

# HFOC Coalition Helps Local Retailers Highlight Healthy Food Items

## SUMMARY

Thanks to collaboration between the Healthy Families of Oceana County (HFOC) coalition and local food retailers, county residents have increased access to information and resources that encourage healthy food choices. Through shelf labels and informational signs at grocery stores and food pantries, as well as healthy menu guides at restaurants, the HFOC coalition has helped to generate a message within the community about the impact of healthy food choices on long-term health.



## CHALLENGE

For residents of Oceana County, chronic diseases such as heart disease and obesity are present in epidemic proportions. According to data released by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), nearly 60% of adults in Oceana County are either overweight or obese. In addition, 65% of adults reported that they had been diagnosed with high cholesterol, and 11% had diabetes. Nearly all of these health outcomes are worse than the state and national averages. Compounding these issues is the fact that Oceana County is situated within a food desert region, with 14% of the population experiencing food insecurity (Feeding America, 2012). With 20% of the population living below the Federal Poverty Level and no public transportation system, the county lacks the resources needed to ensure that residents have adequate access to healthy foods.

## YOUR INVOLVEMENT IS KEY

You can help address the food access needs of your community by volunteering your time with a local food pantry, or by donating fresh fruits and vegetables to local pantries and community centers. You can also help by advocating for initiatives, such as community gardens or gardener gleaning programs, in your own community. Please feel free to contact HFOC with any questions, comments, or concerns as they relate to your specific community needs.

*"There are so many food options on grocery store shelves, which makes choosing a healthy product challenging. The HFOC shelf labels stand out and will make it easier for the consumer to select the healthiest food."*

**- Meryl Smith, RD**

## CONTACT

**Katie Miller, MPH**

District Health Department #10

3986 N Oceana Drive

Hart, MI 49420

231-316-8567 phone

231-845-0438 fax

<http://www.hfocmichigan.wix.com/hfoc/>

## SOLUTION

As an effort to address the long-term health concerns of residents, members of the HFOC coalition worked with local businesses to implement adaptations to the retail environment. The coalition developed a healthy shelf labeling system for local grocery stores and food pantries, with insight from program staff at the Minneapolis Health Department. In addition, HFOC created healthy menu guides for local restaurants. The menu guides and shelf labels help patrons identify food and menu items that meet the general nutrition recommendations set by the USDA. Registered Dietitian and coalition leadership team member, Meryl Smith, provided her expertise in ensuring that food items aligned with these guidelines.

## RESULTS

As a result of the initiative, low-income families and residents who utilize the local food pantry have access to information that encourages healthier choices. The pantry manager estimated that between 70-90 families access the pantry each week to help supplement their daily meals, stating that pantry users are "noticing the new signs" and "we really feel that we are helping them eat healthier." As a result of the shelf labeling project, the produce manager at Gale's IGA grocery store requested a continued partnership with HFOC, suggesting a monthly cooking demonstration for shoppers to sample healthy foods. In addition, managing staff at Daniel's Restaurant stated that customers are ordering healthier items, such as the blueberry oatmeal, which was highlighted on the menu guide.



HFOC members (from left): Juanita Estrada, Katie Miller, Meryl Smith, Christina Tejada, Stephanie Ostrenga, and Nicole Smith.

## SUSTAINING SUCCESS

The HFOC coalition's goal is to sustain the project beyond the funding period by recruiting additional restaurants, grocery stores, and food pantries in the coming year. Coalition members are in the process of working with a new Hispanic food market in Shelby, MI to implement Spanish shelf labels, as well as new menu guides for the Country Dairy Farm Store in New Era, MI. In addition, the leadership team for the coalition has plans to apply for grant funding through the Oceana County Community Foundation, and will collaborate with the local Migrant Resource Council and Bread of Life Food Pantry, to expand the overall reach of the project.



*This publication has been funded in part by the National WIC Association (NWA). Its content is reflective of the author and does not necessarily represent the views or opinions of the NWA. The USDA is an equal opportunity provider.*