



MARCH 2018

BUILDING HEALTHY CORNERS

A BEST PRACTICE GUIDE IN THREE PHASES



DCCENTRALKITCHEN.ORG



LETTER FROM OUR CEO

At DC Central Kitchen, we develop innovative solutions aimed at breaking the cycle of hunger and poverty. We began operations in 1989, with the goal of turning the traditional soup kitchen model on its head. Instead of emphasizing charitable hand-outs, we developed sustainable interventions that trained District of Columbia residents with histories of incarceration, homelessness, and addiction for culinary careers, transformed otherwise wasted food into balanced meals for our city's homeless shelters and nonprofits, and established the first USDA-recognized permanent food hub in the nation's capital.

In 2011, we launched Healthy Corners in response to a call for new ideas for expanding access to healthy food in our city's *food deserts*. We knew that charitable hand-outs of free food and farmers markets open on certain days and at certain times would not, on their own, fully address the significant inequalities in food accessibility across Washington, DC. We devised a model that positioned DC Central Kitchen as a mission-driven wholesaler, retail sales consultant, and street-level marketer of healthy, affordable foods, all in service of our city's small corner stores, which had previously struggled to put fresh, nutritious options on their shelves.

Because of Healthy Corners, 71 small corner stores and bodegas in DC's historically underserved neighborhoods now stock their shelves with fresh produce and healthy snacks – collectively selling over 251,000 healthy items last year alone. Our success stands in stark contrast to the persistent and misguided stereotypes that suggest low-income communities are less interested in purchasing healthy food. We have not only revealed significant demand, but have successfully stimulated it over time. By providing these nutritious options with a commitment to affordability and respect for the communities we work in and call home, Healthy Corners has won over consumers and small business owners alike.

Healthy Corners is changing lives here in Washington, DC – but we know this model has far greater potential. This report outlines our processes, innovations, and challenges operating a healthy corner store program and includes information about how we envision this initiative evolving in the future. Phase I details the launch of Healthy Corners, Phase II details our growth from a lean startup to a national best practice, and Phase III details our plans for 2018 and beyond. We don't have all the answers – but we're sharing the ones we've discovered the hard way. I hope this document sparks replication, adaptation, and further improvements as we and our peers across the country work towards a healthier, more equitable food system.



Michael F. Curtin, Jr., Chief Executive Officer



Because of Healthy Corners, 71 small corner stores and bodegas in DC's historically underserved neighborhoods now stock their shelves with fresh produce and healthy snacks.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

DC Central Kitchen would like to thank our partners at the DC Department of Health for investing in the health and wellness of our city, and specifically for their contribution to Healthy Corners. We would like to additionally thank the foundations, corporations, private philanthropists, nonprofit agencies, corner store owners, vendors, and community partners whose contributions of resources, expertise, and energy transformed this bold experiment into a national best practice model.

ABOUT DC CENTRAL KITCHEN

DC Central Kitchen's mission is to use food as a tool to strengthen bodies, empower minds, and build communities. Founded in 1989 as the nation's first and leading community kitchen, DC Central Kitchen develops and operates social ventures targeting the cycle of hunger and poverty. We fight hunger differently by training jobless adults for culinary careers and then employing more than 80 of our own graduates to prepare the 3 million meals we provide for homeless shelters, schools, and nonprofits each year. Our ventures also prevent the waste of millions of pounds of nutritious food, expand access to healthy, local options in urban food deserts, and scale our model nationally through strategic partnerships with colleges and universities. This work has been featured by national outlets like *National Geographic*, *PBS NewsHour*, *The Atlantic*, *The Washington Post*, *The New York Times*, *Newsweek*, and *The Chronicle of Philanthropy*. To learn more, visit dcentralkitchen.org.





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THE GROCERY GAP CHALLENGE

While Washington, DC has experienced tremendous economic growth in the past decade, these gains have not been experienced by all residents equally. In fact, the District of Columbia has a larger income disparity than any of the fifty states.ⁱ

Pervasive poverty has discouraged the private sector from providing sufficient quantities of healthy, affordable retail food options in under-resourced communities. Nearly 70% of the District's 49 full-service grocery stores are located in four wards that are predominantly white and have the city's highest household incomes. In contrast, just 3 grocery stores are located in Wards 7 and 8, home to nearly one-quarter of the city's residents but also the highest rates of poverty, unemployment, homelessness, and food insecurity of all DC wards.ⁱⁱ



50% of all children receiving SNAP benefits in the city live in Wards 7 and 8ⁱⁱⁱ



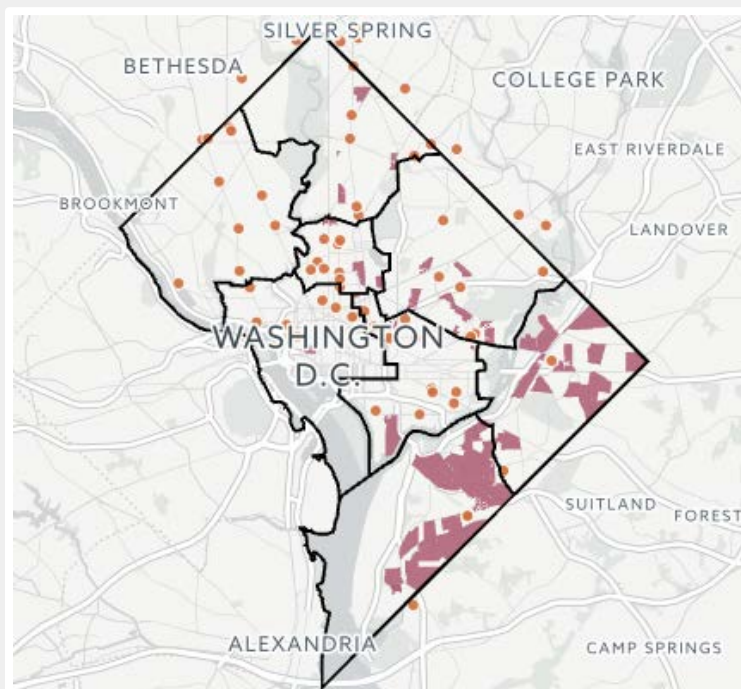
\$34,000 median income for households in Wards 7 and 8, compared to \$75,600 city-wide^{iv}



17% unemployment rate in Wards 7 and 8, compared to 6% city-wide^v

These interconnected challenges have undermined the development of an equitable food system leading many of the neighborhoods within these wards to be identified as food deserts by the U.S. Department of Agriculture. In fact, 89% of the District's food deserts are located in Wards 5, 7, and 8.^{vi} With limited access to fresh, healthy dietary options in their neighborhoods, obesity rates have reached 28% in Ward 5, 40% in Ward 7, and 42% in Ward 8.^{vii}

When the issue of food deserts became a prevalent concern among public health advocates and anti-hunger groups, local actors in Washington, DC coalesced around two primary types of responses. One option was to use large public incentive programs to attract full-service grocery stores to identified food deserts. Over the span of seven years, grocers largely rejected these incentives and the number of supermarkets in DC's Wards 7 and 8 actually decreased.^{viii} The other option was to expand charitable and public benefit programs that gave away fresh, healthy food for free, or subsidized low-income shoppers who visited area farmers markets. These efforts were critical to meeting the immediate needs of area residents, but left space for a middle-ground solution that strengthened existing small businesses in DC's underserved neighborhoods, provided access to healthy food at times when farmers markets and food pantries weren't open, and demonstrated a growing market demand for nutritious options in these communities. The solution became Healthy Corners, our pioneering, market-driven response to expanding healthy food access in DC's food deserts.



WHAT IS A FOOD DESERT?

A food desert is a geographic area in which limited to no access to full service grocery stores makes it difficult to buy affordable or high-quality fresh food. The USDA designates an urban area as a food desert if more than 33% of residents reside more than 1 mile from a supermarket or large grocery store.

LEFT MAP: GROCERY STORES INDICATED BY ORANGE DOT, FOOD DESERTS INDICATED BY PINK SHADING.

SOURCE: DC POLICY CENTER 2016.



HEALTHY CORNERS: AN INNOVATIVE SOLUTION TO A SYSTEMIC FAILURE

DC Central Kitchen's Healthy Corners program is a groundbreaking response to the crisis of urban food deserts and rising obesity rates that is recognized as a national best practice, and the source of inspiration for other communities that are now piloting programs based on this innovative model.

Corner Stores as Part of the Solution

Corner stores are uniquely positioned to serve as partners in the effort to bring fresh, healthy options to low-income communities. As existing retailers, they have an established customer base familiar with their location, products, and prices. Because they are often located in residential neighborhoods, corner stores can be a key gathering place for residents on their way to or from work, school, or other activities. In fact, a national survey from The Food Trust found that over half of surveyed youth visited a corner store at least once per day.^{ix} This finding is mirrored in Washington, DC, where Healthy Corners customer intercept surveys revealed that 63% of customers visit a corner store nearly every day. Often open early morning and late night, seven days per week, residents can frequent a corner store when farmers markets and mobile markets are closed. Healthy Corners partners exclusively with small corner stores in low-access neighborhoods; 53 of the 71 (75%) partner stores are located in Wards 5, 7, and 8 and the remainder are located in neighborhoods with limited access.



DC Central Kitchen has been instrumental in leveraging its resources to provide valuable services to local food deserts

ROBERT SUMMERS, DIRECTOR, DC DEPARTMENT OF SMALL AND LOCAL BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT



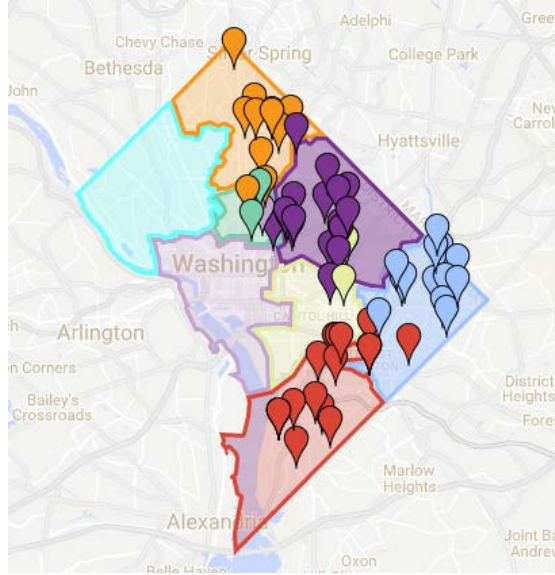
We thank DC Central Kitchen for being outstanding partners in total health

MARITHA GAY, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS AND COMMUNITY BENEFIT, KAISER PERMANENTE OF THE MID-ATLANTIC STATES



I am so excited that this store is now selling produce. We just love fruit and can't wait to come back!

CUSTOMER AT LIFF'S MARKET, A HEALTHY CORNERS STORE



MAP OF HEALTHY CORNERS STORE LOCATIONS BY WARD

The Healthy Corners Model

Healthy Corners acts as a wholesaler by aggregating fresh food from mainline distributors and local farms, processing it at a commercial kitchen, and selling to for-profit corner stores—79% of whom accept SNAP benefits.

Unlike typical wholesalers, Healthy Corners sells this healthy food in small quantities appropriate for small retailers. Stores receive weekly or bi-weekly product deliveries, then mark-up items by 35% for an average suggested retail price of just \$0.37 per item, a lower rate than what a for-profit cooperative (“co-op”) business model might offer.

As a mission-driven social enterprise, Healthy Corners provides free infrastructure like refrigeration and shelving, marketing materials, and direct technical assistance to help store owners engage customers and increase sales of healthy items.

The Impact

Thanks to Healthy Corners, 71 small DC retailers that otherwise could not stock or sell healthy food are now empowering residents of DC’s food deserts to purchase fresh produce and nutritious snacks. Results show that 97% of store owners agree that this program has helped them think differently about selling produce and 91% would recommend other small retailers to participate in the program. One in seven corner stores in Washington, DC is a Healthy Corners store and externally validated research shows that walkability to healthy food had increased by 11% in target communities since the program launched.



PHASE I: FROM IDEA TO LAUNCH (2011-2012)

ESSENTIAL ACTIVITIES & SUCCESSFUL STRATEGIES

Lowering the Barriers to Entry

Three significant barriers have historically prevented corner stores and small retailers from selling fresh produce: an inability to procure fresh produce in small quantities from wholesalers, insufficient knowledge and infrastructure to display and care for fresh produce, and risk-aversion to stocking new products without clear customer demand. Launched in 2011, Healthy Corners' approach tackled all three barriers, first by acting as a produce wholesaler that would sell items to corner stores by the single unit without minimum order requirements. Leveraging the existing food purchasing relationships of DC Central Kitchen's other foodservice programs, Healthy Corners could secure bulk-rate discounts and pass those savings along to corner stores. Then, rather than ask corner stores to remove high rotation items from their shelves to make room for "unproven" fresh produce, we gave retailers racks, baskets, and small display refrigerators so they would have the infrastructure and capacity needed to safely carry perishable goods. And for a limited trial period, we delivered products for free, which allowed risk-averse store owners to establish a market while minimizing their exposure in buying products that might not sell. Despite concerns that stores would drop out once subsidized deliveries stopped, 100% of corner stores stayed in the Healthy Corners network after the initial trial phase, demonstrating that owners saw value (and profit) from selling fresh produce.

Building a Distribution System

To rapidly build a distribution system, we allowed stores to order and purchase items by the case, rather than by weight, which allowed stores to maintain their existing point-of-sale operations. Stores received weekly price sheets denoting each offering (bananas, apples, potatoes, peppers, etc.) and made their order for the following week while the Healthy Corners Field Produce Merchandisers dropped off their current order. Orders were relayed daily to DC Central Kitchen's procurement staff who included these orders in the organization's much larger food purchases. Vendors delivered the products to DC Central Kitchen's central facility, where our team loaded Healthy Corners products into a refrigerated van for delivery.

Engaging Store Owners

We quickly discovered that the single biggest determinant of an individual store's success was the level of personal engagement of the store owner. When store owners were enthusiastic about the program, they took better care of their items, maintained appealing displays, and educated consumers about new products and promotions. Attitude, in short, was everything. To meet owners where they were on the engagement spectrum, we created a store owner training manual designed to be comprehensive, easy to read, and filled with examples of displays, price tags, and marketing materials. The training manual also included tips on improving store owner-customer relations. Some store owners had built a strong rapport with customers as longtime business owners, while others had strained relations with their customer base. Many store owners – more than half – self-identified as immigrants or new Americans and as a result, perceived language barriers and cultural differences often further separated store owners from engaging with their customers, and vice versa. In addition to the training manual, the Healthy Corners team made personal visits to corner stores at least quarterly to answer questions and gather feedback.



There are so many places in DC where people can't get healthy meals, healthy food. I think that's a travesty of justice.

Watch Bo, a HEALTHY CORNERS DELIVERY DRIVER AND GRADUATE OF DC CENTRAL KITCHEN'S CULINARY JOB TRAINING PROGRAM FOR ADULTS FACING HIGH BARRIERS TO EMPLOYMENT, WALK THROUGH WHAT A TYPICAL DAY DISTRIBUTING HEALTHY CORNERS PRODUCTS LOOKED LIKE IN 2012.

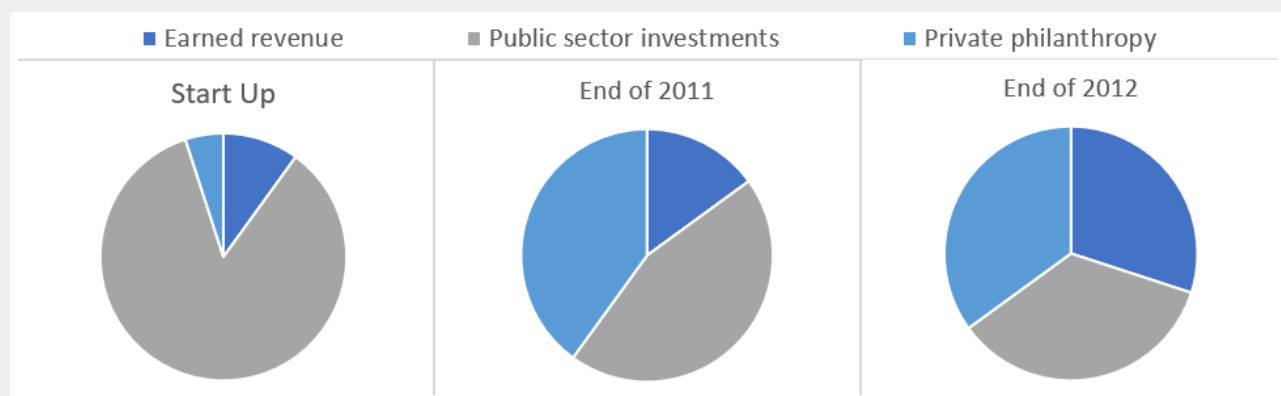
FULL URL LINK:

<https://vimeo.com/32104509>



Developing a Sustainable Revenue Model

Selling wholesale produce to corner stores covered basic food expenses, but to keep prices affordable for the end consumer, those prices did not reflect the staff, equipment, and backend operational costs. Initial investments from the DC Department of Health and the DC Department of Small and Local Business Development propelled Healthy Corners from whiteboard idea to full-fledged operation, and additional public-sector investments continued to sustain the operation for years to come. With our unique approach to combating food deserts and improving community health, we began to leverage private sector investments from healthcare companies, food retailers, and family foundations to build our Healthy Corners operations. Over time, Healthy Corners adopted a revenue model that blended public, private, and earned revenue – a much more sustainable model.



KEY LEARNINGS (2011-2012)

- Consumer demand exists for healthy food. Initial surveys found that more than half of residents wanted to see more healthy food available for sale in their communities.
- DC Central Kitchen's credibility as a leading local nonprofit organization helped start the program. Store owners were familiar with the organization and trusted that Healthy Corners would live up to its pledges of timely deliveries, effective training, and meaningful infrastructure assistance.
- Store owners are risk averse; therefore, providing initial free products, training, and infrastructure is vital to promoting participation at the outset.
- No corner stores left the network when the "free trial" period ended. Instead, once stores had initial buy-in, their engagement and energy around the program increased. In fact, store owner engagement is the leading determinant of store success.

KEY IMPACTS (2011-2012)

33

small retailers stocked and sold fresh produce

19,682

Healthy, wholesale food items delivered

\$13,343

sold in affordable, healthy retail food products at participating Healthy Corners stores

51%

of customers wanted to see even more fresh produce available in their communities



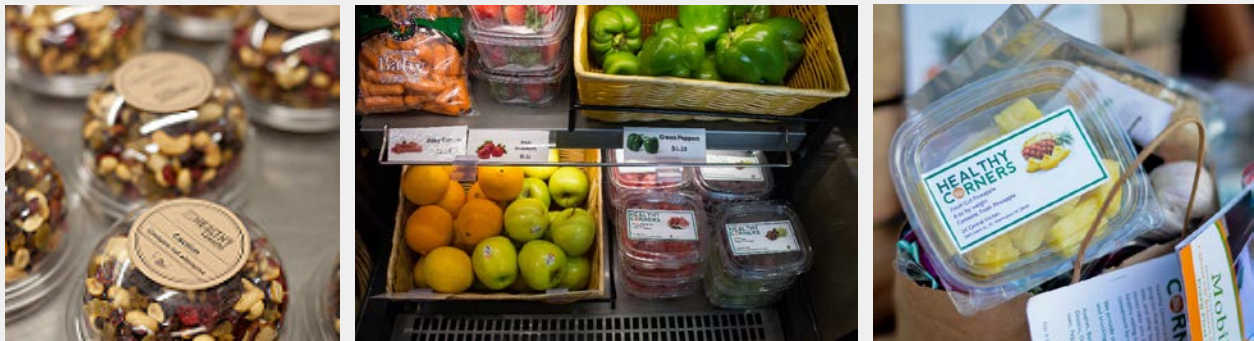
PHASE II: FROM START-UP TO BEST PRACTICE MODEL (2013-2017)

ESSENTIAL ACTIVITIES & SUCCESSFUL STRATEGIES

Expanding Product Line

Healthy Corners began by selling only whole fruits and vegetables such as bananas, apples, and carrots. This was successful in building initial demand for produce, but to better meet customer expectations of convenient, grab-and-go purchases and respond to store owner feedback, we sought to offer a wider variety of produce, more fresh ingredients for home cooking, and prepacked items customers could take with them. We expanded our Healthy Corners product line to include whole watermelon, butternut squash, onions, collard greens, eggplant, and kale; added fresh-cut items including strawberries, pineapples, cantaloupe, honeydew, and carrots; and prepared and packaged healthy trail mix and fresh salads. We coupled the new produce additions with easy-to-make recipes and nutrition education materials that featured the key nutrients in each produce item. The Healthy Corners team also knew to stimulate demand as well as meet it, and did so by crafting healthier versions of familiar food items. The most popular of these items has been a Better for You Brownie, a healthier desert alternative made with black beans and packed with protein, fiber, and essential vitamins and minerals. By 2017, Healthy Corners had developed 48 unique products which corner stores could purchase.

To meet growing customer demand for local produce in that same year, Healthy Corners conducted a produce line audit to determine which fruits and vegetables could be sourced from local farmers in an effort to ensure that more of our dollars supported the region's food economy. As a result, the team sourced seven items (apples, pears, broccoli, spinach, and sweet potatoes, among others) directly from local growers instead of wholesalers. Now, over 75% of Healthy Corners retailers stock locally-sourced produce items.



Decreasing Waste

Product sales were extremely difficult to track in the first phase of the program because the Healthy Corners team could only visit each store once per week. By bringing on new staff and adding technology tools in 2014, the team had the capacity to evaluate each store's waste at least twice per week which, in turn, allowed for more accurate assessment of successful and unsuccessful products. We discovered waste from spoilage or unsold items was roughly 10%. Up until that point, Healthy Corners bought back unsold and spoiled produce each week – a strategy initially developed to incentivize program participation and mitigate store owner risk. We decided to reframe that policy in 2015, and only bought back produce that was still edible but not attractive enough for retail purchase. Healthy Corners delivered that product back to DC Central Kitchen, which used dehydrators and other processing tools to safely recirculate produce into its daily meals. To empower store owners to take ownership of their unsold products, we offered additional training on safe and effective produce handling and worked directly with owners to adjust their weekly purchases to more accurate amounts. We developed new packaging and pricing for unsuccessful products, and created marketing materials to engage customers and store owners around specific items. As a result, waste decreased from 10% per month to less than 3% per month by 2017.

Scaling Sustainably

Healthy Corners doubled its network in the eight months between April 2014 and December 2014, thanks to a grant from the DC Department of Small and Local Business Development. Expansion was primarily led by a Healthy Corners Coordinator who used GIS mapping and the USDA SNAP Retailer Locator to locate potential stores in target neighborhoods. The Coordinator then made door-to-door visits to inform store owners about the program. With initial incentives like free infrastructure and free produce to start, we enrolled 34 additional stores that summer and fall, each of whom signed a three-year aspirational pledge to sell healthy food. While marketing and outreach were the primary mechanisms through which corner stores learned about the program initially, by fall 2014 word-of-mouth and positive referrals also brought new stores to the network. This bold expansion strategy was made possible by leveraging DC Central Kitchen's existing procurement relationships, commercial kitchen, kitchen production staff, and fleet of vehicles to rapidly scale in ways that a stand-alone operation might have found more challenging.

In 2017, Healthy Corners unveiled a new growth strategy. Rather than adding new stores, we decided to drive sales of healthy food by providing tailored support based on a corner store's performance. We created three membership tiers: "Pop-Up" for the lowest performing stores that were either ill-equipped to stock and sell produce or too unsure of customer demand to make weekly produce orders, "Classic" for stores with moderate sales but the potential for growth, and "Promo" for top performing stores that were in the position to purchase healthy foods directly from produce vendors. Based on low sales, we moved 9 stores to Pop-Up status so they no longer received weekly deliveries. Instead, we offered periodic pop-up produce markets and nutrition education workshops at the corner store to drive customer demand. Over time, the goal of this membership model was to demonstrate consistent customer demand so stores move to become Classic members. We placed 57 of 71 stores in Classic status which included weekly deliveries, infrastructure support, technical assistance, and nutrition outreach.

As sales increased, we sought to move 1 to 2 stores annually to Promo status where stores worked directly with for-profit vendors to source their produce. Since the ultimate goal of Healthy Corners is to create healthier food environments, transitioning stores out of Healthy Corners to work directly with vendors reflects a sustainable, long-term, and market-based approach to enhancing community self-sufficiency. In 2017, three stores upgraded to Promo and made a "positive exit" from the network. Healthy Corners supported the "graduated" stores by offering free nutrition outreach such as cooking demonstrations to continue to sustain customer demand for healthy products.



Expansion was primarily led by using GIS mapping and the USDA SNAP Retailer Locator to locate potential stores in target neighborhoods.

HEALTHY CORNERS TIERED MEMBERSHIP

MEMBERSHIPS

	 Classic Corner	 Pop-Up Corner	 Promo Corner
Weekly produce delivery	✓		
Quarterly produce delivery		✓	
Free infrastructure	✓		
Cooking demonstrations & Community Events	✓	✓	✓
Free marketing materials	✓	✓	✓

Personalizing Technical Assistance

Healthy Corners is not just about selling produce, it is fundamentally about creating healthier food environments. But transitioning corner stores from exclusively offering shelf-stable items to stocking sufficient quantities of fresh items means asking store owners to reorganize store layouts, manage new equipment, learn to handle food that spoils, test new marketing strategies, add produce displays in visible areas, and work with new vendors. To ease this process, Healthy Corners began offering increasingly robust technical assistance. In addition to creating and disseminating a store owner training manual which walks store owners through common questions involving store layouts, ordering, and customer preferences, we began by providing each store with an annual store report detailing their sales, waste, and retail value of produce purchased over the year. This popular feature led to the creation of monthly sales and waste reports, and working one-on-one with owners to increase the amount of variety of products they offer. Along the way, we piloted strategies that ultimately weren't right for this program, like cross-store meetings to bring together store owners to share best practices, but found that owners often couldn't leave their stores due to limited staffing. Instead, monthly personalized newsletters for each store with information on product promotions and upcoming activities accounted for owners' limited time and staffing.

Driving Customer Demand

Healthy Corners drives customer demand and promotes community health and wellness through marketing, outreach, and community partnerships. Since its launch, Healthy Corners has provided free marketing materials to corner stores which includes floor stickers, shelf decals, window signage, and recipe cards. In August 2017, Healthy Corners launched its first mass marketing campaign using nearby buses, bus shelters, and Metro rail stations to display Healthy Corners advertisements navigating customers to the closest healthy food access point. This month-long advertising campaign increased sales of one of the target stores by 96%, and another by 60% compared to August of the previous year.

In addition to print marketing, Healthy Corners utilized MailChimp email marketing to send monthly community newsletters promoting upcoming events as well as food assistance redemption reminders, purchased geo-targeted mailing lists to send direct-mail to community residents informing them of upcoming store and promotions events, and maintained a calendar of community events on DC Central Kitchen's website. As of 2017, we now offer 100+ annual events both at corner stores (including cooking demonstrations and guided store tours) and at nearby community locations (including nutrition workshops, taste tests, produce giveaways, and produce raffles). This work was made possible by strategic partnerships with more than three dozen farmers markets, health clinics, public libraries, community centers, and nonprofits. Hosting monthly store events helped to create a reliable customer following and built trust between store owners and customers who previously felt tensions due to security measures like bulletproof glass. Community partnerships have allowed for customer engagement on an ongoing basis outside their shopping experience.

At each of these events, customers were provided the opportunity to sign up for Healthy Corners' text messaging service, which sent bimonthly healthy eating text messages and monthly reminders to residents to redeem food assistance benefits, creating one more touch point to improve public health. As of 2017, more than 900 community members received monthly newsletters regarding healthy retail activities including store offerings, healthy eating text messages, and event updates.



PARTNERSHIP HIGHLIGHT: HEALTHY CORNERS AND PLAYWORKS

In partnership with the nonprofit Playworks, Healthy Corners developed an innovative curriculum combining physical activity with nutrition outreach for youth ages 8 to 15. After one school year, the use of this curriculum showed statistically significant results in improving healthy eating knowledge among students.

Evaluating Impact to Improve Effectiveness

Our approach to evaluating performance goes beyond simply identifying short-term outputs to instead capture long-term impacts. Healthy Corners tracks over three dozen unique data points from procurement to sales to gather insights on customers preferences. We also conduct quarterly assessments at each participating corner store to evaluate existing physical infrastructure and store layout, and pre-, post-, and annual Nutrition Environment Measurement Surveys (NEMS) to evaluate store food environments. This tool, developed by the University of Pennsylvania, captures information on accessibility, affordability, and quality of food sold at corner stores. We collect survey feedback from store owners annually and customers on an ongoing basis. Healthy Corners tracks these data points in a performance management database for DC Central Kitchen's evaluation experts and university researchers to assess impact and determine program effectiveness, in line with our logic model (Appendix I).



Our approach to evaluating performance goes beyond simply identifying short-term outputs to instead capture long-term impacts.

In 2015, Healthy Corners conducted a rigorous year-long evaluation of its consumer population; the results of 1,000 surveys of adults and seniors found that almost 90% of community members were very willing to purchase healthier food options and 95% knew the importance of consuming fruits and vegetables. These types of insights drove Healthy Corners to increase the variety of produce it offered and place free recipe cards on corner store shelves to walk customers through purchasing and preparing these healthy, and at times unfamiliar, products.

In 2017, we partnered with American University's Department of Health Studies to understand program impact and create a tool to help predict the long-term success and sustainability of a Healthy Corners store. American University surveyed customers regarding their visit frequency, produce purchases, and healthy eating decisions. They also leveraged three years of Healthy Corners store evaluations and sales data to create a scorecard that ranks nine key variables of success which include length of time in the network, growth of sales, variety of product offerings, and store owner satisfaction. Each store was assigned a numeric value against these indicators, with a maximum total value of 13 points. With the concept that a higher score on the scorecard may be a predictor of long-term engagement and increased healthy food offerings, the Healthy Corners Scorecard (Appendix II) allowed us to compare network stores to each other to determine how to maximize investments of staff time, marketing dollars, and outreach activities to improve corner store success.

KEY LEARNINGS

- Customers aren't just price sensitive, they are time sensitive too. Grab-and-go items and prepared foods are successful healthy products.
- Technical assistance to store owners regarding marketing, store design, and product placement drives sales.
- Externally validated impact is key to securing public and private investors and donors.
- Providing nutrition education through demonstrations and product sampling helps customers learn to shop for and cook with the new healthy options in the store.

KEY IMPACTS (2013-2017)

Impact on Store Owners

97%

agree that this program helped them think differently about selling produce

50%

of owners have seen in increase in their profit

Impact on Customers

64%

of customers report that the availability of fresh fruits and vegetables has facilitated healthful eating

58%

of surveyed customers purchase some, most, or all of their fruits and vegetables from a Healthy Corners store

ACCOLADES

First prize winner of the nationwide Tavis Smiley-University of Maryland Social Innovation Challenge in 2014.

Replication manual entitled *Turning the Corner: The Inside Guide to Fighting Food Deserts Through Corner Store Collaborations* was recognized in *The Atlantic*, *Nonprofit Quarterly*, *Chronicle of Philanthropy*, and *Huffington Post* in 2015.

Named best practice program by The Food Trust in 2014 and US Chamber of Commerce Foundation in 2016.

Impact on Food Environments

1 IN 7

corner stores in Washington, DC is a Healthy Corners store

60%

of Healthy Corners stores get all their produce from DC Central Kitchen

69%

of Healthy Corners stores are stocking at least 17 different Healthy Corners items per month

60%

of Healthy Corners stores sell at least an average of at least 80 pounds per month

11%

increase in walkability to healthy food in target communities since the program launched, according to researchers from Carnegie Mellon University



PHASE III: A LOOK AHEAD (2018-FUTURE)

PIPELINE ACTIVITIES & STRATEGIES

Healthy Corners has come a long way from that whiteboard idea in 2011, creating value for corner store owners and residents living in low-income and low-access neighborhoods. More must be done, however, to facilitate health and wellness, and create an equitable food economy in under-resourced communities.

90%

of surveyed residents are very willing to purchase healthier food options but only 1/2 believe there are enough healthy food options available in their community

95%

of surveyed residents living in Wards 5, 7 and 8 know the importance of consuming of fruits and vegetables but less than 2/3 practice this behavior

63%

of corner store customers shop at a corner store nearly daily, but 1/3 of them never or rarely purchase Healthy Corners products

Increasing Customer Awareness

Partner researchers from American University found that 63% of customers surveyed at Healthy Corners stores shop at that store almost daily. The high percentage of returning customers and frequency of visits to Healthy Corners stores indicates a prime target population for increased marketing and outreach efforts. Healthy Corners plans to double down on creating in-store marketing materials to direct customers to the availability of fresh produce and healthy snacks and training store owners on appealing product placement. After the success of the August 2017 ad campaign, which increased sales of Healthy Corners items by up to 96% at targeted stores, Healthy Corners will conduct supplemental geo-targeted ad campaigns. In addition to tracking increased sales, Healthy Corners will develop and publish a unique URL displayed on Healthy Corners ads that allows for tracking resulting engagement on the program website. Meanwhile, Healthy Corners will leverage DC Central Kitchen's new Food Access and Education department staffed by three outreach professionals. This team builds the program's capacity to lead more cooking demonstrations, community tabling fairs, and nutrition workshops for Healthy Corners customers and residents nearby. Through surveys and creative tracking techniques, Healthy Corners seeks to gain a better understanding of what types of activities drive consumers to corner stores and once there, influence their purchases.

HEALTHY CORNERS MARKETING CAMPAIGN

In the summer of 2017, Healthy Corners ran a geo-targeted marketing campaign, with advertisements on metro dioramas (pictured below), on buses and bus stalls near Healthy Corners stores in Ward 7 of Washington, DC.





Maximizing Public and Private Partnerships

Healthy Corners also sees itself as a partner of the USDA's Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP). At present, 79% of Healthy Corners stores accept SNAP benefits, but proposed regulations for Fiscal Year 2018 which raise the standards on what types of corner stores can accept these benefits may lead to a drop off in SNAP benefit acceptance within the network. Healthy Corners is prepared to take a leading role providing technical assistance to stores in the Healthy Corners network in order to maintain their ability to accept SNAP benefits, and work with corner stores outside network to help owners understand what actions they need to take to maintain their status. As SNAP double-benefit programs become increasingly popular at farmers markets, Healthy Corners plans to pilot a similar effort with its retailers to allow consumers to maximize their SNAP dollars to purchase healthy, fresh foods. We also plan to help inform SNAP-eligible consumers of the availability and use of their food assistance benefits.

Healthy Corners is one proven successful venture within a web of food access programming in the District of Columbia. Healthy Corners sees itself as a critical complement to organizations offering free meals, produce bags, farmers markets, community gardens, and community supported agriculture subscriptions. Because each of these critical initiatives provides access to fresh and nutritious foods on certain days and hours, Healthy Corners wishes to inform those recipients of the availability of healthy options at their neighborhood corner store. Through coordinated outreach efforts and shared events, Healthy Corners and its food access partners will help ensure that access to healthy foods in underserved communities exists year-round and low-income consumers can use their purchasing power to encourage the development of an equitable food ecosystem where they live.

We will facilitate healthy food access and coordinate robust nutrition outreach in ways that promote community-wide health and wellness. Integrating materials and best practices from SNAP-Ed, USDA MyPlate guidelines, and Healthy Corners' holistic health curriculum into the team's 100+ annual outreach events at corner stores and nearby mobile markets, health fairs, and community events will promote healthy eating and active living on a budget. Strengthening partnerships with physicians at Unity Healthcare, a network of federally qualified health centers, and educators at THEARC, a campus of nonprofit organizations that provide education, health, and arts programming for children and families, will help expand our reach to additional members of our target population.

Creating Jobs for Adults with Barriers to Employment

DC Central Kitchen considers it critical to its mission to provide stable, meaningful, and dignified jobs for those who would otherwise struggle to find employment. Since Healthy Corners launched, the production, packaging, and distribution of its products has been led by DC Central Kitchen employees who graduated from the organization's Culinary Job Training program for unemployed adults – one third of whom participate in the USDA-funded SNAP Employment & Training program. Every such employee works full-time hours starting above the DC living wage with comprehensive health care benefits and a matched retirement plan.

Food deserts are, ultimately, the result of pervasive poverty and a lack of economic investment, so any sustainable solution must look to create good jobs and economic opportunity, as well as spaces for community residents to contribute to – and advocate for – a more equitable food system that supports their health, wellness, and economic security. As Healthy Corners moves into this next phase, the program seeks to empower more Culinary Job Training program graduates to lead nutrition education and community outreach workshops, leveraging their culinary expertise while creating leadership opportunities for residents of these historically underserved communities who have personal experiences coping with food insecurity and living in food deserts.



Each of DC Central Kitchen's social ventures exists to test new solutions to systemic failures, expand healthy food access, and create opportunities for meaningful careers.

ALIGNING WITH FEDERAL & LOCAL PRIORITIES

USDA Corner Store Guide

In June 2016, the USDA published a guide for planning and implementing a successful healthy corner store program in the community, citing that these types of interventions have the potential to impact the health of community members through not only increasing the sale of healthy foods but also increasing customer knowledge and perceptions surrounding healthy products. Healthy Corners utilizes all six of the USDA recommended strategies for creating healthier corner store food environments:

STRATEGY I: ENGAGING STORE OWNERS

Store owners are involved in the purchasing process and can dictate what and how much of each product they would like. Additionally, store performance audits and individualized performance improvement plans are conducted for each store.

STRATEGY II: ENGAGING COMMUNITY MEMBERS

Recipe cards are distributed featuring fresh produce sold and community members are continuously engaged during community events and in-store demonstrations. Graduates of DC Central Kitchen's Culinary Job Training program for adults from marginalized communities are hired to implement Healthy Corners.

STRATEGY III: DEFINING PROGRAM INCENTIVES

Store owners are incentivized to participate in the program by providing weekly deliveries, free marketing, technical assistance, infrastructure, and events. Customers are incentivized to purchase products by raffles for free produce and previously \$5 *Freggie Bucks* to purchase products.

STRATEGY IV: PROVIDING NUTRITION EDUCATION

DC Central Kitchen organizes nutrition education activities and food tasting events at participating corner stores and community events for various populations.

STRATEGY V: MARKETING HEALTHIER PRODUCT OPTIONS

DC Central Kitchen provides marketing assistance to store owners through large, colorful signs for shelves, display refrigerators, and window signs.

STRATEGY VI: SOURCING HEALTHY FOODS AND BEVERAGES

DC Central Kitchen has an extensive purchasing network including relationships with local farms to offer fresh produce at a low cost. Each month, produce promotions highlight a seasonal produce item that is typically local and provided at a discount to both the store owners and the customers.



Healthy Corners benefits from additional strategic partnerships with the USDA. As a Community Food Project grantee from 2015 to 2018, we receive financial support to install refrigeration and shelving at partner corner stores, and we benefit from connections to peer organizations working on community food initiatives across the country. DC Central Kitchen has also been recognized by USDA as the only permanent food hub in the District of Columbia, underscoring the organization’s central role in aggregating products from dozens of farms across the region and distributing them to corner stores, nonprofits, schools, and other food businesses in our nation’s capital.

DC Healthy People 2020

The DC Healthy People 2020 framework, created collaboratively across 30 District agencies, sets the city’s health outcome objectives to be achieved by the year 2020. The framework recommends evidence-based strategies to improve key health outcomes for District of Columbia residents. With past and present support from the DC Department of Health, the Healthy Corners model addresses three objectives in key ways, and plans to adopt new and innovative programming to further move the needle on the District’s health priorities.



DC Central Kitchen is the only USDA-recognized permanent food hub in the District of Columbia.

RECOMMENDED NUTRITION & WEIGHT STATUS STRATEGY:

Encourage development of full-service grocery stores in food deserts and augment offering of healthy, affordable foods at corner stores.

Current Healthy Corners Activities

- Provide free infrastructure and incentives for store owners to include healthier food options in corner stores
- Provide personalized training with owners on the benefits of offering healthier food options
- Conduct in-store events
- Transform program structure to 3-tiered membership
- Increase procurement of local produce from local farms

Future Healthy Corners Activities

- Pilot a program testing minimum stocking requirements based on food access research
- Bring in retail display experts to maximize Healthy Corners visibility on store shelves
- Market creatively using guidelines from USDA
- Provide store owners business materials relating to additional infrastructure, lighting and applications for national food incentive programs

Benefits that Support the Recommended Strategy

- Store owners do not assume initial risk of offering produce
- Store owners are educated about their role in changing the food environment
- Enhances positive relationships for store owners and customers
- Increases business opportunities
- Increases access to local produce, grab-and-go, and easy to prepare produce items
- Increases foot traffic and revenue for small businesses
- Increases produce access will increase demand and empower community members to advocate for development of full-service grocery stores
- Increases produce purchases based on marketing
- Enhances store compliance with federal nutrition assistance program requirements

RECOMMENDED DIABETES STRATEGY:

Improve access to affordable, nutritious food through full-service grocery stores, mobile markets, and programs that provide financial assistance and incentives for buying fresh fruits and vegetables.

Current Healthy Corners Activities

- With support from the Department of Health, distribute vouchers to community members to purchase fresh fruits, vegetables and healthy snacks at Healthy Corners stores
- Offer discounts to store owners to purchase local produce, those discounts are passed along to customers
- Host pop-up markets where for \$5, customers can fill a reusable tote with fresh produce and take home healthy recipe cards
- Offer produce bags as raffle prizes at community outreach events

Future Healthy Corners Activities

- Distribute produce vouchers to encourage shoppers at farmers markets and afterschool markets to shop at Healthy Corners when their current supply runs out
- Partner with Wholesome Wave to offer a SNAP matching incentive program at corner stores and small retailers, allowing customers to double their SNAP dollars to purchase fresh fruits, vegetables, and healthy snacks
- Host additional pop-up markets with \$5 produce bags at corner stores too small or too ill-equipped to permanently stock produce

Benefits that Support the Recommended Strategy

- Provides incentives for low-income community members to purchase healthy food options
- Increases access to local produce from farms within a 250-mile radius
- Increases revenue for small business owners in marginalized communities
- Improves customer and store owner relationships in target neighborhoods
- Collaboration on innovative food access initiatives across food-focused nonprofits
- Maximizes federal nutrition assistance benefits used to purchase healthful foods
- Allows customers in neighborhoods without Healthy Corners stores to purchase discounted fresh fruits and vegetables

RECOMMENDED SOCIAL DETERMINANTS OF HEALTH STRATEGY:

Maintain a mix of uses in neighborhoods, including affordable production space, to support the retention of well-paid manual, skilled and low-skilled jobs for people with low-educational attainment and other barriers to jobs.

Current Healthy Corners Activities

- Leverage DC Central Kitchen’s Culinary Job Training (CJT) program to prepare unemployed, underemployed, previously incarcerated and homeless adults for careers in food service
- Offer intense, 14-week program focused on culinary skills and life skills, currently funded by Department of Employment Services and the SNAP Employment & Training program
- Program participants receive job-placement assistance, self-empowerment classes and job-readiness skills

Future Healthy Corners Activities

- Partner with local food business incubators and small grocers to offer additional jobs paying above minimum wage to CJT graduates
- Continue close partnership with DC Workforce Investment Council and Department of Employment Services to promote food industry career pathways
- Expand training to include front-of-house and point-of-sale skill development, improving employee adaptability
- Expand services to out-of-school, out-of-work “opportunity youth”

Benefits that Support the Recommended Strategy

- Ninety percent of program graduates secure employment, 75% job retention at one year after program completion
- Program graduates receive food handler’s license, increasing their marketability in the food industry
- Increases consideration for higher paying food service positions
- Increases access to match program graduates with community partners paying at or above DC’s living wage
- Program completion is correlated with a 90% reduction in criminal recidivism versus the national average
- Supports implementation of compliance with Federal WIOA legislation



ACHIEVING SUSTAINABILITY & LONG-TERM SUCCESS

Healthy Corners builds the capacity of small businesses to meet the healthy food needs of residents, and ultimately exists to sustainably improve food environments in Wards 5, 7, and 8. Over a year of working alongside American University's Department of Health Studies to analyze historic program data and determine key indicators of success and sustainability, showed that defining "success" would be complex. For some stores with lots of square footage and high customer traffic, success is selling large enough quantities of produce to work directly with a for-profit wholesaler or what Healthy Corners defines as a "positive exit" from the network. For many stores, success is just generating profit each month from the sale of produce it purchases. For others, success involves positive customer feedback and establishing a competitive advantage over their nearby competitors. The Healthy Corners Scorecard (Appendix II) captures each store's point-in-time success and provides a roadmap for moving that store towards different metrics of success which may include increased sales, increased variety of offerings, improvements in customer feedback, or a combination of multiple variables.

Healthy Corner's revenue model blends public and private investments with earned revenue in line with other social enterprises of its size and scope. Nearly one-third of its revenue is generated through the sale of produce, one-third is granted through local government to expand operations and evaluate programmatic impact, and one-third is covered through private philanthropy looking to make smart investments in more equitable food systems. Going forward, Healthy Corners will look to help high-

performing stores transition to purchasing from cooperative or traditional wholesaling options that may be able to offer a wider variety of products and more regular deliveries. In the event of these stores “graduating” from Healthy Corners, the program will be able to shift its limited resources to new partner stores that do not yet offer nutritious, fresh food options and building their capacity as healthy food retailers.

Ensuring equitable access to healthy food in urban food deserts requires system-level change and a wide array of collaborations. In Washington, DC’s food deserts, full-service grocery stores, farmers markets, and charitable feeding programs are all part of the solution. A robust Healthy Corners program contributes to the success of each of these endeavors by reinforcing positive behavior changes among consumers while demonstrating the significant opportunity missed by businesses who do not offer nutritious, affordable food options. Just as importantly, Healthy Corners contributes to the social determinants of health through its linkages with SNAP, SNAP education, job training activities, and healthy physical activity promotion in area schools. Today, Healthy Corners is positioned at the intersection of market forces and mission-based work, addressing a critical public health need while investing in small businesses, DC’s local food system, and accessible career pathways for adults with high barriers to employment.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX I: HEALTHY CORNERS LOGIC MODEL

prepared for the DC Department of Health

INPUTS	ACTIVITIES	OUTPUTS	OUTCOMES	IMPACTS
<p>Staff: Established program staff; 2 FTE evaluation staff; 2 FTE marketing staff</p> <p>Partnerships: 71 DC corner stores; SNAP-Ed partners; wholesalers, local farms, American University evaluators</p> <p>Processing & Distribution: USDA recognized food hub commercial kitchens, fleet of delivery vehicles</p> <p>Technology: mobilized survey; Apricot; SMS; MailChimp</p> <p>Skills: Delivering nutritious food to corner stores; engaging nutrition education</p>	<p>Distribute healthy food to corner stores in Wards 5, 7, and 8; enroll 5 new stores</p> <p>Provide technical assistance to corner stores</p> <p>Provide nutrition education and outreach to residents</p> <p>Provide healthy eating and active living info directly to residents through marketing and community events</p> <p>Develop long-term sustainability model and health impact plan</p>	<p>200,000 units of fresh produce and healthy snacks are sold at 70+ stores</p> <p>Store profits from selling healthy food increase by 5%, waste decreases to 3%</p> <p>1,500 adults and seniors receive info on nutrition assistance programs and healthy food engagement</p> <p>5,000 community residents living in Wards 5, 7, and 8 become aware of Healthy Corners program</p> <p>“Next Steps” handbook, Book of Best Practices made available</p>	<p>Sales of healthy foods increase by 10% over 2016</p> <p>Store owners report positive attitudes about offering healthy food options in their store</p> <p>50% of SNAP-Ed participants increase healthy eating</p> <p>Increased resident awareness of healthy food options available in their community</p> <p>5 corner stores advance to a more sustainable membership level (from Popup to Classic, from Classic to Promo)</p>	<p>Increased number of retailers in target wards stock and sell healthy food</p> <p>Enhanced customer and store owner relations</p> <p>Consumers in target wards use nutrition assistance programs to purchase healthy food</p> <p>Consumers in target wards are more regular purchasers of healthy food provided by area retailers</p> <p>Replication of Healthy Corners model by other organizations</p>

APPENDIX II: HEALTHY CORNER STORE SCORECARD

developed by American University's Department of Health Studies

Variable	0 Points	0.5 Points	1 Point	1.5 Points	2 Points	Max Points for the Question
Amount in Pounds Purchased by Store per Month (mean of 2014, 2015, 2016)	< 45		45 - 79		≥ 80	2
Variety/Number of Different Items Purchased (mean of 2014, 2015, 2016)	< 17		17 - 25		≥ 26	2
Months in Program	< 29		29 - 40		≥ 41	2
NEMS-CS		≤ 10	11 - 20	21 - 30	≥ 31	2
Store Owner Survey/Quarterly Site Visit: Do you purchase produce (fruits and vegetables from other vendors?)	No		Yes			1
Store Owner Survey/Quarterly Site Visit: Would you recommend other small retailers participate in the Healthy Corners Program?	No		Yes			1
Store Owner Survey/Quarterly Site Visit: What percent of produce do you throw out each week?	>20%	16-20%	11-15%	6-10%	0-5%	1
Store Owner Survey/Quarterly Site Visit: Customer Demand for Healthy Corners Products	Not Satisfied	Somewhat Satisfied	Satisfied			1
Store Owner Survey/Quarterly Site Visit: Overall, I am satisfied with my store's participation in the Healthy Corners Program	No		Yes			1
Total Points Possible						13

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