

Vendors 4 Health: Shamelessly Pedaling Produce

by: Eva Falk

SUMMARY

In 2016, Cultiva La Salud will launch Vendors 4 Health, a program that will bring local, fresh and affordable fruits and vegetables to nearly 56,000 Southeast Fresno residents on a daily basis using bike carts. The design of the program is intended to increase healthy food sources to low-income, Latino residents who live in disadvantaged neighborhoods with limited access to healthy food. The Vendor program has the potential to turn food deserts into food havens by bringing fresh fruits and vegetables to community.



CHALLENGE

Fresno County is in the midst of a serious obesity crisis. Approximately 69% of adults are overweight or obese. Residents living in Southeast Fresno are especially at risk since retail outlets offering fresh, local and affordable foods are nonexistent in their neighborhoods. Southeast Fresno is a food desert, saturated with fast food restaurants and convenience stores. Data from a recent Communities of Excellence in Nutrition, Physical Activity and

Obesity Prevention (CX3) survey highlighted that not a single store in this neighborhood met the state standards of a quality store. Of the 8 stores that were surveyed, a majority of them promoted unhealthy foods, many did not offer a variety of fruits and vegetables and/or priced their produce above the state's affordable rate. Limitations in accessing fruits and vegetables unfortunately, reinforce unhealthy food choices for Latino residents living in Southeast Fresno.

YOUR INVOLVEMENT IS KEY

Support Vendors 4 Health by buying locally sourced fruits and vegetables from them. Additional support can be lent by sharing the importance, ensuring access to healthy foods and buying local in your communities and schools. Cultiva La Salud is dedicated to engaging, informing and inspiring Latino residents to actively advance personal, family and community health through healthy lifestyles and civic engagement. To learn more about Cultiva La Salud and ways you can get involved, visit: www.CultivaLaSalud.org.

Contact

Eva Falk

Cultiva La Salud
Fresno, CA
559-498-0870 phone
www.cultivalasalud.org

SOLUTION

Mobile vendors were interested in selling fresh produce but existing city ordinances governing mobile vending were obstacles in their ability to sell produce. Latino residents and local mobile vendors championed the issue by sharing their concerns with city staff and in effect influenced changes in the City's development code. In November of 2015, the City of Fresno adopted a Healthy Eating Active Living (HEAL) Resolution in response to community input. This resolution acknowledge the health impacts of City policies in promoting good health and was a first step in getting the City to address issues, which predispose residents to poor health. Changes in the Development Code were also supported by the adoption of the HEAL Resolution. These changes not only incentivize

RESULTS

The Vendors 4 Health program can now thrive thanks to the new Development Code ordinance, which expands the reach and access to selling fruits and vegetables in neighborhoods and around schools. Vendors 4 Health will sell fresh, affordable fruits and vegetables in neighborhoods, like Southeast Fresno, that are considered food deserts. The project includes the 12 mobile vendors who helped inform the changes to the development code. These vendors were selling unhealthy items but engagement of existing vendors allows the program to convert unhealthy mobile vending to healthy, thereby simultaneously increasing the number of healthy business to double, due to the demand for healthy products, "especially in the summer months" says one of the mobile vendors. Positively affecting the food environment is just one of the benefits of the project. By biking, the vendors are also modeling physical activity and operating a climate friendly business.

SUSTAINING SUCCESS

Cultiva La Salud's goal is to increase access to healthy foods in food desert neighborhoods like Southeast Fresno and prevent chronic disease. However, there are multiplicative benefits, these mobile vendors will help create a footprint for creating greater access to healthy food and build a stronger base for economic growth connected to local agriculture. The project's longer-term goal is to grow in other parts of the County, including rural settings. In addition, the vendor project has garnered funding for the establishment of a Community Kitchen in Fresno. The kitchen will serve as a hub for Vendors 4 Health but will also allow other healthy food enterprises to develop. This kitchen will help sustain efforts for continued access to healthy food throughout the City and especially in Southeast Fresno.