

# Strategies that Work

## *Real Solutions to Community Food Problems*

May 2008

### **One Year Later: An Inspection of Hartford Stores Shows Measurable Progress for the Healthy Food Retailer Initiative**

In 2006, the Hartford Food System launched the Healthy Food Retailer Initiative, a partnership with corner markets and neighborhood food stores (often called *bodegas*) to increase the availability of nutritious groceries in Hartford. Since the city has only one full-size supermarket, these smaller retailers represent an important food source in the community. However, most stores stock a limited selection of healthy items, typically at higher prices than a larger supermarket, and their shelves are often crowded with junk food and soft drinks.

These deficiencies in the urban food environment have an impact on community wellbeing. Diet-related diseases like diabetes, heart disease, and obesity are roughly twice as prevalent in Hartford as the rest of Connecticut. The difficulty that many people face in shopping for basic groceries is a contributing factor to the rise of these health conditions. By improving Hartford's grocery sector, the Healthy Food Retailer Initiative offers a practical response to this problem.

As members of the Healthy Food Retailer Initiative, each participating store has committed to shift 5% of its junk food inventory annually to healthier groceries. In exchange, the Hartford Food System has pledged to support these stores through grassroots publicity, surveying customers to identify food preferences, negotiating with wholesalers for better prices, and representing the concerns of bodegas to local agencies like the Health Department that regulate these stores.

#### **Measuring Progress**

One year ago, the Hartford Food System measured the square footage of all grocery merchandise within the 25 stores that had enrolled in the Healthy Food Retailer Initiative as of February 2007. Last year's inspections were intended to create a baseline from which future progress on inventory shifts would be measured. Within these 25 stores, the percentage of regular groceries to the overall food and beverage inventory was 71%, with the remaining 29% of the inventory comprised of junk food and soft drinks.<sup>1</sup>

In early 2008, the Hartford Food System re-measured 23 of these 25 Healthy Food Retailers. (One of the original stores changed owners and another dropped out, resulting in a 92% retention rate for the project.) The Hartford

#### **Summary of Results**

- **Forty stores now participate in the project.**
- **Since 2007, stores have shifted 8% of junk food inventories to regular groceries.**
- **While inventories improved in the aggregate, not all stores had positive shifts individually:  $\frac{2}{3}$  made gains over 2007 and  $\frac{1}{3}$  did not.**
- **More stores are now stocking low-fat milk and whole wheat bread compared to 2007.**
- **Three-quarters of stores have expanded shelf space and some owners have added new stores, suggesting business growth.**

**HARTFORD FOOD SYSTEM**



Food System has also recruited 17 new stores to the Healthy Food Retailer Initiative for a total of 40 stores.

Among the 23 stores for which baseline measurements exist from last year, 78% of the aggregate inventory consists of regular groceries and 22% is junk food and soft drinks. This overall shift in the percentage of healthy food represents an 8% improvement over the course of one year.<sup>2</sup>

Not all stores improved individually relative to 2007's measurements, however. While 15 of the 23 stores surpassed their earlier percentage of regular groceries, 8 of the 23 stores actually worsened. The level of improvement among those stores that shifted their inventories in a positive direction was higher on average than the drop among those stores that did not improve. The size of these

gains and the nearly two-to-one ratio of stores moving in the right direction account for the 8% expansion in healthy food overall.

Each of the 8 stores that failed to improve had been above last year's median level. Meanwhile, the retailers that were found this year to have increased their percentage of regular groceries include the low performers from 2007. In other words, the stores that needed to improve the most did so, while some stores which ranked better than the rest fell below their prior status. The Hartford Food System will be working more intensively with these 8 stores over the coming year to help them reduce their level of junk food.<sup>3</sup>

Store inspections in 2007 also captured information about specific healthy items that stores have been asked to stock.

Table 1.

2007 - 2008 Comparison Food and Beverage Inventories of Participating Retailers									
	2007 MEASUREMENTS				2008 MEASUREMENTS				Healthy Shift within Stores
	Regular Groceries	Junk Food	Percentage of Regular Groceries	Percentage of Junk Food	Regular Groceries	Junk Food	Percentage of Regular Groceries	Percentage of Junk Food	
Boricuas Market	505	290	64%	36%	607	269	69%	31%	▲
Brito Grocery	364	190	66%	34%	323	109	75%	25%	▲
Charter Oak Supermarket	417	273	60%	40%	610	250	71%	29%	▲
Ciales Grocery	684	456	60%	40%	759	356	68%	32%	▲
El Coqui Grocery	413	40	91%	9%	678	224	75%	25%	▼
Cristal 2 Food Market	350	274	56%	44%	[dropped out due to lack of interest]				
Los Cubanitos	585	33	95%	5%	365	343	52%	48%	▼
DiMauros	651	137	83%	17%	734	140	84%	16%	▲
La Familia	359	72	83%	17%	420	192	69%	31%	▼
Five Corner Market	361	450	45%	55%	[store sold; new owner declined to join]				
Flatbush Market	304	162	65%	35%	419	169	71%	29%	▲
El Gitano	1,827	361	83%	17%	6,255	336	95%	5%	▲
Glorimar Grocery	879	358	71%	29%	991	320	76%	24%	▲
Hernandez Market	789	671	54%	46%	1,022	305	77%	23%	▲
Hot Corner Market	419	326	56%	44%	512	378	58%	42%	▲
El Kiosko	535	72	88%	12%	526	183	74%	26%	▼
Los Primos Market	519	100	84%	16%	474	270	64%	36%	▼
Martinez Mini Market	810	621	57%	43%	830	306	73%	27%	▲
Peoples Market	63	21	75%	25%	855	361	70%	30%	▼
Ramon Market	413	466	47%	53%	508	435	54%	46%	▲
Romny Market	1,099	297	78%	21%	1,403	275	84%	16%	▲
Rumaldo's Grocery	1,692	257	87%	13%	2,275	570	80%	20%	▼
Shop Fair	1,850	135	93%	7%	6,055	1,313	82%	18%	▼
Williams Market	654	411	61%	39%	940	320	75%	25%	▲
Y2K Market	271	445	38%	62%	501	410	55%	45%	▲
Average:	16,102	6,194	72%	28%	28,062	7,834	78%	22%	

(To ensure an accurate comparison, the 2007 averages do not include the two stores that closed. Measurements are in square feet of shelf space.)

Among the 23 stores that joined the project before 2007's measurements, a higher percentage now sell reduced fat milk (87% this year over 78% last year), whole wheat bread (74% over 65%), and 100% fruit juices (100% over 91%). All 23 stores continue to stock vegetables of some kind – frozen, canned, or fresh – and the percentage of stores that sell fresh produce remains unchanged from last year at 91%. A list of these items for all 40 Healthy Food Retailers appears in Table 2.

### More Stores and More Food

The Healthy Food Retailer Initiative has expanded greatly since a kickoff event in April 2006 with 6 stores. During its first year, the project grew to 25 stores. This roster has grown to 40 stores during the project's second year. Baseline measurements for these new stores were taken at the same time that earlier enrollees were re-measured this year. This data appears in Table 3.

The Healthy Food Retailer Initiative's emphasis on expansion reflects the project's underlying rationale, which is to use a mainstream channel of food access to achieve a large scale of impact. Tens of thousands of Hartford residents shop at small markets for a portion of their groceries, and some are almost entirely dependent on them. Improving the food selection in these stores – even if change occurs incrementally over several years – is a realistic strategy to help eliminate health disparities in urban neighborhoods.

The project's growth has also made it easier to achieve its programmatic goals. The city has approximately 150 grocery retailers, and the Healthy Food Retailer Initiative now includes more than a quarter of them. This market share provides real leverage to influence store owners on nutritional issues as they think about their economic position within Hartford's grocery retail sector.

Indeed, this year's measurements show that stocking healthier food can coincide with business expansion. The amount of total groceries measured in 2008 increased by 61% among the 23 stores for which a

Table 2.

	Reduced Fat Milk	100% Fruit Juice	Fresh Vegetables	Whole Wheat Bread
Anamil Grocery	✓	✓	✓	
Barbour's Market	✓	✓	✓	✓
Bella Vista Grocery	✓	✓	✓	
Boricuas Market	✓	✓	✓	✓
Brito Grocery	✓	✓	✓	
Carlos Supermarket	✓	✓	✓	✓
Center Market	✓	✓	✓	
Charter Oak Supermarket	✓	✓	✓	
Ciales Grocery	✓	✓	✓	✓
El Coqui Grocery	✓	✓	✓	✓
Cruz Market	✓	✓	✓	✓
C-Town (New Britain Avenue)	✓	✓	✓	✓
Los Cubanitos	✓	✓	✓	
DiMauros	✓	✓	✓	
EnR Market	✓	✓	✓	
Ernie's Grocery	✓	✓	✓	
La Familia	✓	✓	✓	
Family Grocery	✓	✓	✓	
Flatbush Market	✓	✓	✓	✓
El Gitano #1	✓	✓	✓	✓
El Gitano #2	✓	✓	✓	✓
Glorimar Grocery	✓	✓	✓	
Hernandez Market	✓	✓	✓	✓
Hot Corner Market	✓	✓	✓	✓
El Kiosko	✓	✓	✓	✓
Kwik Stop Mini-Market	✓	✓	✓	✓
Los Primos Market	✓	✓	✓	✓
Martinez Mini Market	✓	✓	✓	✓
New York Grocery	✓	✓	✓	
Peoples Market	✓	✓	✓	✓
Polo Supermarket	✓	✓	✓	✓
Ramon Market	✓	✓	✓	✓
Reyes Grocery	✓	✓	✓	✓
Romny Market	✓	✓	✓	✓
Rumaldo's Grocery	✓	✓	✓	✓
Shop Fair	✓	✓	✓	✓
Sigourney Grocery	✓	✓	✓	✓
Urelio Grocery	✓	✓	✓	✓
Williams Market	✓	✓	✓	✓
Y2K Market	✓	✓	✓	✓
Average:	78%	98%	85%	68%

comparison can be made, from 22,297 square feet to 35,846 square feet. Three-quarters of retailers managed to stock more merchandise within their existing floor plan, and a few even expanded to new facilities.

For example, El Gitano Market not only added shelf space within its original store, but opened another store several blocks away in the same neighborhood. (For the sake of consistency, inventory figures for El Gitano #2 are not included in Table 1, but appear as a separate store in Tables 2 and 3). Several other stores recruited last year are also owned by the same individuals that originally partnered with the project in 2006.

While a number of factors may explain these newly acquired stores and expanded inventory, the data shows that most Healthy Food Retailers have been able to grow their businesses while providing a healthier selection for their customers. These two developments bode well for the sustainability of this effort.

Table 3.

	Regular Groceries	Junk Food	Percentage of Regular Groceries	Percentage of Junk Food
Anamil Grocery	633	208	75%	25%
Barbour's Market	814	278	75%	25%
Bella Vista Grocery	271	325	45%	55%
Carlos Supermarket	4,884	456	91%	9%
Center Market	466	282	62%	38%
Cruz Market	2,041	312	87%	13%
C-Town (New Britain Avenue)	4,292	715	86%	14%
EnR Market	413	265	61%	39%
Ernie's Grocery	618	300	67%	33%
Family Grocery	812	352	70%	30%
El Gitano #2	7,501	738	91%	9%
Kwik Stop Mini-Market	1,005	282	78%	22%
New York Grocery	302	216	58%	42%
Polo Supermarket	616	409	60%	40%
Reyes Grocery	152	111	58%	42%
Sigourney Grocery	975	517	65%	35%
Urelio Grocery	143	192	43%	57%
<b>Average:</b>	<b>25,938</b>	<b>5,958</b>	<b>81%</b>	<b>19%</b>

(Measurements are in square feet of shelf space.)

**Endnotes:**

<sup>1</sup> Readers are encouraged to review the February 2007 *Strategies that Work* report, "Healthy Food Retailers in Hartford's Neighborhoods," which describes the project's origins and overall approach in more detail. This publication is available on our website, [www.hartfordfood.org](http://www.hartfordfood.org).

<sup>2</sup> A few notes about the calculations used in this report: For the 25 stores that were measured in 2007, the percentage of regular groceries compared to total inventory was 71%. However, 2 of those 25 stores subsequently dropped out. Therefore, this same calculation for the remaining 23 stores is no longer 71%, but 72% as cited in Table 1. Also, the percentage improvements cited at the top of page 3 for healthy items such as reduced fat milk, whole wheat bread, and 100% fruit juice are comparisons between 2006 and 2007, and may differ from the calculations based on all 40 stores that appear in Table 2.

<sup>3</sup> The most significant drop occurred with Los Cubanitos Market, which experienced a change in ownership and the loss of its WIC certification (thus removing a financial incentive to stock nutritious items). These changes resulted in a very different store from the one we originally recruited. The Hartford Food System has convinced the new owner to stay in the project and is now helping to transform this bodega back to its true potential.

The Healthy Food Retailer Initiative is made possible by the generous support of the Aetna Foundation, J. Walton Bissell Foundation, Connecticut Health Foundation, Donaghue Medical Research Foundation, Frances Fund, Hartford Foundation for Public Giving, Lawson Valentine Foundation, Lincoln Financial Foundation, Kraft Foods, Phoenix Foundation, and Presbyterian Hunger Program.



The mission of the Hartford Food System is to fight hunger and improve nutrition for disadvantaged members of our community through sustainable, non-emergency strategies. To this end, we implement programs that improve accessibility to nutritious and affordable food, help consumers make informed choices, and advance responsible food policies at all levels of government.