren't participating?**

- L. Mancino responded that for this analysis, this was kept pretty basic, but perhaps doing a 138 percent FPL and lower category is a good idea.

**Question: Is there public access to FoodAPS data?**

- L. Mancino responded that the public access data should be available shortly. (They were just released on November 15, link here: <http://www.ers.usda.gov/data-products/foodaps-national-household-food-acquisition-and-purchase-survey/>)

**Question: Were men involved in the focus groups?**

- T. Psota replied that men were involved, and the groups had an even split for matching population in terms of gender.

**Question: Do you have any idea to what degree materials are being personalized by stores or local programs?**

- T. Psota explained that USDA has ongoing collaborations with state and federal partners to personalize materials and have also considered unbranding materials to help with dissemination.

## Panel 2: Perspectives from a Researcher, Retailers, and a SNAP-Ed Practitioner

Colin Payne, New Mexico State University

Rob Ybarra and Matthew MacDonald, Lowes Pay and Save

Sue Foerster, Association of State Nutrition Education Administrators (ASNNA)

C. Payne began the panel by stating that Lowes Pay and Save (P&S) is committed to the health of consumers. They recently changed the format of some of their stores and have reduced costs across the board in this format.

### **E. Arkin asked how C. Payne and R. Ybarra first got together.**

Their working relationship began in 2012, when C. Payne started working at New Mexico State and was interested in continuing his work in the retail environment. A colleague mentioned P&S and he called the manager of the store, who put him in contact with the regional manager, and he followed the chain all the way up to Mr. Ybarra. P&S has a great IT department that was able to provide key data, which is a big piece of the program's success.

### **E. Arkin asked how many stores included these programs.**

M. MacDonald stated that iterations of these programs are currently in 152 stores.

### **E. Arkin wanted to know what the retail stores had to commit to do.**

R. Ybarra stated that stores were asked to provide sales information including retail sales, WIC sales, food stamp sales, average sale per customer. Typically, stores don't share this on an individual level. The P&S owners were willing because they trusted the individual asking and knew could benefit SNAP and WIC program.

### **E. Arkin asked what Mr. Ybarra would tell another retail store that was approached by a researcher in this manner.**

R. Ybarra stated that he would love to share what P&S learned and that it's important not to reinvent the wheel when so much work has already been done.

### **E. Arkin asked Mr. Payne the same question.**

C. Payne replied that relationship building is key. There should be mutual respect and trust, and each party should meet face-to-face to go over specifics and desired outcomes. The *New York Times* learned of the original project in El Paso, and that positive press was helpful.

### **E. Arkin asked if S. Foerster had other lessons to share.**

S. Foerster found that grocers were interested in the fruit and vegetable programs and did offer resources. However, it's now more difficult to work with retailers. SNAP-Ed is working with retail from farmers markets to supermarkets (this part is challenging). Supermarkets work on a district/corporate level, so we need to reconcile requirements to address the SNAP-Ed audience in stores where we're allowed to pay for collaterals and surfaces that are needed. Programs should position this work in a way that can fit in with a corporate environment. In that regard, the company needs to believe in what is being done and have flexibility to allow such programming. ASNNA wants to complement what is already happening in the community and to reinforce those messages. This means space, time, shelf

labels, signage, clerks knowing about the program, tastings.

**E. Arkin asked what the market rates are on fruits and vegetables compared to other segments, such as meat and dairy.**

R. Ybarra stated that margins are about 50 percent for fresh produce. Fresh produce is one of the higher margin items, but it depends on the retailer.

**E. Arkin asked the panel to discuss interventions that can be scaled.**

C. Payne mentioned the New Mexico P&S stores as examples that can be scaled. For this intervention, a preliminary consumer panel was performed that looked at placement and menu psychology. As a result, a highly responsive advertisement was created and circulated over four to five weeks with treatment and washout periods in two different New Mexico locations. The stores saw a significant increase for SNAP produce purchases. The circular has the New Mexico WIC logo, which was an added value to let customers know what was considered a healthier purchase. P&S is currently exploring how to make that a staple at P&S stores. The P&S Food King format includes 99-cent packaged fruit and vegetables at the checkout aisle. The distributor packages them in pairs and strategically prices the package so that they can make a margin, but just under what these would usually be priced. Another successful intervention has been green arrows on the floor of the grocery store, which direct people to healthier items. Stores with the arrows saw a significant increase in produce purchases. Additional intervention was upselling at the cash register by reconfiguring POS systems to assess how much was left in a customer's food and vegetable benefit.



R. Ybarra clarified that the 99-cent packages were created within a distributor subsidized by a co-op. These packages didn't do as well until the store moved them from a hidden corner to a more central location in the stores.

C. Payne stated that retailers are concerned about treating WIC customers differently, which prevents them from asking WIC customers for their receipts.

R. Ybarra stated that more collaboration with states may help in getting access to data that can help change behaviors among varying populations. As far as additional resources from the retailer to implement interventions, it depends on the systems the retailer already has in place. One low-cost change was the circular; it didn't cost very much and was mostly a process change to place the WIC logo on the left-hand side.

**E. Arkin asked if there was any pushback from other vendors about changes to placement of products.**

M. MacDonald stated that endcaps are contractually obligated to some vendors, which required getting their cooperation, limiting some item placement.

**An audience member asked if there were shifts at the managerial level or any additions to staff and employee training.**

R. Ybarra said the message first went to local area store managers for buy-in and ideas on implementation. They then took that to the supervisor team, who would relate new procedures to produce managers. The process was similar to running a grassroots campaign, spreading the word all the way down to team members who refill the shelves and keep healthy areas stocked.

**An audience member asked if the store partnered with SNAP-Ed.**

C. Payne stated that his team did talk to the New Mexico SNAP-Ed team and received buy-in for the interventions in five additional counties. In Texas, SNAP-Ed implementation agencies are mostly in food banks, so SNAP-Ed was not a part of their plan to go into retail. The process and partnerships depend on who the implementation agencies are in each state.

R. Ybarra stated that his stores would like to collaborate more with SNAP-Ed. SNAP is 30 to 40 percent of business, and his stores see a lift in sales the first two weeks of the month. If the double-up box incentive occurred during the last two weeks of the month, this lift could continue throughout the month and benefit customers and retailers.

S. Foerster reminded participants that representatives from five SNAP-Ed states attended this workshop and that the new SNAP-Ed evaluation framework will allow the agency to work with outer spheres of influence. Since many programs are county-based, working store by store may not be efficient, but working within districts and regions of companies may work.

**Panel 3: Healthy Retail Interventions: Current Practice; Information Needs; Research Opportunities**

*Usha Kalro, Food and Nutrition Service, USDA*

SNAP-Ed is available in all 50 states and three U.S. territories. States are expected to deliver SNAP-Ed interventions that include comprehensive multi-level interventions by incorporating policy, system, and environmental (PSE) strategies into their activities. The [SNAP-Ed Intervention Toolkit](#) is designed to help states identify evidence-based PSE strategies. In addition, the [SNAP-Ed Evaluation Framework](#) can help determine if these strategies work by examining 51 evaluation indicators that align with SNAP-Ed goals.

All states are encouraged to measure four core indicators of changes. Retail can fit between indicators MT2 and MT5.

Indicator Code	Indicator Name
MT1	Healthy Eating Behaviors
MT2	Food Resource Management Behaviors
MT3	Physical Activity and Reduced Sedentary Behaviors
MT5	Nutrition Supports Adopted in Environmental Settings

\* MT=Medium Term

States can also get assistance by becoming a SNAP-Ed partner. The first step is to get in touch with the state [SNAP-Ed contact](#). SNAP-Ed plan

guidance is released on March 31 each year, and plans are due to FNS by August 15. Approved plans are ready for implementation on September 1. Plans are currently in place for FY17. If organizations have an idea, timing is great now to reach out to state contacts.

SNAP-Ed can plan, implement, operate, and evaluate interventions. It can consult with partners and evaluate emerging interventions, provide nutrition education items that cost \$4 or less, point-of-sale signage, and collateral activities as part of a research project. SNAP-Ed can also work with strategic partners on planning, customer newsletters, and product placement. A strong partner is Cooking Matters, who works with SNAP-Ed and retailers to provide nutrition education. SNAP-Ed cannot fund costs associated with refrigeration units or shelving in grocery or convenience stores; capital improvements; salaries for non-SNAP-Ed personnel; cash incentives or gift cards; or direct research (although SNAP-Ed could help fund parts of a research project).

There are other opportunities for partnerships, such as the FINI grants, which help incentivize purchases of fruits and vegetables. The National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA) expects FY17 Requests for Applications by October 31, 2017. For more information about the FINI grants program, email [FINI@fns.usda.gov](mailto:FINI@fns.usda.gov).

FNS provides retailers with some incentives. Law prohibits retailers from offering incentives only to SNAP beneficiaries. If retailers are interested in doing something like this, they can apply to FNS for a waiver before offering these incentives. It is recommended that retailers start early to get these waivers for a project, as this process can take time. On June 2, FNS published the [Healthy Corner Stores Guide](#), which provides strategies and resources.

### **Opportunities to Bridge Research and Practice in SNAP-Ed Retail Work**

*Kimberly Keller, University of Missouri*

Part of the continuous quality improvement process is to embrace evidence-based approaches, whether published results or emerging practices that have shown promise in the field (i.e., evaluation studies, interventions with sound theoretical practice testing). The goal is to eventually elevate these to evidence-based and research-tested interventions.

The purpose of the socio-ecological model is to demonstrate that people's choices are nested within larger systems of society and that in order to make healthy changes, they need to be in supportive environments. SNAP-Ed has been strong in promoting individual behavior changes, but research is needed to determine how the environment can foster further innovation. For example, as baby boomers age and millennials comprise the majority of the workforce, messages and strategies may need to be adjusted over time.

Promoting changes in retail is an increased focus of SNAP-Ed. Many states are participating in retail projects (these are listed in the SNAP-Ed Toolkit), but constantly face the following questions. Benefits to consumers are fairly clear in terms of the research, but what will help nudge retailers to participate in these changes? Are there other data points that can be used as proxies when store purchasing data are not readily available? Are there other incentives, like promotion of community good will, that can help retailers become partners? How can current interventions be scaled across state lines? Looking further upstream— as retailers are embedded in larger food systems—what cross-promotion possibilities are available? How can SNAP-Ed broker relationships between consumers, retailers, food system packagers, and marketing and media efforts?

The overall goal is to promote healthy lifestyle choices based on dietary guidelines. But in order to promote these lifestyle changes, organizations must also take into account the cultural norms of targeted groups and develop surveillance systems that help measure progress across the socio-ecological model.

**Healthy Retail Interventions: Current Practice; Information Needs; Research Opportunities**

*Kellen Zubick, Share Our Strength’s Cooking Matters Colorado*

Cooking Matters wants to empower families with the skills, knowledge, and confidence to prepare healthy and affordable meals. Programs are run across the United States and reach over 464,000 people.

Cooking Matters offers guided store tours and events that walk people through the daily dietary guidelines and how to purchase and prepare healthier foods. Recently, these tours are occurring in pop-up places, like clinics, for those who don’t have the opportunity to attend at grocery stores.

The Altarum Institute’s long-term study of Cooking Matters showed the six-week cooking, shopping, and nutrition courses have a powerful, sustained impact that is significantly greater than changes that would have occurred without an intervention. After attending Cooking Matters, families have a more positive attitude about cooking, leading them to cook more often. One current challenge is how to reach more people who may benefit from these interventions. Cooking Matters is preparing to launch a phone-based application of the in-store class in the spring, thanks to funding from the Walmart Foundation. Going forward, this new applications and continued research will help determine how to systematically reach SNAP users to scale food skills education for multi-generational solutions.

**Healthy Retail Interventions: Current Practice; Information Needs; Research Opportunities**

*Teresa Blanco, Northgate Gonzales Markets*

Northgate instituted a Wellness Program built for customers, but also for its employees. The program includes three pillars: Community, Healthy Products, and Associates. Before starting the program at Northgate, connections had already been made with other organizations working on nutrition education. Northgate approached these organizations to help position the market as a health portal for these information sources.

Because some trending products and educational materials aren’t in Spanish, the market needed to hire chefs to introduce products with recipes that consumers are already used to preparing and eating. Northgate also features a nutrition tag label program.

Each store hosts a worksite wellness program on a quarterly basis (e.g., healthy demos, back-to-school store tours). For example, one month Northgate had a chef teach high school students to advocate for healthier school choices. The market’s weekly circular, with a reach of 1.8 million across Los Angeles, Orange County, and San Diego County, also highlights two programs per week.



Occasionally, Northgate gets requests from organizations to participate in grants. Typically, Northgate leadership reviews data related to the request and determines feasibility of participation. Northgate is currently participating in a grant with Anya Samek at University of Southern California (USC). For this request from USC, the wellness coordinator also asked for letters from government officials about the importance of the problem, and took those back to company leadership. The store launched its first Healthier Checkout Aisle in one store in Los Angeles and now has these aisles at eight stores. These lines feature healthier items and additional branding, and do three times more sales of fresh produce than those that aren't marked as a healthier checkout aisle.

Many retail environments have enough going on and don't want to deal with a grant program, but making it simple and building relationships with store management can help get a program off the ground. For example, USC asked what the store wanted to know and offered to add questions to focus groups. The store also had opportunity for a FINI grant, which was at first a hard sell, but University of California San Diego (UCSD) came down and sold it to the VPs and the UCSD/Northgate partnership has received a FINI grant. This pilot will launch in early fall.

## Q&A

### **Question: What role has SNAP-Ed funding played in efforts to be innovative and expand into the shopping space?**

- K. Zubick stated that SNAP-Ed can help provide opportunities and frameworks for longer term thinking regarding stability. Ms. Blanco responded that SNAP-Ed educational material in multiple languages was very helpful and brought in additional customers who may have been referred from school-based programs.

### **Question: Does Northgate receive SNAP-Ed funding?**

- T. Blanco stated that Northgate Market does receive SNAP-Ed funding, mainly through the FINI grants.

### **Question: Is there a process to include some of these practices in the SNAP-Ed Toolkit?**

- U. Kalro stated that a workgroup is currently being convened and hopefully next year a call will be put out for people to submit interventions. There is a list of current interventions as a starting point.

### **Question: What does the work with vendors in retail outlets look like?**

- T. Blanco stated that part of the FINI grant is to partner with the vendor community and create new promotions through funds they have through the avocado commission. The goal is to make customers aware of new products being brought in and to educate them on how to cook with them and integrate them into recipes.

### **Question: How do stores figure out what content customers want to know?**

- T. Blanco stated that the goal is to make things positive, with events like “Rethink your Drink,” where the store has aguas frescas to introduce produce into the water and also make them sugar free.
- K. Zubick stated that Cooking Matters at the Store is a walking tour with stations and uses facilitated dialogue to determine participants’ health goals, answer their questions, etc.

**Question: Is there SNAP-Ed guidance on discouraging versus encouraging?**

- U. Kalro stated that disparaging any particular food is not the way to go. Instead, SNAP-Ed encourages positive messages like drink more water, etc. This is not new in the guidance, just more emphasis is given on the topic.

**Resources to Move Forward**

*Laura Kettel Khan, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)*

CDC is not typically a research funder, but instead funds programmatic and practitioner and technical assistance programs. In this area, related to retail space, there is no research funding currently available. CDC does offer technical assistance and evaluation guidance, as well as support for research and academic networks.

In terms of technical assistance, there is a new [action guide](#) on healthier food retail, which is designed to provide examples of research partnerships and the evaluations that were used. CDC also offers guidance on how to initiate conversations to form partnerships (this resource is only a couple months old). The University of California, San Francisco Center for Vulnerable Populations, acts as lead coordinating center for [NOPREN](#) and works with 5 funded and 14 affiliate members with 67 active individual researchers and evaluation scientists. These experts meet regularly on a variety of topics. Additional workgroups include healthy food retail, rural food access, policy research impact, hunger safety net, school wellness, early childhood education, and water access.

The biggest thing CDC does in leveraging space in this field is collaborating and partnering with others, such as the RWJF Healthy Eating Research program. The NOPREN collaboration overlaps with the RWJF group so that they coordinate a lot of calls; this speaks to how much interest there is in this area, and leveraging groups is well worth the effort. CDC works very closely with the SNAP-Ed program, especially on evaluation. This is a continuation of a workgroup to support SNAP-Ed evaluation and technical resources.

**Resources to Move Forward**

*Emily Welker, Healthy Eating Research (HER)*

HER is a national program of RWJF, which means it is tasked with building an evidence base to find effective policy systems and promote healthy eating. It is focused on those most at risk (low income, African American, Latino, Native American). The organization has three main program goals:

1. Establish a research base for policy and environmental factors that influence healthy eating and body weight in children, as well as effective policy and environmental strategies for reversing the childhood obesity epidemic.
2. Build a vibrant, multidisciplinary field of research and a diverse network of researchers.
3. Ensure findings are effectively communicated to inform policies and guide the development of effective solutions.

The Healthy Food Retail Working Group is a collaborative effort between NOPREN and HER. Started in 2015, it currently consists of 144 members from academic, nonprofit, government, and funding organizations. The group wants to increase the quantity and quality of HER research by influencing purchasing, improving access, and facilitating the development of evidence-based policies. The group also has smaller subgroups: 1) Methods for Assessing the Retail Food Setting, focused on examining existing methods for evaluating healthy retail settings and developing common measures; 2) Retailers and Reaching Consumers, focused on designing interventions and engaging retailers, taking into account their interests and perspectives; and 3) Policies to Support Healthier Consumer Purchasing Patterns, working on development of evidence-based policies that shift purchasing patterns. Each group is funded with small grant funds to work on a series of papers.

Funded HER projects include a focus on healthy retail practices, including stocking standards and promotion strategies for small stores, front-of-package labeling, and virtual retail interventions.

### **Resources to Move Forward**

*Alice Ammerman, Behavioral Economics Research Center (BECR)*

[BECR](#) is a younger sister of the [BEN](#) Center, with more of a focus on retail, SNAP, and WIC. The mission is to promote healthy, economical food choices through the use of behavioral economics with a particular focus on food purchasing choices among SNAP and WIC participants; this includes internal research and building research capacity within the field.

Related to building capacity, BECR has sub-awards for applied behavioral economics research, including the Healthy Food Behavior Research Grants program with a SNAP focus. Initially, the funds focused on WIC and had a call for papers and a July 2015. A roundtable focused on the challenges of the WIC shopping experience (e.g., finding foods, stigmatization). BECR released another round of RFAs to improve this experience. The program also offers a Perspectives Fellowship program, which provides a seed grant of \$15,000. Currently, the program has funded four fellows.

Coming soon are BECR briefs summarizing important food purchasing behaviors, consistent with dietary guidelines and actionable via SNAP-Ed. In addition, an interactive guide on how research can build the evidence base around behavioral economics to support the efforts of SNAP-Ed and other practitioners.

### **Resources to Move Forward**

*Sheila Fleishhacker, National Institutes of Health (NIH)*

Several workshop attendees have secured funding through NIH and are a good resource to understand the funding process and navigate the system. NIH has a variety of goals and is traditionally known as the

largest funder of biomedical research, but the agency also does translation work and works with practitioners. Dr. Christopher Lynch, the new Director of the Office of Nutrition, will embark on a trans-NIH effort to strategically plan new initiatives for NIH nutrition research. National Institute of Diabetes and Digestive and Kidney Diseases (NIDDK) offers scans of what the nutrition landscape looks like: funded 4,345 projects totaling \$1.55 billion. NIH also does portfolio analysis and funding announcements, making sure they line up with innovative needs to identify knowledge gaps and opportunities.

NIH grants are competitive, but it also helps to know people inside and outside the system to invest time wisely in pitching a study. NIH also offers selected NIH workshops to understand opportunities.

## Q&A

J. Guthrie announced that USDA will be funding a new center at Tufts University and the University of Connecticut. The Research Innovation and Development Grants in Economics (RIDGE) center will offer smaller scale research grants on a wide variety of topics, among them behavioral economics and retail. The RIDGE center will send out an announcement at the end of the month and is expecting the first RFP in early 2017. (See press release attached).

### **Question: Are natural experiments particular to any of NIH's branches or more across methodology?**

- S. Fleischhacker stated that Christine Hunter publishes many papers on the utility of natural experiments in the field. NIH's Fall 2017 workshop is through the Office of Disease Prevention, convening experts around natural experiments. RWFJ also has a working group on this topic.
- A. Yaroch, as a former program officer, advised taking a look at the roster when submitting an R21 or program announcement. If you don't recognize anyone, don't submit to that study section.
- S. Fleischhacker stated that review panels aren't accustomed to reviewing those types of applications; it's wise to contact the program office to discuss.

### **Question: Are there other funding streams for rapid-response, time-sensitive programs?**

- S. Fleischhacker stated that Johns Hopkins has one for these types of programs.
- E. Welker stated that HER has commissioned research funds that are on rolling basis and more time sensitive. It also offers funding for rapid projects for Voices for Healthy Kids and policy levers (stocking standards report, for example).
- S. Fleischhacker stated it is important to volunteer on a study section, to review studies or papers.

### **Question: Is it still possible to nominate individuals to staff existing panels?**

- S. Fleischhacker has been working with the American Society of Nutrition (ASN) to nominate people, but she is always happy to take suggestions.

**Question: Regarding methods, to which programs might SNAP-Ed go to find methodology that uses a multi-level, multi-component approach? Additionally, are there practical evaluation instruments that can be used for program planning?**

- A. Ammerman stated that the SNAP-Ed Toolkit is linked to the Evaluation Framework and urged using the Toolkit to identify researchers who would benefit from practical experience that SNAP-Ed implementers have and form partnership to apply for a grant. The interactive toolkit is available here: <https://snapedtoolkit.org/>.
- S. Fleischhacker stated that NCCOR will soon publish its Measures Registry User Guides on nutrition and the food environment and physical activity and the physical activity environment.

## Small Groups Table Talk

Members from each table discussed the following Table Talk questions:

- What kinds of studies do practitioners feel would be most useful for them as they strive to build healthy retail interventions? What can they do to support researchers?
- What practitioner constraints to researchers need to be aware of?
- What are values of partnerships to the retailers that might make it appealing to them to participate?
- What kinds of research do retailers want/not want in their stores? What kinds of support might they offer—store space, purchase data, other?
- How can NCCOR partners keep the researcher-practitioner dialog moving forward to advance research and its translation into evidence-based practice?
- Are there some especially promising opportunities for partnerships across researchers, retailers, and/or practitioners? What would it take to make that happen?

## Table Talk Report Out

**Group 1:** When communicating with retailers, it is important to understand their priorities, and particularly articulate how an intervention will affect the retailer's sales. Mr. Ybarra emphasized the intervention P&S did, using the store environment to guide people to healthier choices (e.g., placards, arrows, and circulars). Before this intervention, about 67 percent of customers never went to the produce station, so the store placed produce at key cross-merchandise locations to influence purchase. They had to be patient and consider the shopping cycle, giving an intervention about six months to have an effect. This takes into account multiple seasons and months. P&S discovered that with WIC and SNAP customers, they needed about six cycles. P&S also emphasized the Five a Day program by placing certain items in cross-merchandise locations. For example, placing strawberries by the milk section; bananas by the cereal department; limes, peanuts, pistachios, and avocados by the meat section; soup mix bundles by the roasts; and lettuce next to the lunch meats and cheeses. Also, P&S used the front end of the store to sell healthier items, like apples in a tote bag. A current intervention from Mr. Payne targets sugary drinks, so he convinced retailers to place pomegranate juice within soda sections.

**Group 2:** One way to establish relationships between practitioners and researchers is to co-create research questions and potential topics to explore. For example, how are social norms changing, particularly among retailers? What is the role of SNAP-Ed at the federal level and what systematic changes need to be made to help researchers incorporate changes?

**Group 3:** In working with retailers, keep research questions and the intervention simple. Think about staff resources at the store and effectively provide staff support for your intervention so the retailer doesn't have to invest in additional resources. One way to build a relationship with a small retailer is to conduct worksite wellness demonstrations in order to appeal to the retailer and build from there. In asking for data from the retailer, take into account what is easy to provide. Or offer to provide an analysis service for the retailer on WIC or SNAP participants. One challenge in this regard to consider addressing is not being able to treat WIC or SNAP participants differently.

Researchers need to think about how to work around this issue to improve behaviors among these populations.

**Group 4:** This group discussed how to measure sustainable behavior changes over time, from both the participant and the retailer side. Specifically, how do you define healthy when taking into account taste and culturally appropriate foods? Can a retailer get community-level data to help determine customer desires? Researchers can help by leveraging data collection tools, like Sample Size Matters, to crowdsource information not yet available.

**Group 5:** Researchers need practical ways to get data from retailers. Using simple research questions and speaking retailer language may help. For example, if the intervention is to do “community surveys,” then retailer language is “market surveys.”

**Group 6:** To improve alignment between USDA and NIH when it comes to funding, this group suggested having SNAP-Ed practitioners on more review boards and study sections. In this way, practitioners can find ways to promote sustainability of overall norms and push dissemination of research. The research community can draw from other fields that use Pay for Success or Social Impact Investor, which allows an agency to reimburse an investor if the program demonstrates success. On the research side, it may be helpful to have a business expert on the research team in order to have language skills to help with retail partnership.

**Group 7:** This group emphasized the need for a common language to link nutrition and production policies. All sectors are dealing with essentially the same issues, but are speaking different languages.

### Closing Remarks

*Joanne Guthrie, Economic Research Service, USDA*

This event follows a workshop from two years ago, and there is still more to come. There is a lot of dialog and a lot to follow up on based on the Table Talk. This workshop shows that more than just researchers are interested in healthy retail. We have a better idea of how emerging research could affect diet and health. We know more about what business is interested in doing and how we can work with them (as well as SNAP-Ed and exploring further boundaries). Today’s discourse comes together to form new ideas for potential research.