Coalition Increases Access to Healthy Foods in Geary County

by: Kristen Noriega

SUMMARY
The Geary County Access Healthy Foods Coalition has convened to address the issue of low food access that affects at least one-third of Geary County residents. The coalition is built upon the premise of uniting local hunger and food access organizations, efforts, and initiatives to collectively increase access to healthy foods for all residents, especially those most in need. Coalition members are creating a resource guide for food access points in Geary County and are bringing an EBT system to the 2016 Geary Community Hospital farmers market.

CHALLENGE
Accessing healthy foods in Geary County is difficult for many. According to the United States Department of Agriculture Economic Research Service, 35.12% of Geary County residents have low food access, compared to the national average of 23.61%. Decreased access to healthy foods increases an individual’s risk for chronic diseases, including obesity, diabetes, hypertension, and heart disease. 82.2% of Geary County residents, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System, consume less than the recommended 5 servings of fruits and vegetables per day. Additionally, the 2014 Geary County Community Health Assessment confirmed that residents also identified a lack of available and affordable healthy food options. Exacerbating these statistics, Geary County residents generally struggle to admit their need for food assistance.

YOUR INVOLVEMENT IS KEY
Anyone interested is welcome to join the Geary County Access Healthy Foods Coalition. Meetings are the second Tuesday of each month from 12-1 at the Geary County Health Department, 1212 W. Ash Street, Junction City, KS 66441. Call 785-762-5682 for more information.

"Hunger in our community is very private."
- Sarah Talley
SOLUTION
A new community goal is to collaboratively address hunger and low food access in Geary County by uniting current local initiatives together. Cohesiveness of all the food access initiatives will better identify and combat barriers, close any gaps in timing and locations of food access points, and ensure that all populations with need are being served. An example of this collaboration is a compilation of times and locations of food access points for people in need of food. It will be a tool for someone to learn where and when they can get free or inexpensive food, as well as any requirements, such as proof of residency or income.

RESULTS
Formation of the Geary County Access Healthy Foods Coalition has been successful with broad representation from the community. Coalition members range from local producers and invested individuals to food pantry directors and city commissioners. The coalition has met three times this year and plans to continue monthly meetings. Individuals responsible for different food access initiatives have already made invaluable relationships as a result of the coalition.

As an extension of the coalition, an EBT system will be available at the 2016 Geary Community Hospital Farmers Market for use by SNAP/food stamp recipients. The EBT system is possible due to funding from the Community Partnerships for Healthy Mothers and Children project at the Geary County Health Department and WIC.

SUSTAINING SUCCESS
The Geary County Access Healthy Foods Coalition will have monthly meetings for updates, planning, and strategizing. We will continue to recruit members to represent an even broader spectrum of Geary County residents. Funding for additional initiatives and projects is actively being pursued and members are working out these logistics.

Contact
Kristen Noriega
Geary County WIC
1212 W. Ash St
Junction City, KS 66441
785-762-5682 phone
785-762-5025 fax
https://jcgchealthdept.org/

Success Stories http://nccd.cdc.gov/dchsuccessstories/