

Healthy Food Purchasing

When cities have healthy food available on public property, we all have more opportunity to choose what's best for our bodies. Cities that prioritize health in their food purchases make sure everyone has access to healthy choices in public places where we work, play and learn – from municipal offices to public gyms to daycare facilities. It can also help cities save millions of dollars in preventable health care costs.

The Healthy Food Challenge

- Obesity is an important issue facing many Americans, with direct medical costs of obesity-related illness costing approximately \$260 billion in 2016 (the last year for which an estimate is available).¹
- Few (10-12.3%) U.S. adults meet their fruit and vegetable intake recommendations.²
- Nearly a quarter of U.S. working adults obtain food at work, with the most popular items being foods high in solid fat, added sugars or sodium.³
- Local governments are often among the largest employers and food purchasers in a community.

A Healthy Solution: Healthy Food Purchasing

- **Meets residents where they are** – Increases healthy food offerings in places that are integral to residents' lives, whether it be at work in government offices, at play in parks and recreational centers, or in other local settings such as afterschool programs, daycare facilities, or correctional facilities.
- **Focuses on improved nutrition** – Helps give increased focus to the nutritional profile of purchased food.⁴
- **Emphasizes sustainability** – Can keep more money in the local economy and prioritize environmentally sustainability.⁵

What is the Evidence that Healthy Food Purchasing Policies Can Improve Health?

Healthy Food Purchasing policies help improve nutrition and fight obesity by using cities' considerable purchasing power to make healthy options more accessible in the daily lives of residents.⁶ Local governments are typically large employers in a community, and providing

access to fresh and healthy options at work is a powerful opportunity for municipalities to ensure a healthy environment for their workforce.^{7,8}

- A systematic review of 34 studies found that healthy food procurement programs consistently resulted in the increased availability of healthier food and reduced purchases of foods high in fat, sodium, and sugar.⁶
- Established in 2012, the Los Angeles Good Food Purchasing Program resulted in healthier daily meals for the more than 600,000 students in the city school district, reduced their carbon footprint by purchasing less meat, and influenced vendors to source more locally.⁹
- In the first two years, the percentage of locally-purchased fruits and vegetables in the city rose from 9 percent to 75 percent.¹⁰ Since launching in Los Angeles, the GFPP has expanded to 20 cities and affects more than \$1 billion in annual purchases.⁹

How Can Healthy Food Purchasing Help Address Health Disparities?

Access to food is a key root cause of existing health disparities.¹¹ Neighborhoods that were historically redlined, are majority people of color, and with higher numbers of disabled people are all associated with reduced food access compared to other neighborhoods.¹² Widely available healthy food at schools, in government buildings and elsewhere can help fill the gap in access to nutritious food, especially given the significant amount of time people spend at work and school.

- Healthy Food Purchasing policies can help combat the obesity epidemic, which currently affects [49.6% of the Black and 44.8% of the Latino communities—above the national average of 42.4%](#).¹³
- Providing healthy food options can help reduce Americans' risk of developing heart disease, diabetes or high blood pressure, which affect communities of color at higher rates.¹⁴

What Are Some Future Issues to Consider?

Procurement policies are complex and require a level of detail and oversight that can be burdensome in municipal government. Due to product shortages, supply chain issues, or budget challenges, cities may need to issue exceptions in specific circumstances. Healthier products sometimes carry a higher price tag, which may cause apprehension among lawmakers. Finally, the scope of municipal healthy food procurement policies is limited and may not affect the food that people eat elsewhere.

Resources for Cities

[Center for Good Food Purchasing](#)

Center for Science in the Public Interest: [Government Food Purchasing Toolkit](#)

ChangeLab Solutions: [The Power of Procurement for Healthier Communities](#)

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