Angelina County Food Banks Work Together to Increase Access to Fresh Produce

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Summary

Thanks to the collaboration of local food pantries, a regional food bank, and community stakeholders, more than 16,000 residents in Angelina County will have increased access to fresh produce. With added availability of fresh produce at rural food pantries in Huntington and Zavalla the Community Partnerships for Healthy Mothers and Children (CPHMC) team hopes to see a decrease in chronic disease rates, an improvement in fruit and vegetable consumption, and an increase in availability of healthy food in the area.

Challenge

Food insecurity is a growing epidemic in East Texas. According to the Centers for Disease Control, Eight out of ten Angelina County residents have inadequate fruit and vegetable consumption compared to 76% in Texas. The Episcopal Health Foundation reports that one in three children is living in poverty and lacks nutritious food. With Angelina County seated in a food desert obtaining nutritious foods poses a great concern. While lack of nutritious foods is a precursor for high rates of diabetes, cardiovascular disease, and obesity, many residents live far from supermarkets or grocery stores that provide nutritious foods. There is also substantial evidence that many people may "not qualify for federal nutrition programs like SNAP and must rely on charitable food assistance" from food banks and pantries according to Feeding America's 2013 "Food Insecurity & Food Cost in the US" report.

Solution

With a mission of preventing chronic disease and improving access to healthy foods, the CPHMC team formed a work group of three local food pantries, two of them representing rural communities, to play a key role in increasing fresh produce options at food pantries. In a roundtable meeting which included representatives from the agricultural extension office and regional food bank, discussions were held to determine how to gain access to available fresh produce in order to serve to rural clients. This discussion led to a collaboration with the food pantries, and regional food bank resulting in an added produce drop that will provide increased access to fresh fruits and

Your Involvement is Key

You can help food banks continue to provide fresh produce options and contribute to local community gardens. Find out how you can be more involved in the community by becoming a volunteer at a local food pantry or community garden. Make the healthy choice the easy choice in your community.
## Results

The collaboration influenced a systems change within the regional food bank's delivery route, and welcomed a change in the schedule of a food pantry by opening an extra day during the week. The regional food bank requested that the rural food pantry agree to a consistent schedule of monthly produce deliveries. By adding this delivery, two other food pantries will have access to fresh produce. This change will potentially reach more than 16,000 food bank clients in Angelina County. Also participating is one of our larger food pantries, Christian Information & Services Center (CISC), which serves over 2 million pounds of food a year to local residents. They will aid the smaller rural food banks by sharing fresh produce deliveries and other healthy options if needed.

“Zavalla is such a big area that people can’t drive to the nearest grocery store...people live really far out and do not have transportation...so people come to the local food bank to get groceries.”

- JP Hopkins

## Sustainable Success

The CPHMC's goal is to increase the number of food banks that offer healthy food in Angelina County. We have established partnerships with representatives from the East Texas Food Bank, CISC, and two rural food pantries to establish a consistent schedule of produce deliveries. Beginning in the Spring of 2016, CISC will be adding a community garden to help create a sustainable system and infrastructure to ensure that local residents continue to have access to fresh produce. CISC’s community garden has created more partnerships by engaging the local sheriffs department, garden club, and agricultural extension office. We are also seeking to reach children by providing classrooms with service learning opportunities at the garden.

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