

White Paper

**AFFORDABLE HOUSING RESIDENTS AND
DEVELOPERS MAY BE SIGNIFICANT CONTRIBUTORS
TO
HEALTHY FOOD ACCESS**

An observation of programs to improve access to healthy food as
initiated by a Los Angeles, California Affordable Housing Developer

through the partnership of:

Women Organizing Resources, Knowledge & Services (WORKS)

&

Urban & Environmental Policy Institute at Occidental College

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PREMISE

What if people living in traditionally underserved neighborhoods and food deserts had the tools to access healthy food? What would that require? How would it affect a community? Is it possible?

These are questions Women Organizing Resources, Knowledge & Services (WORKS) posed as they launched a healthy food access program at five of their 17 affordable housing sites in Los Angeles. As a nonprofit affordable housing developer, WORKS is not a typical player in efforts to improve healthy food access in underserved communities. Not many developers are thinking about food and programs as an important piece of building healthy communities. Most focus on the bricks and mortar of housing. There are approximately 69,000 affordable housing units in Los Angeles. Many affordable housing developments are built in neighborhoods that are in or adjacent to food deserts. Because people living in affordable housing are often also food insecure, by involving housing developers in the food access conversation it is possible tens of thousands of people could benefit. WORKS is a developer that is testing this premise. WORKS has implemented a four pronged program with *healthy food distribution, onsite community gardens and edible landscaping, nutrition and cooking education, and resident-driven policy change work*. WORKS hopes to bring nutritious food to low-income communities, and to help change the thinking of what ‘healthy’ housing really means.

What is a ‘food desert’?

For the purposes of this paper a food desert is defined as a food environment unsupportive of health; it is defined by barriers which restrict access to healthy foods. Barriers may include lack of access to food retailers, availability of nutritious foods, or affordability of foods. Research has defined food deserts quantitatively or by neighborhood characteristics such as economic and social barriers.

CONTEXT

Despite its natural and cultural advantages of a year round growing season and a wealth of cuisines from around the world, Los Angeles County faces a serious food and health crisis. Low income communities face twin and related challenges of food insecurity and overweight and/or diet related illness. Nearly a million people, approximately ten percent of the population of Los Angeles County, received food assistance from pantries, soup kitchens and shelters in 2009. *That’s a 46 percent increase from 2005 – with an alarming 112 percent increase in the number of children receiving food assistance.*ⁱ It’s no secret many low-income neighborhoods of color in Los Angeles are food deserts with too few places to buy healthy food, and an oversaturation of fast food and junk food. Obesity and diet related illness among communities of color exist at a much higher rate than white neighborhoods, with Hispanic and African American children and youth leading the obesity rates. Only 15.1 percent of adult residents of Los Angeles County eat the recommended five or more daily servings of fruits/ vegetables.ⁱⁱ However 40.2 percent of adults and 47.7 percent of children eat fast food at least once per week and 38.8 percent of adults and 43.3 percent of children drink at least one soda daily.ⁱⁱⁱ 22.9 percent of children in grades 5, 7, and 9 and 22.2 percent of adults are obese, with 35.9 percent of adults overweight or obese. 7.2 percent of LA County residents have been diagnosed with diabetes, with Latinos (8.3 percent) and African Americans (9.2%) having higher than average rates. Rates among low-income populations are even higher. For example, 11.5 percent of African Americans earning below the federal poverty level have been diagnosed with diabetes and another 5.7 percent were diagnosed as borderline or pre-diabetic.^{iv}

Why? What causes this? Why is this happening? Media reports include factors such as the heavy marketing of fast food and junk food, lack of parental example, and lack of awareness of the health issues. These statements are all true, but equally important and least talked about is *access*.

‘Access’ as it relates to healthy food-

When thinking about ‘accessible healthy food’ what does that really mean? Does it just mean availability? Not necessarily. If the nearest grocery store is out of walking distance for a single parent, senior, or person living with a disability, and the closest store is a liquor store with only high priced, heavily processed foods and few, if any, fruits and vegetables then healthy food is not **geographically** accessible. If the store is within walking distance but the nutritious foods such as fresh, organic fruits and vegetables, and other whole foods are priced too high for area incomes then it is **priced beyond** accessibility. And if the food is priced affordably but the shopper is unaware of the health dangers of foods that are filled with unhealthy fats, sugars, toxins, preservatives and lack nutrients, then healthy food is not accessible due to the lack of **awareness and education**. Where can a person go for healthy food when it is geographically difficult to reach, priced too high or it is unclear what is nutritious? Unfortunately, many people turn to fast food and highly preserved packaged foods and this propels the diet related disease epidemic forward.

A healthful food environment is necessary for people to make healthier food decisions. The association between the food environment and meeting dietary recommendations has been documented; specifically, more fruits and vegetables were eaten in areas that had more supermarkets.^v A follow-up study found an association between supermarket concentration and lower prevalence of overweight and obesity, and between high concentrations of corner stores and a higher prevalence of overweight and obesity.^{vi} Supermarket concentration also has been associated with lower body mass index and weight, and convenience store concentration with higher body mass index and weight.^{vii}

It is important to examine and understand the housing and food environment in any location before determining what can be done to make improvements. Two crises to consider are food and housing in Los Angeles. There are numerous aspects to the food crisis such as access to healthy food, affordability, sustainability, the reliance on foreign food supply, droughts and floods in food producing areas such as central California, and diet related disease. Housing has also become a slippery slope for many people due to the increasingly higher costs of rent, utilities and property values and the lack of wages to compensate for these steady increases. Housing issues are closely linked to food challenges, as the rise in food insecurity is one result of the Great Recession.

According to the City of Los Angeles Housing Department, Los Angeles “has approximately 69,000 affordable housing units in 1,900 developments, serving very-low, low and moderate-

Unsafe food?

Many people find it hard to believe unsafe food could be produced and sold in America, but it is true and evident. Food that is filled with cancer causing chemicals and preservatives, saturated fats, harmful preservatives, colors, and modified products are commonplace in grocery stores and schools. Safe food is whole food free of carcinogens, harmful chemicals, synthetic pesticides and additives. Learn more about this topic from groups such as The Environmental Working Group- www.ewg.org

income households.”^{viii} This includes units whose residents are assisted in paying rent by various government programs, public housing units, and/or rent restricted units. The city does not track market rent units that might be affordable to lower income residents. Affordable housing developers and agencies generally consider that, “In order for housing to be considered affordable, a family should not spend more than 30% of its income on rent.”^{ix} The average rent and utilities for a two bedroom apartment in Los Angeles County is \$1420 – up 77 percent since 2000 - meaning that a household would need an income of \$56,800 for this cost to be affordable. The National Low Income Housing Coalition estimates the average income of a renting household in the County to be \$39,867. *Therefore market-rate two bedroom apartments are unaffordable for 65 percent of renting households.* ^x A household with one wage earner making the minimum wage could only afford \$416 in monthly rent. A household supporting themselves on one Supplemental Security income could only afford \$272 in rent. Put another way, it would take almost 3 and a half full time minimum wage jobs to afford a two bedroom apartment in Los Angeles County.^{xi}

The affordable housing crisis in the Los Angeles region forces low-income residents into overcrowded or substandard housing. It can result in families spending such a huge percentage of their income on rent or mortgages that they have to skimp on other necessities. The Los Angeles County Food Bank reports that 46 percent of food assistance recipients had to choose at least once in 2009 between paying for food or paying for monthly rent or mortgage - up from 29.8 percent in 2005.^{xii} At its most extreme, the high cost of housing contributes to Los Angeles having the most homeless residents in the country.^{xiii}

Beyond the fiscal impacts of costly housing, the type and location of housing that people can afford also influences what neighborhoods they live in and by extension what type of food environment they experience. There is a food and health emergency, with obesity poised to become the nation’s leading cause of preventable death, partly due to a lack of access to healthy food in many low income neighborhoods. And there is a housing crisis, with too many working poor unable to afford a place to live, and rental costs swallowing such a high percentage of incomes that many families are unable to afford enough nutritious food.

These linked challenges suggest the possibility of innovative linked solutions. To promote healthy, livable communities, it is important to consider ways to orient housing near sources of healthy food and to make housing, especially affordable multi-family housing, hubs of healthy food. Working to improve food access in underserved neighborhoods can seem like a monumental task. Many external challenges hinder the progress:

- › An industrial food system that subsidizes sugary, processed food rather than whole, healthy foods
- › A prevalence of liquor stores, fast food and convenience stores, and an absence of conventional grocery stores and farmers markets in many communities
- › Small amounts of green space for community gardens and urban agriculture
- › Inadequate funds in public schools to provide healthy school meals
- › The significant reduction of health education in public schools
- › The time and cost required to site and develop full service grocery stores

The current healthy food access issue is therefore complex and seemingly expensive to solve. Being in a unique position as an affordable housing developer, the WORKS' team believes they can contribute to improving food access for the residents they serve. What is WORKS and where did they come from? How did they embark on this food related project?

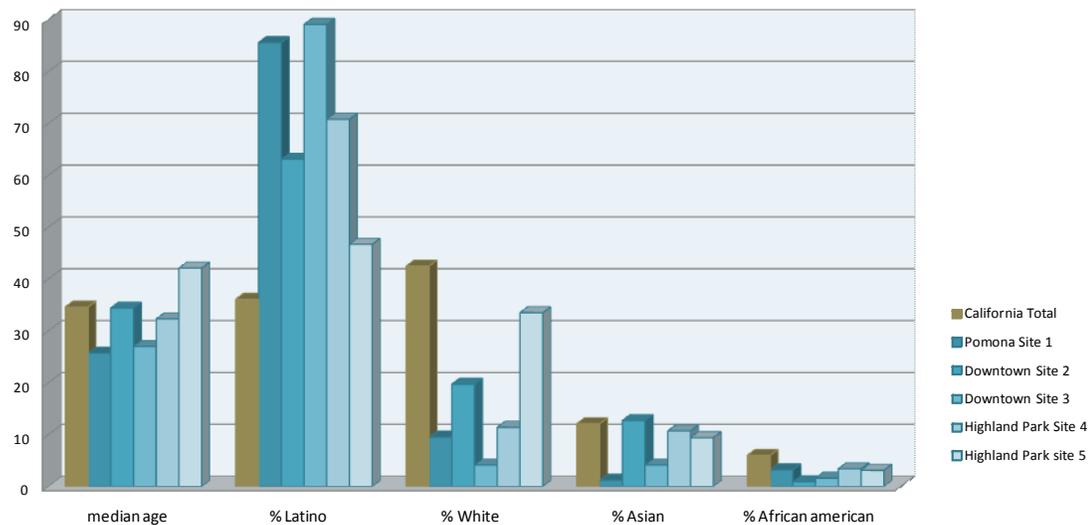
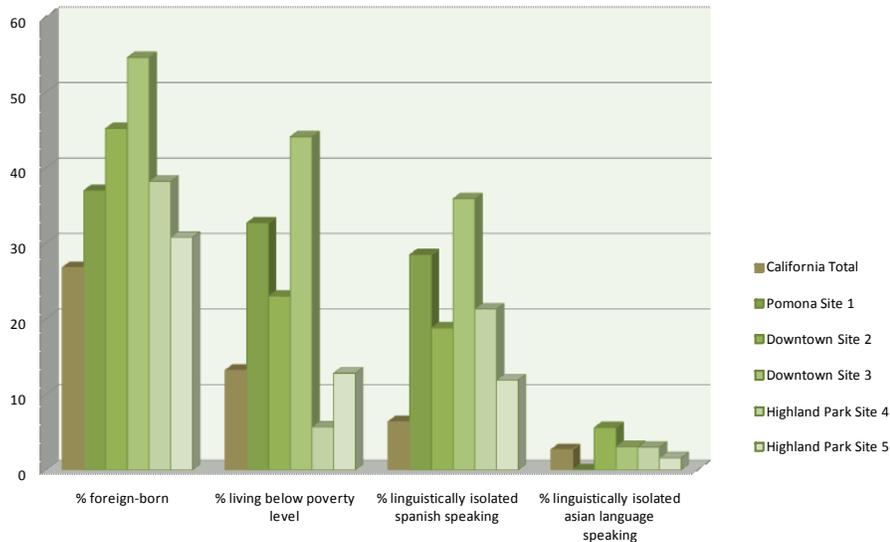
WORKS, formed as a nonprofit affordable housing developer in 1998, provides affordable housing for people who are designated low-income within the area median income as defined by HUD. WORKS has 17 sites which include sites for seniors, families and individuals. They have three permanent supportive housing sites in development which will serve Transitional Aged Youth (TAYs), seniors, homeless veterans and persons with developmental disabilities. WORKS' building philosophy is to go beyond simply bricks and mortar, to create beautiful, quality homes. They make a conscious effort to incorporate green building materials and construction techniques and are pursuing LEED certification in some of their newer developments. WORKS is based in Los Angeles and is led by women of color with a passion for building community.



WORKS developments can be viewed as a microcosm of the larger food access problem. The developments are opportunities to leverage and test initiatives that could be reproduced in other housing developments and neighborhoods in urban areas of the country. The WORKS' management team felt strongly about testing the theory and integrating healthy food into affordable housing as a response to the lack of affordable, safe and nutritious food options in the predominantly low-income neighborhoods they serve. The team developed a multi-pronged approach to improve residents' access to healthy food through edible landscaping, onsite community gardens and onsite produce markets. But they soon realized they could not tackle the significant problem of food access in these neighborhoods alone. More had to be done. They could work on improving food access for their residents and the immediate neighbors, but low-income communities, which are also predominantly neighborhoods of color, need a variety of solutions to really solve the food and diet related disease disparities. Solutions include more retail markets, more farmers markets, and healthier school food, while ensuring adequate funding for food assistance programs all of which should offer quality, affordable, safe and nutritious food. WORKS also created a program to provide residents with education and tools for advocating for broader change in their neighborhoods.

WORKS chose five sites in the Los Angeles, CA area to initiate healthy food access programs: one site is in the City of Pomona, two sites are in the Los Angeles Highland Park neighborhood, and two are just slightly northeast of downtown Los Angeles. Each area poses significant challenges for healthy food access in addition to being underserved in other areas such as housing and economic development. The residents in these areas are predominately of color, and most are living below the federal poverty level. Below are charts reflecting demographics of the areas WORKS serves:

**Census Tract Data of CA and neighborhoods where
WORKS' five food access sites are located**



THEORY IN ACTION

In 2007, WORKS began surveying residents to find out what was most important for them. Residents reported wanting healthy fruits and vegetables, access to farmers markets and healthier options for their children. In response, WORKS implemented four onsite programs in their affordable housing developments to improve access to healthy food options for residents. The basis for these programs was two-fold: 1) to improve access to healthy food and hence improve resident health; and 2) create a replicable model for other affordable housing developers and organizations across the country. The four programs are:

A healthy food distribution program supported by a Community-Based Supported Agriculture model. WORKS partners with local farmers and distributors to bring fresh, safe and nutritious food into affordable housing developments. Residents are trained and employed in managing weekly produce markets that include cooking demonstrations featuring healthy cooking techniques, and introduce new and highly nutritious vegetables. This takes place onsite, in the housing properties. These produce markets sell produce, nuts and grains at 30-50% below some retail prices making it more affordable for residents.



Onsite community gardens and edible landscaping. WORKS focuses on planting edible landscaping including fruit bearing trees within their affordable housing developments. Space for community garden plots is also incorporated into the properties. Residents receive training on how to design and maintain the community garden plots and are encouraged to share in the harvest together.

Nutrition and cooking education. WORKS provides free, onsite cooking and nutrition classes for adults, youth and children, which demonstrate how to incorporate produce from the gardens and the produce markets into every day diets. The classes also teach food safety, the dangers of synthetic chemicals in food and a focus on eating whole, healthy foods. Classes also feature cultural favorites prepared in a variety of healthful ways.



Resident driven policy change work. WORKS' self-selected Resident Councils are provided leadership and organizing training to affect policies that limit or deter access to healthy food. Residents decide which issues are most important for them and then present solutions to decision makers.

The fourth program, **resident driven policy change work**, is an important component for food access justice on a broader scale. WORKS recruited an experienced policy analyst and community organizer in hopes of providing residents in affordable housing developments and surrounding neighborhoods the training, information, guidance facilitation and support needed to launch and pursue campaigns for change. Implementing a targeted door to door outreach strategy, the WORKS' community organizer began to identify residents interested in taking an active role in addressing food access issues. Resident

Councils were established at each of the five WORKS sites to serve as a vehicle to support monthly resident engagement and to facilitate leadership development of residents. The Resident Council structure was critical to increasing the capacity and participation of residents as the Resident Councils serve as a structured learning environment. During Resident Council meetings residents are able to engage in dialogue, share information and have strategic conversations about their site specific campaigns and the health focused issues they want to pursue. Resident Council meetings have become the ideal venue for resident trainings on policy, developing resident led presentations to other community stakeholders, and how to develop public testimony and talking points for advocacy activities.

Resident Driven Campaigns

Healthy School Food Reform

Neighborhood Parks Campaign

Food Stamp and SSI Reform

Tax Credit Allocation

Committee Application Food

Criteria Inclusion

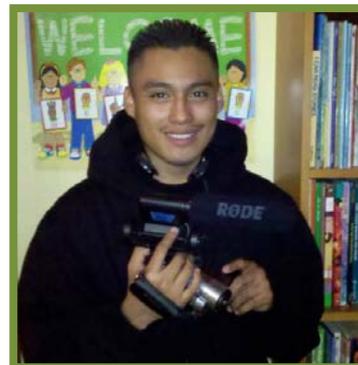
While the Resident Councils were established to work on legislative change, early in the process it became apparent that it would be a challenge to solely focus on a legislative agenda because Residents Councils had varying interests and ideas of what they wanted to work on. To overcome this challenge, it was necessary to allow Resident Councils to define their own scope of work. The WORKS' community organizer facilitated one-on-one conversations with residents and community dialogue sessions which allowed residents to identify site specific activities and programming goals, as well as self-identified legislative campaigns.

Once residents identified food access and health issues they were interested in, WORKS' policy analyst worked to identify local partners to introduce and build resident awareness of the larger food justice movement and to help conduct resident advocacy trainings and workshops on policy design and policy change opportunities. Resident collaboration with each other and with their local community partners has contributed to residents overcoming their fears and skepticism about the public policy process; has increased their knowledge about housing, land use and food policy; and has led residents to take concrete action on their newly learned knowledge and skills.

CHANGE MAKERS

Recently, youth residents made their first trip to City Hall as part of Los Angeles Hunger Action Day. They were the only youth representatives amongst 200 food advocates. Delivering letters and postcards from WORKS' senior residents, the youth spoke to Spanish news outlets about the impact cuts to the summer lunch program would have on their friends and families.

In 2010, a youth resident council member, Alex Perazo, traveled to Sacramento to participate in a rally and delegation visits to state lawmakers calling on them to pass a budget that does not cut safety net programs and cash assistance programs that WORKS seniors and families depend on. Alex personally delivered handwritten statements from senior residents unable to make the trip. As Alex explained, "*In Sacramento I advocated on behalf of seniors so the government passes a budget for the*



state of California that will not cut out programs such as SSI and other senior programs that let seniors have access to food ... A year ago I would have never considered myself a filmmaker, leader and political advocate."



Resident Council members from the WORKS' site in Pomona, CA chose to campaign on the need for more open space for physical activity and community gardens. As part of their preparation to meet with City representatives, they photo documented the numerous empty, blighted lots in their neighborhood. They then traveled to City Hall for the first time to meet with their City Council Representative seeking her support in acquiring a

vacant lot for park space adjacent to their building and formally requesting the City to develop a comprehensive inventory of unused, City owned lots that could be converted to small parks and gardens.

Senior residents partnered with youth resident council members to produce a short documentary film "Seniors Speak Out" showing the challenges seniors with limited incomes face when trying to access healthy food. This Resident Council film was shared with local stakeholders and lawmakers.

In their effort to advocate for additional reforms as part of the LAUSD school lunch program, mothers from two Resident Councils have provided weekly feedback as part of the Food Service Menu Reform Committee Meetings. A new school lunch menu with healthier food items will be introduced for the 2011-12 school year.

By mobilizing residents in healthy food access work, it has become evident that providing a tangible healthy food resource that is owned by the residents feeds inspiration and hope for change. Onsite community gardens designed, tended, maintained and harvested by residents is an effective and immediate engagement tool that also provides much needed accessible healthy food for those of very modest means. WORKS commitment to cultivating community gardens at affordable housing developments is revealing many benefits beyond being a food source. The gardens serve as a forum for informal relationship building among residents of different cultures and ethnicities. They also serve as important physical activity outlets where safe outdoor parks or recreation are not always readily available.

Since launching this program, the resident driven, place-based, organic community gardening and urban agriculture work has matured into an important resource in WORKS housing developments. Residents are taking ownership of the gardens and are collectively benefiting from them as evidenced by the formation of weekly Garden Circles that are comprised of residents planting, harvesting and maintaining garden beds. Monthly workshops have been organized for Garden Circle participants and the broader resident community focusing on a range of edible landscaping techniques, including composting, transplanting, water conservation, recycling and reusing, and soil cultivation.

Resident ownership (leadership) and engagement are the foundation of the success and sustainability of long-term individual and community change. As residents attend classes, shop the markets and work in

the gardens, they share insights and reveal an expanded awareness of food access and diet-related issues. The residents are engaged as owners of the 'community change' because WORKS designed the programs to be resident-driven. For example, WORKS does not dictate to residents what food they should purchase; instead, they listen to what the residents' desire and make those food choices available at the markets. Another example is they do not predetermine what food access issues the Resident Councils should work on. Instead they have engaged them in a discussion about health and wellbeing allowing residents to self-identify issues they deem most important to work on. WORKS' approach honors the residents' feelings, desires and perceptions thereby creating true buy-in and ownership in the work.

WORKS defines 'local' as produce sourced from California growers.

SIGNS OF SUCCESS

Launching innovative food programs in the past two years, given the economy, may be an indication of success, however by WORKS' standards it is not enough. WORKS considers the impacts on residents' lives as the true measure of success or failure. They are seeing signs that the food programs are having a positive impact.



Over the past two years, residents have become meaningfully engaged, and have begun to regularly participate in the food access programs. Through participation they have gained valuable information and practical tools raising knowledge levels about healthy food and healthy food access. This increase of knowledge and awareness has led to motivation and intention to use the practical methods and information in their daily lives. Many residents have tried the new behaviors and those actions have become a sustainable part of many residents' lives and family cultures. Residents who have adopted the knowledge and behavior have provided testimonies of improved health and wellbeing.

So far WORKS' residents have benefited from the programs in various ways including:

1. Through increased knowledge and awareness, many residents have increased their understanding of healthy food and applied that to their daily food choices which will benefit their health in the long run.
2. Residents who might not have thought they could make a change in policy have become leaders and advocates for their community.
3. Residents who are involved with the various stages of soil cultivation, gardening design, growing and harvesting of food have reconnected with the Earth, eaten garden fresh food and had an outdoor activity in green space which is not always readily available in densely populated, low-income, urban areas.
4. Residents have shared information, stories and their diverse cultures in the programs, building new friendships across what was perhaps once a cultural divide.
5. Participating residents have gained a heightened awareness about how food is grown, processed and distributed, priced and prepared.

To further illustrate how programs like these can directly support people of very modest means, it helps to look at the quantifiable points. Since launching the programs two years ago WORKS has:

- ✓ Held 238 onsite markets, delivering approximately 25 tons of safe, nutritious food, making it available to over 700 people
- ✓ Held 127 nutrition and healthy cooking classes to approximately 85 residents
- ✓ Conducted 25 leadership training workshops to over 50 residents
- ✓ Led 3 policy campaigns mobilizing 75 residents
- ✓ Organized 6 meetings with local policy makers with 12 residents participating
- ✓ Held 27 gardening workshops training 98 residents
- ✓ Planted over 29 community garden beds
- ✓ Harvested 58 different crop varieties from community gardens
- ✓ Held 6 community dinners, feeding and uniting over 125 people
- ✓ Mobilized 61 community volunteers
- ✓ Established 42 new community and food advocacy food partnerships

The surrounding community has also benefited from WORKS initiatives and they hope the broader community impact will grow. Affordable housing developments (also sometimes mistakenly viewed or called ‘projects’) are not commonly viewed as a place to connect to community, receive enrichment, or find sources for improved health. Unfortunately they are sometimes viewed as neglected, rundown and rife with crime. Family resource centers, YMCAs, YWCAs, Boys and Girls Clubs, and community centers are often considered a more likely place to find enrichment or assistance, but with WORKS’ model that perception could change. WORKS properties are well maintained, attractive and provide quality housing which helps make them inviting. Since launching the programs surrounding neighbors have become aware of the markets and the policy campaigns and want to participate. Now neighbors regularly shop at the produce markets and many want to join the policy campaigns to improve their community. Another noticeable but not obvious community benefit has been the support of local, small scale farms and other community partners as the program re-circulates dollars formally spent on large chain stores or on conventional or imported foods. The markets and gardens are true farm-to-fork connectors and have many sustainable benefits.



Campaigning for policy change has more benefits than simply changing policy. It has far reaching community impact. Individuals build valuable, practical skills that can be used over a lifetime in a multitude of settings. Youth residents have expanded their public speaking, group presentation and research skills. Residents, particularly the youth and seniors, participating in regular multi-lingual trainings and meetings have overcome common language barriers learning to facilitate meaningful and collaborative group discussions. Providing a safe space amongst friends and neighbors to freely express their ideas and opinions has sparked a new confidence in residents to take on greater leadership positions at school, the

workplace and in the broader community.

CHALLENGES

Making affordable housing developments into hubs for healthy living requires overcoming a number of challenges. The food environment surrounding many housing developments presents a barrier. Government policies do not necessarily support the linkage of housing and food access. In addition to the many external challenges the Resident Councils and the WORKS team encountered, there are attitudinal challenges influencing the ability for communities at large to tackle food disparity. It is important to recognize that attitudes and behaviors are significant factors in any campaign for change. These behavioral and attitudinal challenges include:

- › Poor eating habits being passed down to younger generations
- › A cultural shift from home cooked meals to fast, pre-made food
- › Policy makers who may be unaware of food access issues
- › Policy makers who may be unwilling to work on food access policy
- › Overwhelming marketing messages focused on fast, packaged or non-nutritious foods
- › Budget cuts on federal, state and local levels
- › A lack of health education in schools

WORKS learned many lessons as they embarked on the healthy food access work. Some of these lessons which might be helpful for other developers include the following:

- › **Funding** – WORKS primary focus is affordable housing and hence funding has been mainly structured to sustain the costs involved in building affordable housing. As WORKS moved beyond its traditional enriched service programs to include a healthy food access initiative, supplemental funding through donations and grants was required. The challenge was exacerbated in part due to the timing of launching their initiative during the worst economic climate since the Great Depression. Funding for materials, staff, food, transportation, translation and interpretation, and equipment has not come easily. However, as much of a challenge it has been, WORKS has been able to leverage many donated goods, services and volunteers which has helped to secure grant funding and sustain the programs for two years.
- › **Logistics** – Bringing programs such as community gardens, cooking classes and produce markets into affordable housing developments raises a number of logistical and staffing issues. Replacing grass and decorative plants with edible landscaping, fruit bearing trees and community garden

Consider First...

1. *Buy-in from residents and staff.*
2. *Understand resident demand before building gardens.*
3. *A community room/space on site to hold activities and storage space of tools and materials.*
4. *For an organic, non-synthetic pesticide program, a dedicated space and process for composting is required.*
5. *Consider physical disabilities before constructing garden beds/plant containers.*
6. *A truck (purchased, rented or borrowed) for the food distribution and transport of garden materials is a must.*
7. *Diverse languages and literacy levels are factors to address. Translation and interpreters are a must (volunteers are very useful in this area).*
8. *If, when and how onsite programs might be open to the surrounding community or neighborhood.*
9. *A solid funding pipeline.*

plots requires planning and accommodation from an asset management and, at times, a zoning perspective. Holding workshops and classes that parents and youth can attend between school, jobs and family and other onsite activities can also be challenging.

- › **Learning Curves** – Bringing awareness to a subject not commonly talked about in schools, workplaces or in the media is not an easy task. Awareness is the first step to learning and understanding. But even awareness and education don't always lead to behavior change. According to Jennifer Foltz of the Centers for Disease Control, in spite of increased awareness campaigns on healthy eating their studies show a decline in the number of fruit intake, and no change in vegetable intake, in Americans from 2000 to 2009. Brian Wansink, a Cornell University behavior scientist derives that behavioral principles have as much if not more to do with eating as awareness. Beyond awareness, WORKS believes access to quality, affordable produce is helpful in facilitating sustainable behavior change. If you can't easily and readily put to practice the knowledge you gain, one might question – what good is it? It is one thing to educate residents on how certain policies may perpetuate food inequities in neighborhoods; but quite another to change eating behavior and go one step further to fight for policy change. A very tough job indeed.
- › **Languages and Cultures** – Mobilizing a community to organize and campaign for policy change requires working within the language and cultural framework of community members. Policy work can be abstract at first glance. Policy terminology and jargon can be intimidating, as well as overwhelming, especially in multi-lingual learning environments. Most of WORKS residents are multi-lingual yet feel more comfortable reading and speaking in their native tongue. To overcome this challenge, WORKS has invested in translation and interpretation services to ensure language is not an inhibitor for residents who want to participate.

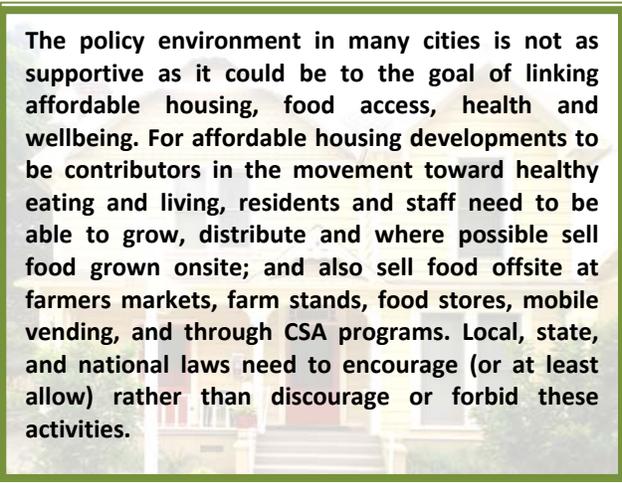
Launching an initiative or implementing an idea to help improve food equity is not simple, cheap or fast. It takes enormous resources, time and energy. It is a long distance race not for the faint of heart. However, organizations and community leaders who have a passion and strong commitment to social justice and food equity who also practice active outreach and engagement of their community members (specifically affordable housing residents), do have tangible opportunities and will witness a reward in the improved wellbeing of their constituents.

POLICY OPPORTUNITIES

Zoning and Urban Agriculture

Existing regulations present a number of barriers to advancing healthy food programs at housing developments. First, many zoning codes assume single uses for plots of land. Residential uses are separated from agricultural uses and commercial uses. Municipal and zoning codes regulate what uses and what landscaping are allowed or disallowed on each parcel of land in a city.

There are some cities with zoning codes that can be beneficial for increasing healthy food access



The policy environment in many cities is not as supportive as it could be to the goal of linking affordable housing, food access, health and wellbeing. For affordable housing developments to be contributors in the movement toward healthy eating and living, residents and staff need to be able to grow, distribute and where possible sell food grown onsite; and also sell food offsite at farmers markets, farm stands, food stores, mobile vending, and through CSA programs. Local, state, and national laws need to encourage (or at least allow) rather than discourage or forbid these activities.

within affordable housing. For example, in the City of Los Angeles truck gardening is allowed. Truck gardening was defined as vegetable gardening for sale off site until the recent passage of the “Fruit and Flowers” freedom act which expanded the definition to allow: “The cultivation of berries, flowers, fruits, grains herbs, mushrooms, nuts, ornamental plants, seedlings or vegetables for use onsite or sale or distribution off-site.”^{xiv} There are zones in the City of Pomona which allow residents to raise crops, however the commercial delivery vehicles, signs and advertising, or generation of pedestrian or vehicle traffic are not allowed. Many areas of Los Angeles allow edible landscaping with the exception of sidewalk medians in front of the developments. Last year the City released new Residential Parkway Landscaping Guidelines that allow a few herbs and a variety of beach strawberries to be grown in the sidewalk strip.^{xv} However, most edible plants are still forbidden.

There is leeway in most regulations for motivated developers who want to pursue gardening on their sites, but to encourage more housing developers to feature healthy food programs, policies could be changed to *incentivize* and allow urban agriculture and healthy food enterprises at housing sites.

Zoning and Urban Agriculture Policy Recommendations

Allow gardening, edible landscaping and urban farming in multi-family residential zones. As a basic prerequisite for urban agriculture, zoning codes could allow the cultivation of berries, flowers, fruits, grains, herbs, mushrooms, nuts, ornamental plants, seedlings or vegetables on multifamily residential zones in gardens and as edible landscaping. Zoning codes could also allow these products to be sold off-site.

To further expand possibilities for urban agriculture, zoning rules should:

- › Allow food to be grown on sidewalk strips/medians at multi-family residential properties.
- › Expand the definition of what may be grown to include some animals, such as chickens but potentially including other livestock and bees. For example, the City of Cleveland allows one small animal (chickens, ducks, rabbits) to be kept per 800 square feet of land, one beehive per 2,400 square feet, and larger farm animals to be kept on lots of at least 20,000 square feet.^{xvi}

The City of Seattle recently modified its zoning code to allow urban agriculture on all residential zones. Residents can sell from their properties with some limits (such as sales being allowed between 7am to 7pm, with only one commercial delivery per day).^{xvii} In the City of Los Angeles, multi-family residential zones which currently allow truck gardening, should allow farming, which permits, “The cultivation of berries, flowers, fruits, grains, herbs, mushrooms, nuts, ornamental plants, seedlings or vegetables for use on site or sale or distribution on site or off site.”

- › Allow capture, storage and use of rainwater for irrigation.
- › Incentivize urban agriculture projects for their economic development and food access potential. For example, Cleveland’s ‘Gardening for Greenbacks’ program gives grants of up to \$3000 to groups to purchase equipment to set up urban agriculture businesses.^{xviii}

Incentives for Developers to Include Food Programs

Public and private sources of financing for multi-family housing developments tend to favor dedication of space to as many rentable units (and often parking spaces) as possible, potentially squeezing out developers who want to operate programming such as WORKS’ initiative. There are, however, some

incentives that reward innovative services and programs. The California Tax Credit Allocation Committee (TCAC) administers State and Federal Low Income Housing Tax Credits (LIHTC).^{xix} Applications to receive LIHTC are ranked based on priorities set by the agency; California operates on a highly competitive twice-a-year tax credit award cycle. The ranking system requires developers to go above the minimum criteria (20 percent of units for 50 percent at or below AMI or 40 percent of units at or below 60 percent AMI). Projects are ranked based on a 155 point system, and these points can be accumulated by meeting criteria such as: evidence of leveraging public and some private funds, previous affordable housing management experience, location amenities (for example, being located by a public transit stop, schools or grocery stores), service amenities (for example, after school computer classes or free-of-charge internet services), mixed income projects, projects that attain energy efficiencies, etc. The only points related to food within the application are with relevance to the project's proximity to a full-scale grocery store of 17,000 square feet or more.

Incentives for Developers to Include Food Programs Policy Recommendations

Agencies that grant tax credits and other funding for low income housing development should add more food access programs to the criteria for receiving funding.

- › Development of onsite weekly produce market
- › Proximity to weekly farmers markets that accept EBT or WIC
- › Development serving as a drop-off location for a year round CSA/CBSA program that offers organic and/or fresh produce.
- › Proximity to drop-off location for a year round CSA/CBSA program that offers organic and/or fresh produce.
- › Development has a resident and/or community garden as a service amenity.
- › Proximity to a community garden open to members to join.
- › Edible landscaping and gardens as a sustainable building method.

Public lenders should also partner with private lenders and encourage private lenders to fund affordable multi-family housing developments with food programs.

LOOKING FORWARD

WORKS recently completed two years of working to improve access to healthy food for residents. They have learned as much about what not to do, as what to do in this type of work. They continue to learn and refine their approach as they continue their progress, and offer their learning experiences to other affordable housing developers.

It is the intention of WORKS to work towards the following efforts:

1. Duplicate the initiative in their other 12 affordable housing developments at the rate of adding one to two sites each year, as funding allows
2. Provide consultation to other affordable housing developers who are interested in healthy food access
3. Get the word out that affordable housing developers can be contributors to the solutions
4. Serve as a hands-on learning example for any organization interested in healthy food access for low income communities in affordable housing

In today's environment, low income communities and diet related disparity are becoming synonymous. This White Paper serves as an example of how that trend could possibly be reversed. For anyone wishing to embark on this work, some key take-aways to keep in mind:

- ✓ **Collaborative Partnerships** Visions of this scale are never achieved by one individual or organization. WORKS quickly discovered partnerships can often be more effective and mutually rewarding when established with an intention that specifies a level of interrelatedness on the continuum from cooperation to collaboration. Through persistent outreach community partners, grassroots, industry, public, academic, political, other philanthropic, higher education and faith based partners have joined WORKS. Some have become an integral part of operations giving and receiving value from the shared work.
- ✓ **Knowledge & Networks** WORKS' initiative intersects with food access and other social and economic efforts in many communities. Establishing or participating in formal networks to keep informed, exchange ideas, share resources and solicit and provide support will exponentially further efforts and increase impact.
- ✓ **Organizational Strength** Organizations committed to fundamental and healthy changes in communities of modest means, should encourage staff to develop deeper levels of transparency, trust and collaboration. This translates into more meaningful peer-to-peer relationships, measurable gains through greater efficiency of leveraged resources, greater programmatic impacts, and an overall stronger organization. Strive to establish and institutionalize Knowledge Management and Evaluation processes. Using logic models such as the process established by the W.K. Kellogg Foundation can be very helpful in working towards goals.
- ✓ **Place-Based Growth** How food access initiatives unfold across other communities (and individual developments), will be unique to the developer, resident needs, the communities and available resources. Implement and test concepts in one geographic location before expanding. Analyze factors which may present both significant contributions and challenges to the project.

Perhaps in the future the idea of affordable housing coupled with healthy food will become the standard as developers across the country further the work.

FAQ's

1. Where did WORKS get funding to start this work?

A: Fortunately WORKS received grants from The Boeing Company, The California Endowment, W.K. Kellogg Foundation, Weingart Foundation, and The Metabolic Studio, a charitable activity of the Annenberg Foundation, among others. They also leveraged thousands of dollars of donated goods and services.

2. What does WORKS recommend to developers in harsher climates where the growing season is limited?

A: WORKS recommends two key solutions 1) Use green houses that are heated through composting systems such as Growing Power in Michigan (growingpower.org), and 2) Canning and preserving could be taught.

3. Do developers need to implement each component at once to be successful?

A: Success should be defined by the residents' needs and wants. Perhaps residents only need or want produce markets onsite, but do not want community gardens – if markets are established then perhaps therein lies the success.

4. What do you do if residents are not showing interest in the programs?

A: If any program or service is created out of listening to the needs of residents, there is greater likelihood they will remain interested and engaged. By offering free community meetings and trainings to raise awareness about food disparities in low-income communities, residents may develop their own solutions or ideas specific to their community. That ownership is the greatest connector to any program or service offering a developer could provide.

APPENDIX

WORKS solely and/or in partnership with both nonprofit and for profit organizations, provides housing for low-income individuals, families and seniors in 17 affordable housing developments.

These five sites are in various stages of implementation of the food access programs:

Highland Village
245 S. Ave 50
Los Angeles, CA. 90042

Pisgah Village
6026 Echo Street
Los Angeles, CA. 90042

Park William
853 William St.
Pomona, CA 91768

Court Street Apartments
1301 Court Street
Los Angeles, Ca. 90026

Temple Villas
1421 W Temple St
Los Angeles, CA 90026

Other sites:

Young Burlington Apartments
820 S Burlington
Los Angeles, CA. 90057

Andalucia Heights
431 Lucas Street
Los Angeles, CA. 90017

Rosa Parks Villas
2507 Bronson St.
Los Angeles, CA. 90018

Palo Verde Terraces
38235 10th St. East
Palmdale, Ca. 93550

Villa Serena
3887 East First Street
Los Angeles, CA 90063

Villas Las America
9618 N. Van Nuys Blvd.
Panorama City, CA 91402

Villas del Lago
456 S. Lake Street
Los Angeles, CA 90057

Cielo Azul
38040 27th Street East
Palmdale, CA 93550

Casa de Angeles
4900 S. Figueroa Street
Los Angeles, CA 90037

Flores del Valle
222 N. Ave 23
Los Angeles, CA. 90031

Camino Al Oro
333 W. Avenue 26
Los Angeles, CA 90031

Colonia Libertad
2910 Saddle Club St
Salem, Oregon 97317

Ingram Preservation

Scattered Sites

234 N. Lake Street, Los Angeles 90026

2120 2nd Avenue, Los Angeles 90018

1935 La Salle Avenue, Los Angeles 90018

1525 S. St Andrews, Los Angeles 90019

1809 S. Van Ness, Los Angeles 90019

1225 W. 39th Place, Los Angeles 90037

1075-79 W. 39th Place, Los Angeles 90037

WORKS Partners and Collaborations

California Food Policy Advocates

Urban & Environmental Policy Institute at Occidental College

El Centro del Pueblo

Evergreen Farm Fresh

Free Arts for Children

Hunger Action LA

Operation Street Kidz

Public Counsel

Public Health Law Policy (PHLP)

South Central Farmers

UnEarth Media

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