

Prince George's County Food System Study

M-NCPPC
Prince George's County
Planning Department

Presentation to the
Prince George's County Council

February 9, 2016

Healthy Food for All Prince Georgians

An assessment of access to healthy food
in Prince George's County, Maryland

Accessibility

Affordability

Cultural Variety

Customer Service

Quality Assurance

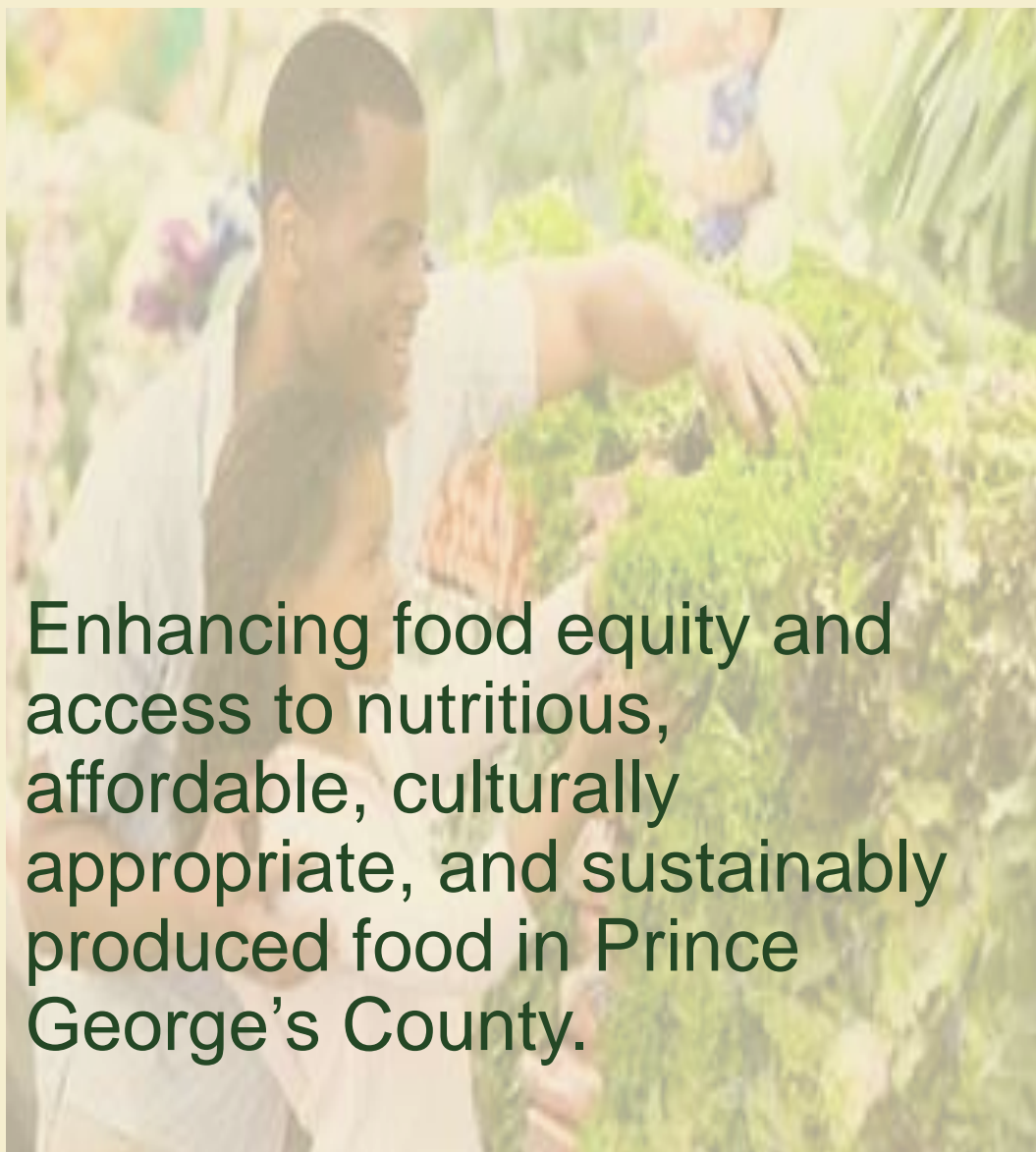


*Prince George's County Food
System Study*

November 2015



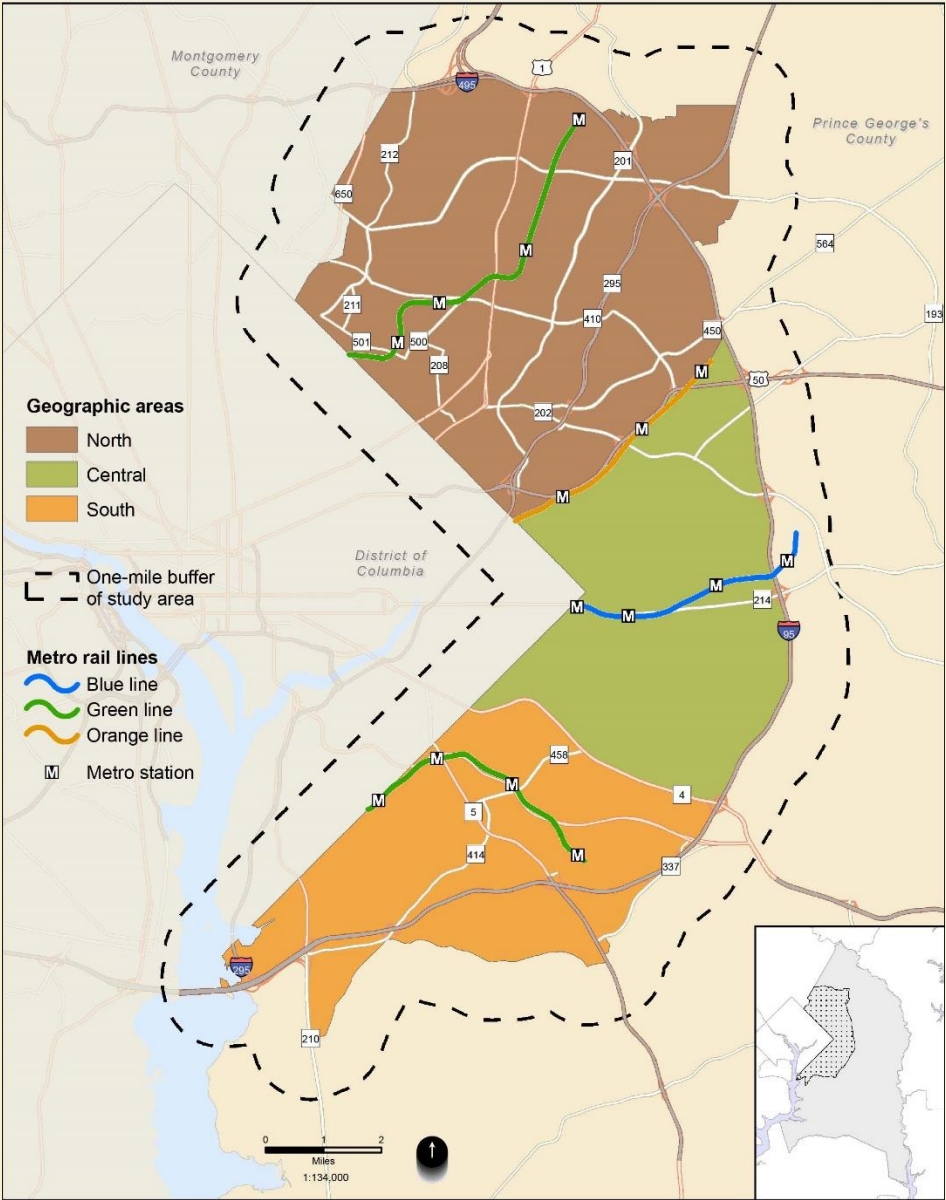
The Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission
Prince George's County Planning Department
www.pgplanning.org



Enhancing food equity and access to nutritious, affordable, culturally appropriate, and sustainably produced food in Prince George's County.

Purpose of the study

Study area map



What do
consumers say?





Consumer survey with **600** residents and discussions

with **7** focus groups revealed that:

- County residents are having difficulty accessing quality, nutritious, affordable, and culturally appropriate food within a reasonable distance from where they live.

- Food access challenges are more related to the quality of local stores and what they carry than the physical access to food outlets.
- Many residents do not patronize nearby supermarkets but travel elsewhere, even to other jurisdictions, where more variety and better quality food are sold for less.



Food retail outlets





In the study area there are:

636 food retail stores

951 prepared food service outlets

- **Carry-out places** are the most prevalent type, comprising 45 percent of prepared food service outlets and 25 percent of all food retail outlets.
- Full-service restaurants have the second highest number followed by gas station stores and fast-food restaurants.

- There are more supermarkets in the study area than this market would normally support. Therefore, opening new supermarkets may not solve the healthy food access problem.
- It is not the lack of supermarkets but the spatial distribution of them and the quality and price of products they carry that create inequity in accessing healthy food.



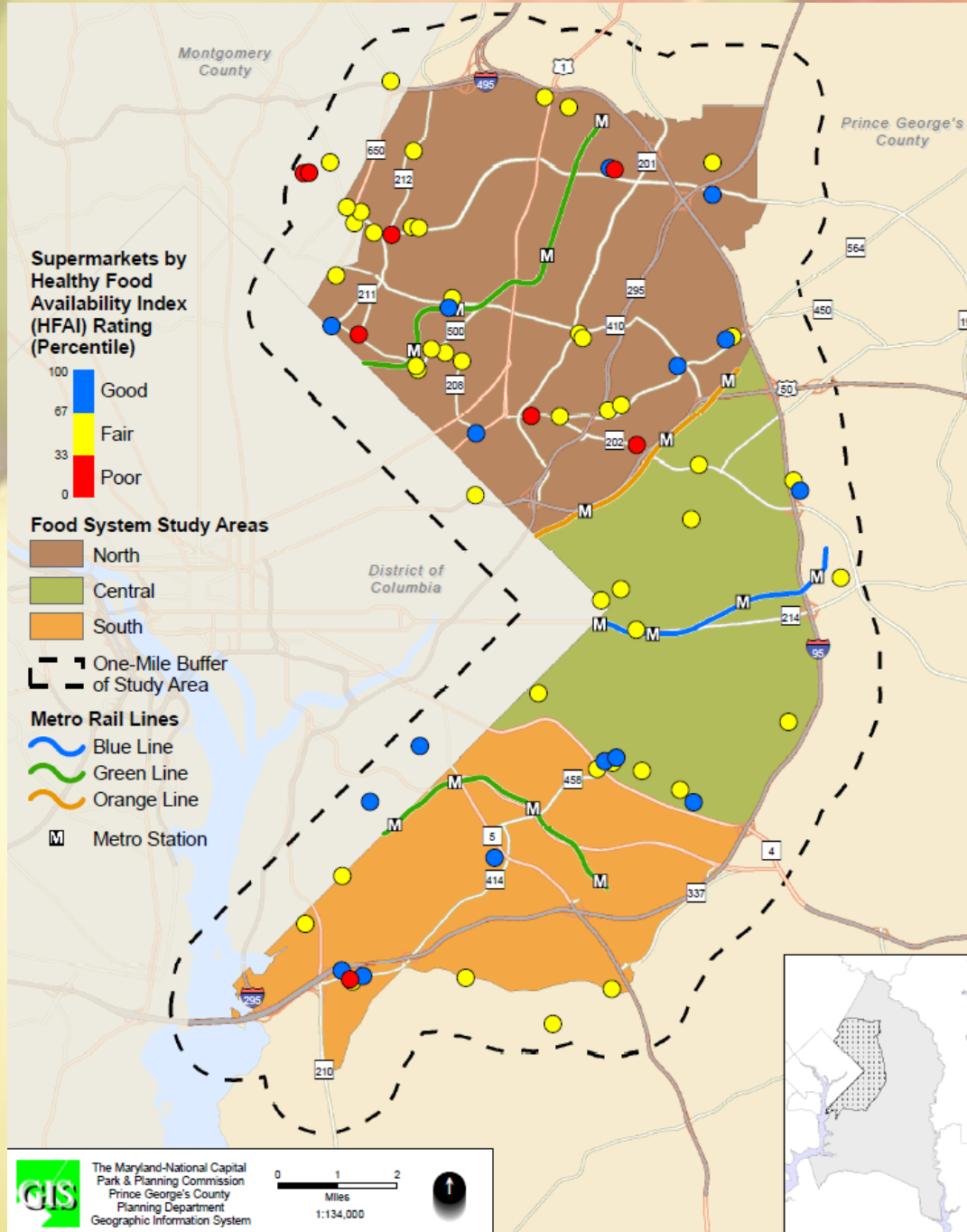
Healthy food availability





The Healthy Food Availability Index (HFAI) survey at all **70** supermarkets and **104** or 22 percent of small markets that serve the study area revealed that:

- Healthy foods are not widely available in the study area food retail outlets.
- Majority of supermarkets got a “fair” rating.
- Average HFAI score is:
 - **56** out of 100 for supermarkets
 - **27** out of 100 for small markets



Spatial distribution of supermarkets by Healthy Food Availability Index (HFAI) rating

- Average HFAI score for supermarkets is the highest in the South Area and lowest in the North Area.
- North Area small markets have the highest average HFAI score, followed by South and Central Areas.
- Among the six categories of small markets, international markets scored the highest, and gas station stores scored the lowest average HFAI scores.



Areas with limited access to healthy food



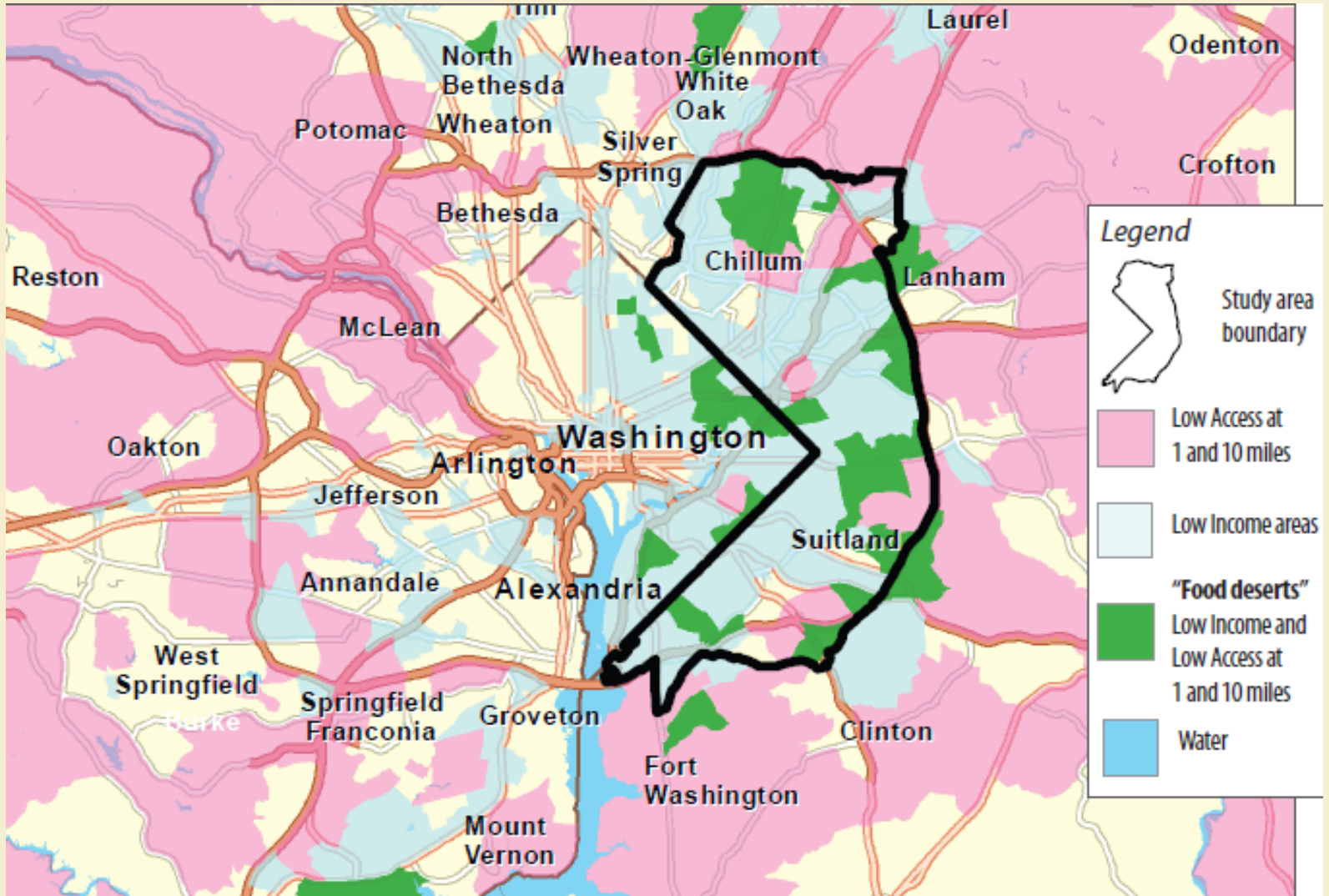


Nationwide studies by USDA and The Reinvestment Fund (TRF) on areas with limited healthy food access have shortcomings:

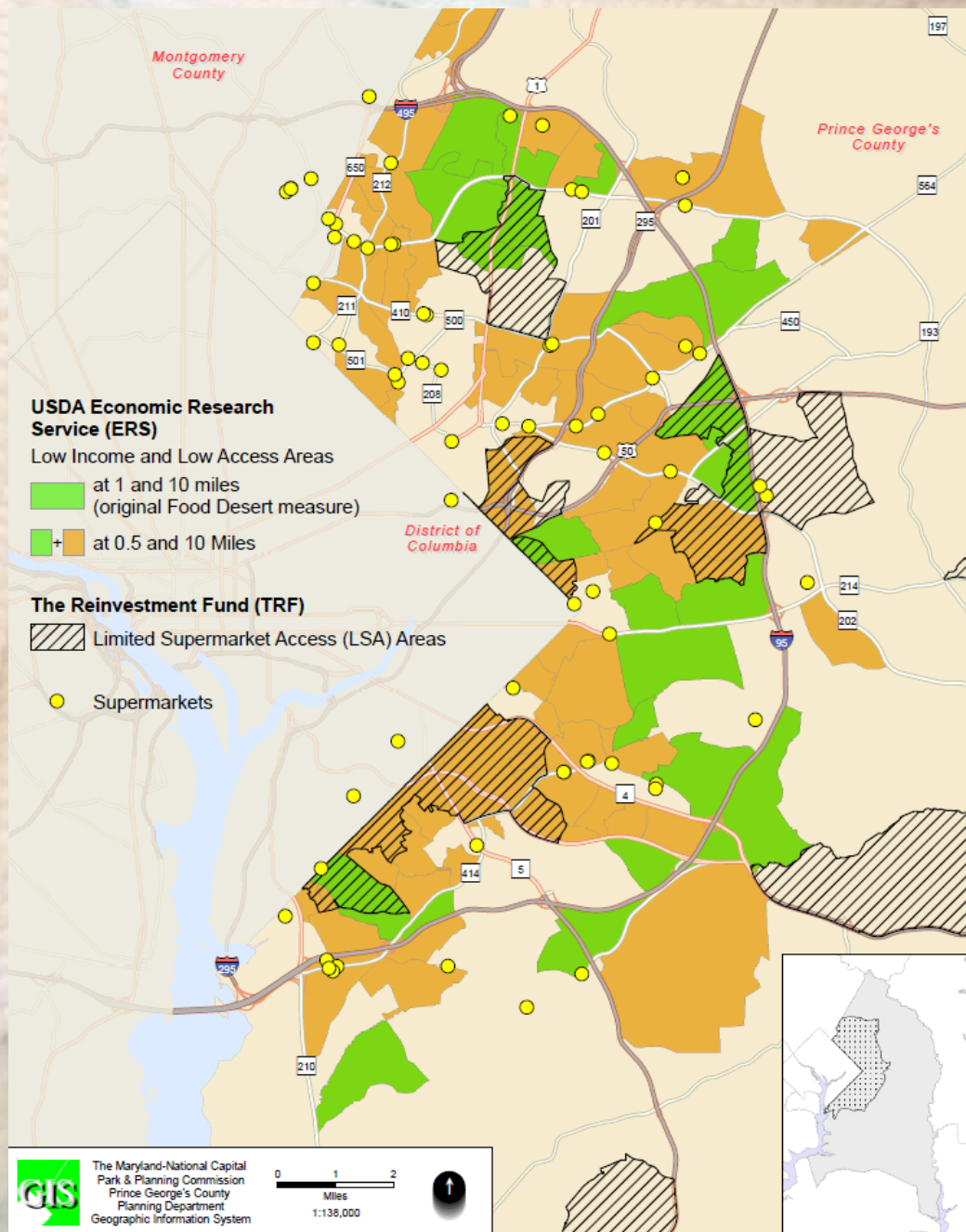
- They do not reflect the essence of the healthy food access problem and put the County in unfair position. Hence, policy decisions should not be based on these studies.
- The County has more USDA-identified “food deserts” not because of the availability of fewer supermarkets compared to other low-access areas in the region but due to the presence of areas with Median Family Income (MFI) less than or equal to 80 percent of the Metro area’s MFI.



USDA low income and low access areas (food deserts)



Areas with limited access to healthy food



Comparison of USDA and TRF limited access areas

Significant observations

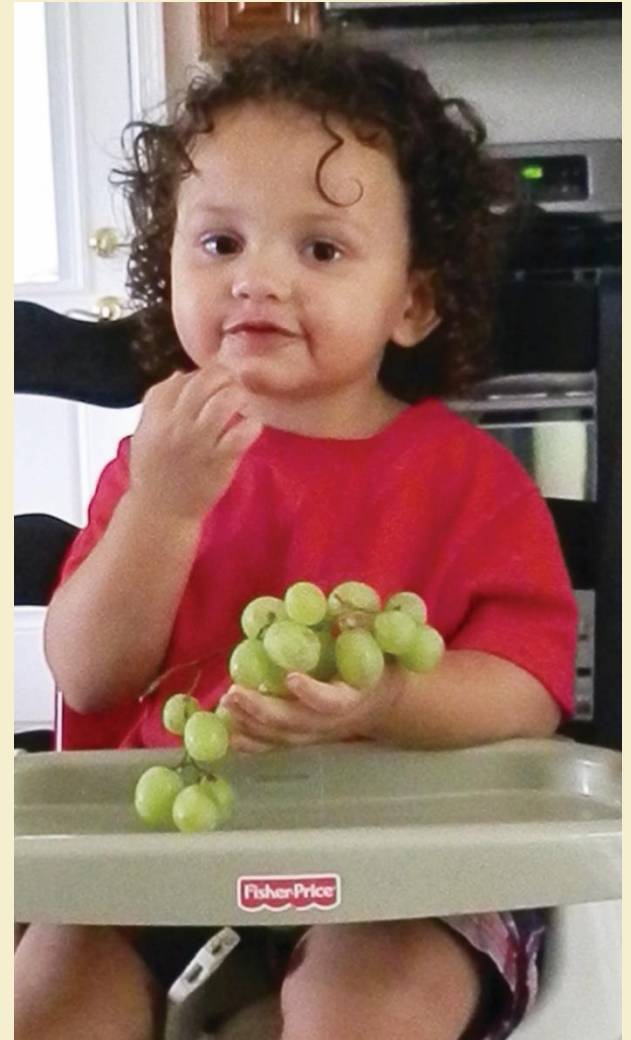
- Limited access areas identified by USDA and TRF do not overlap.
- There are several existing supermarkets inside the identified areas.
- Several nonresidential areas are included in the limited access areas.

Place matters for food equity in the County...

- Healthy food availability, quality, and/or cost varies by location, even among the stores of the same retailer.
- The cost of a typical market basket for a balanced diet varies considerably by geographic area.
- Unequal spatial distribution of supermarkets contributes to the inequitable food access.
- Supermarkets are generally located along major roads, away from where people live, causing hardship to access to healthy food for residents who cannot drive .



Food-health connection





There is a direct correlation between the food we eat and our health.

Most people are aware of the connection between food and health but still eat food that may cause major health risks due to:

- Insufficient nutrition knowledge
- Food insecurity
- Healthy food is expensive
- Healthy food may not be available
- Lack of cooking skills and time
- Convenience of fast food
- Marketing and peer-pressure

Disparities in accessing healthy food may deprive people of a balanced diet, causing public health issues:

- Prince George's County has higher than average rates in diet-related chronic diseases in Maryland.
- More than two thirds of the adult population is overweight or obese. The obesity rate is on the rise.
- Heart disease is the number one cause of death in the County.

There are several initiatives in the County to promote healthy eating and prevent diet related diseases.



How healthy are school meals?





School meals provide opportunities to offer healthy food and healthy eating habits.

Facts about meals at Prince George's County Public Schools (PGCPS):

- 80,000 lunches and 53,000 breakfasts served daily.
- Two thirds of the students participate in the National School Lunch Program and 64 percent of them are enrolled in the Free and Reduced Meals program.
- 31 percent of high school students are overweight or obese.
- Annual budget of PGCPS Food and Nutrition Services is \$69 million.
- Only 2 percent of \$20 million food costs is spent on local

How healthy are school meals?
foods.



PGCPS **school menu** evaluation revealed that:

- The Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act of 2010 (HHFKA) requirements are generally met, but some meals fall short or exceed caloric limits.
- Only limited nutritional information about school food is provided. Food ingredients are not easily available.
- Added sugar in school breakfast exceeds limits recommended by the American Heart Association.



PGCPS **cafeteria** evaluation revealed that:

- Lunch periods are too short.
- Drinking water is not freely available.
- There are no hand-washing stations.
- Cafeteria staff encourage elementary school students, but not high-school students, to eat more fruits and vegetables.
- Salad bars are not available.

Both **school principals** and **students** shared similar opinions about the need to improve school food.

- Schools want to offer input about menus.
- Breakfast programs have a big positive impact.
- Increased farm-to-school participation and more school gardens are needed.
- Students want attractively presented, healthy, and good tasting foods and snacks.



How is food insecurity a problem?





Food insecurity is a serious problem in the County:

- One in seven people are food insecure.
- Participation in the federal food assistance programs are increasing, but only a little more than half of the eligible people participate.
- About 112,000 benefit from the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) and 5,000 participate in the Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) program.
- Over 130 food pantries operate in the County.
- There are several programs offered by various entities to support food security for the County residents.

A survey with the participants in the federal food assistance programs revealed that:

- SNAP benefits run out before the end of the month.
- A third of the respondents are not able to feed their children enough nutritious food.
- A third of the respondents do not have enough food at home and have to skip meals.
- More than half buy fruits and vegetables only once a month.
- If their benefits double, almost half would like to buy fresh fruits and vegetables with the difference.



Recommendations



Policy 1:

Develop an overarching food policy framework for the County.



Strategies

- Establish a County agency for food policy, or create a food policy director/coordinator position.
- Create a shared vision for food and a local food system involving the community.
- Create a food charter for the County.
- Develop and implement a food system plan.
- Encourage appropriate County agencies to collaborate and implement necessary strategies to achieve common goals related to the local food system.

Policy 2:

Support the Prince George's County Food Equity Council.



Strategies

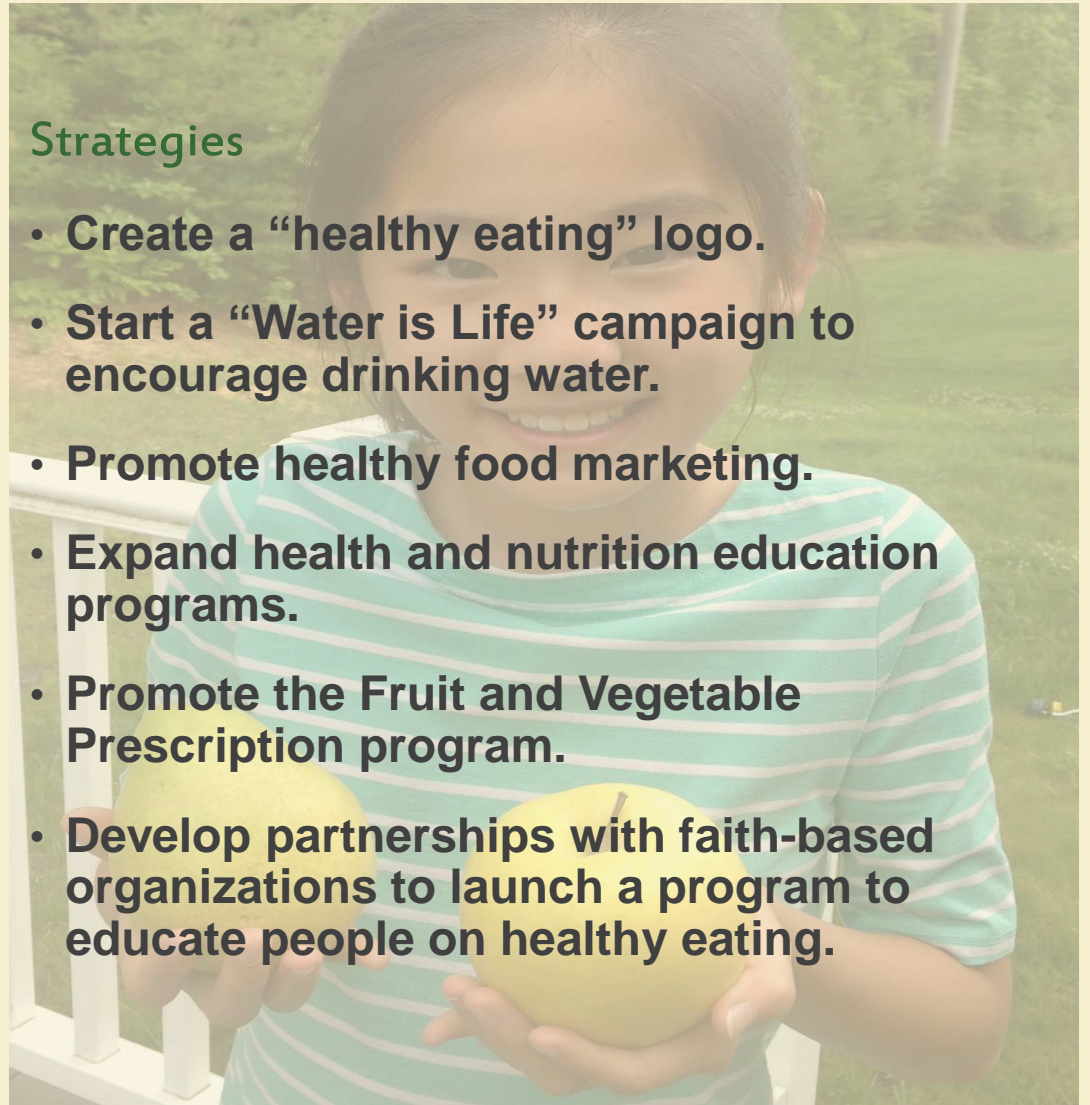
- **Consider implementing the policy recommendations FEC develops on a continuous basis.**
- **Provide political, technical, and financial support to FEC for implementing its strategies for local food production, healthy eating and nutrition education, and healthy food retail as well as future strategies related to access to healthy food in the County.**

Policy 3:

Launch an integrated healthy eating and food-health connection awareness campaign.

Strategies

- Create a “healthy eating” logo.
- Start a “Water is Life” campaign to encourage drinking water.
- Promote healthy food marketing.
- Expand health and nutrition education programs.
- Promote the Fruit and Vegetable Prescription program.
- Develop partnerships with faith-based organizations to launch a program to educate people on healthy eating.



Policy 4:

Encourage local food consumption, and support the local food economy.

Strategies

- Define “local” to include a specific geographic range.
- Revise procurement policies, and require that County agencies purchase food from local producers.
- Create and promote “Be a Locavore!” campaign.
- Initiate/support farm-to-institution, farm-to-school, and farm-to-table programs.
- Support Southern Maryland Agricultural Development Commission’s (SMADC) Hub and Spoke program.
- Encourage supermarkets to buy a certain percent of their produce from local farms.
- Promote and support direct marketing to consumers.
- Support and promote farmers’ markets.



Policy 5:

Increase sustainable local food production in rural and urban areas.

Strategies

- Provide incentives to local farmers who produce sustainably grown food for local consumption.
- Encourage local farmers to grow high-value specialty crops.
- Promote and support urban farms.
- Support new farmer education programs.
- Establish a farm incubator.
- Preserve land for farming.
- Allow sales of produce grown at community and home gardens.
- Ensure living wages for farm workers.



Policy 6:

Establish a food hub in the County to support local and regional food distribution and marketing.

United States Department of Agriculture

FOOD HUBS

Strategies

BUILDING BUSINESSES, SUSTAINING COMMUNITIES

- Partner with the Southern Maryland Agricultural Development Commission to establish a regional food hub.
- Convert the underutilized Cheltenham farmers' market/auction facility into a food hub.
- Apply for various federal programs that fund the food hub.

ON AVERAGE, EACH FOOD HUB WORKS WITH 41 FARMS & SUPPLIERS

19% ARE OWNED BY WOMEN & 29% BY MINORITIES

OVER HALF OF HUBS SUPPORT LOCAL FARMERS AS A PRIMARY MISSION

#2 MARKET → GROCERY STORES + CORNER STORES

#1 MARKET → RESTAURANTS + BAKERS + CATERERS

GROWTH OPPORTUNITY → K-12 SCHOOL MEALS

Policy 7:

Promote local food processing and invest in food processing infrastructure.

Strategies

- Promote value-added processing.
- Convert the underutilized Cheltenham farmers' market/auction facility into a shared-use food processing and distribution facility.
- Establish a community kitchen incubator.
- Rent existing commercial kitchens in government facilities to small value-added food processors.
- Expand the locations where small-scale value-added food production is permitted.
- Get Prince George's County Economic Development Corporation involved in promoting local food processing.



Policy 8:

Increase sale of quality, healthy fresh foods at existing food retail outlets, and decrease unhealthy options.

Strategies

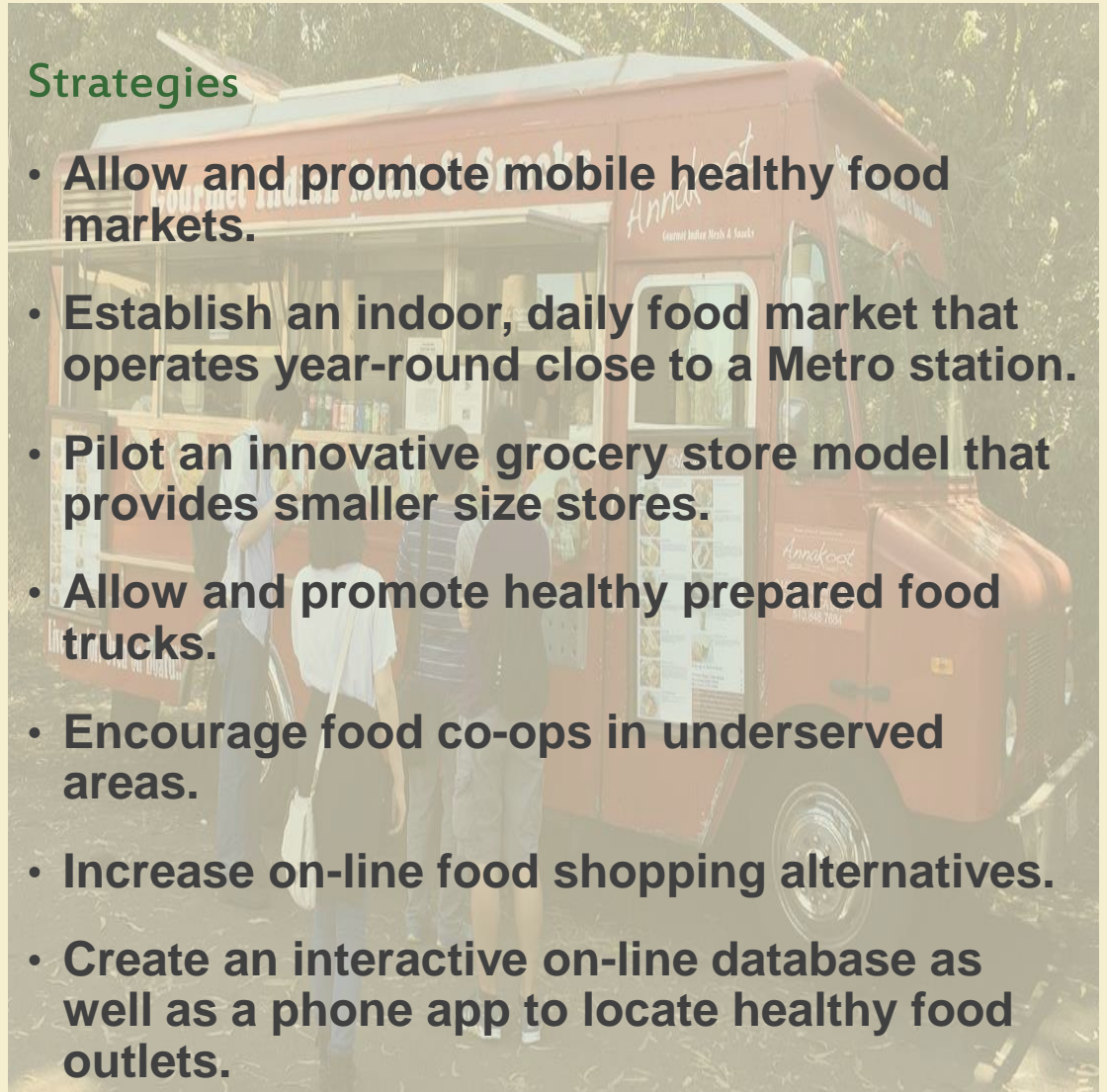
- Encourage supermarkets to stock a certain amount of fresh fruits and vegetables.
- Launch a “healthy small markets” program.
- Partner with food retailers to promote healthy foods.
- Require vending machines in government facilities to carry healthy foods and drinks.
- Create a healthy carry-out program.
- Launch a “healthy menu” campaign to encourage restaurants to include healthy menu options.
- Discourage self-service sugary drink machines.
- Provide tax incentives to food retail outlets that carry healthy food items in underserved communities.

Policy 9:

Encourage alternative food retail models to improve healthy food access.

Strategies

- Allow and promote mobile healthy food markets.
- Establish an indoor, daily food market that operates year-round close to a Metro station.
- Pilot an innovative grocery store model that provides smaller size stores.
- Allow and promote healthy prepared food trucks.
- Encourage food co-ops in underserved areas.
- Increase on-line food shopping alternatives.
- Create an interactive on-line database as well as a phone app to locate healthy food outlets.

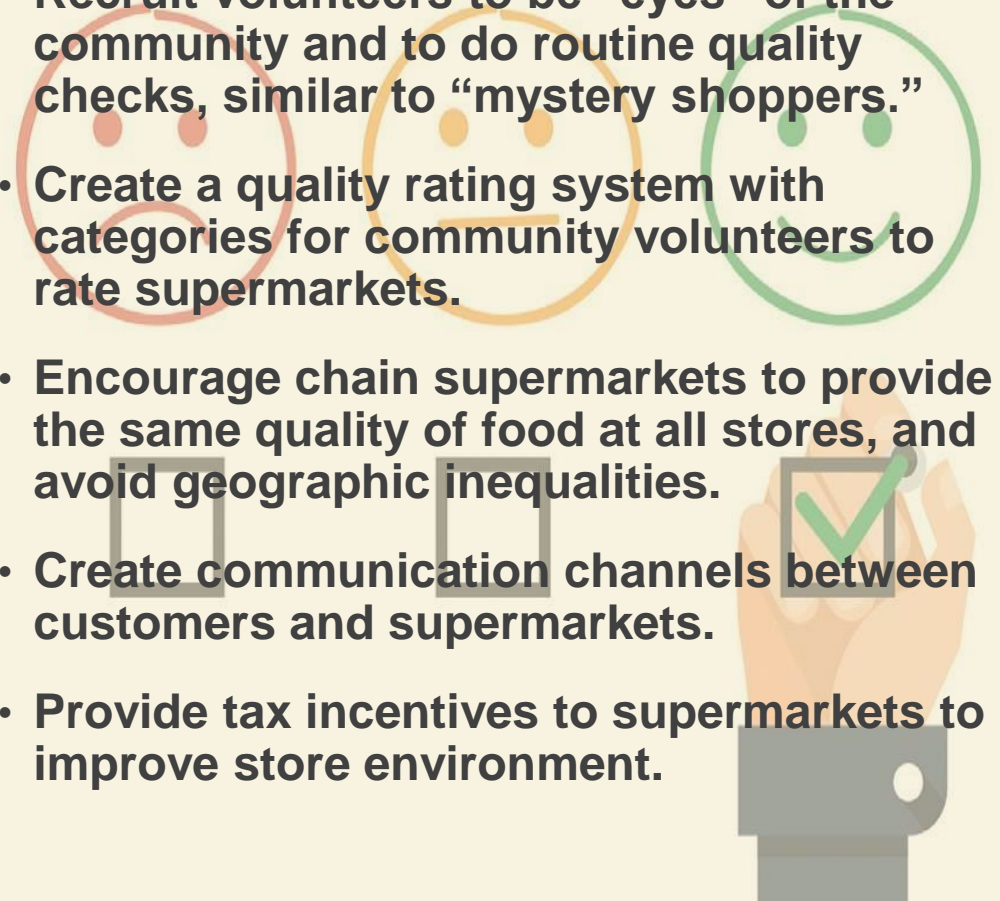


Policy 10:

Ensure good quality food, a safe and clean environment, and excellent customer service at supermarkets.

Strategies

- Recruit volunteers to be “eyes” of the community and to do routine quality checks, similar to “mystery shoppers.”
- Create a quality rating system with categories for community volunteers to rate supermarkets.
- Encourage chain supermarkets to provide the same quality of food at all stores, and avoid geographic inequalities.
- Create communication channels between customers and supermarkets.
- Provide tax incentives to supermarkets to improve store environment.



Policy 11:

Launch a “mini healthy neighborhood grocery store” initiative to make healthy foods accessible within residential neighborhoods.

Strategies

- Allow mini grocery stores that sell healthy foods within residential neighborhoods.
- Consider zoning incentives that would encourage the provision of land for mini grocery stores in areas at least one mile from the nearest grocery store.
- Use the tax credit incentives to attract mini healthy neighborhood grocery stores.
- Encourage these stores to carry locally grown produce.
- Encourage co-ops to operate in the neighborhoods as mini stores.
- In residential buildings, encourage grocery stores to be on the ground level.

Policy 12:

Looking through an equity lens, rethink zoning with food and health in mind to make access to healthy food easier.

Strategies

- Define various types of food retail outlets, reevaluate zones where they are permitted to ensure an equitable distribution of healthy food retail outlets.
- Consider creating a floating grocery store zone and/or permit small-scale healthy food retailers in all residential zones.
- Create “Healthy Food Zones” within a certain distance of schools and playgrounds.
- Limit drive-through fast food restaurants and concentration of fast food and carry out places.
- Consider the policy recommendation and strategies on zoning in *Urban Agriculture: A Tool for Creating Economic Development and Healthy Communities in Prince George’s County*.

Policy 13:

Improve transportation options to healthy food outlets.

Strategies

- Design bus routes to facilitate access to healthy food retailers.
- Increase frequency of buses, and arrange bus schedules to accommodate consumer needs.
- Develop shuttle services to supermarkets, especially for elderly and disabled.
- Create safe routes to healthy food markets by ensuring pedestrian and bicycle safety.
- Educate people about existing transportation services.
- Promote involvement of faith-based organizations in providing transportation to grocery stores and farmers' markets.

#35100100

Policy 14:

Make healthy food affordable.

Strategies

- **Encourage food co-ops and food buying clubs.**
- **Teach people how to shop for healthy food with a limited budget.**
- **Start food recovery and gleaning programs.**
- **Create fruit orchards in public parks, and plant edible landscaping in public spaces.**
- **Encourage people to grow, preserve, and cook their own food.**
- **Encourage foraging for wild food.**
- **Prepare a guidebook for residents on how to access affordable healthy food.**
- **Consider policy recommendation in the Urban Agriculture report about establishing community gardens in all neighborhoods.**



Policy 15:

Improve the quality of school meals.

Strategies

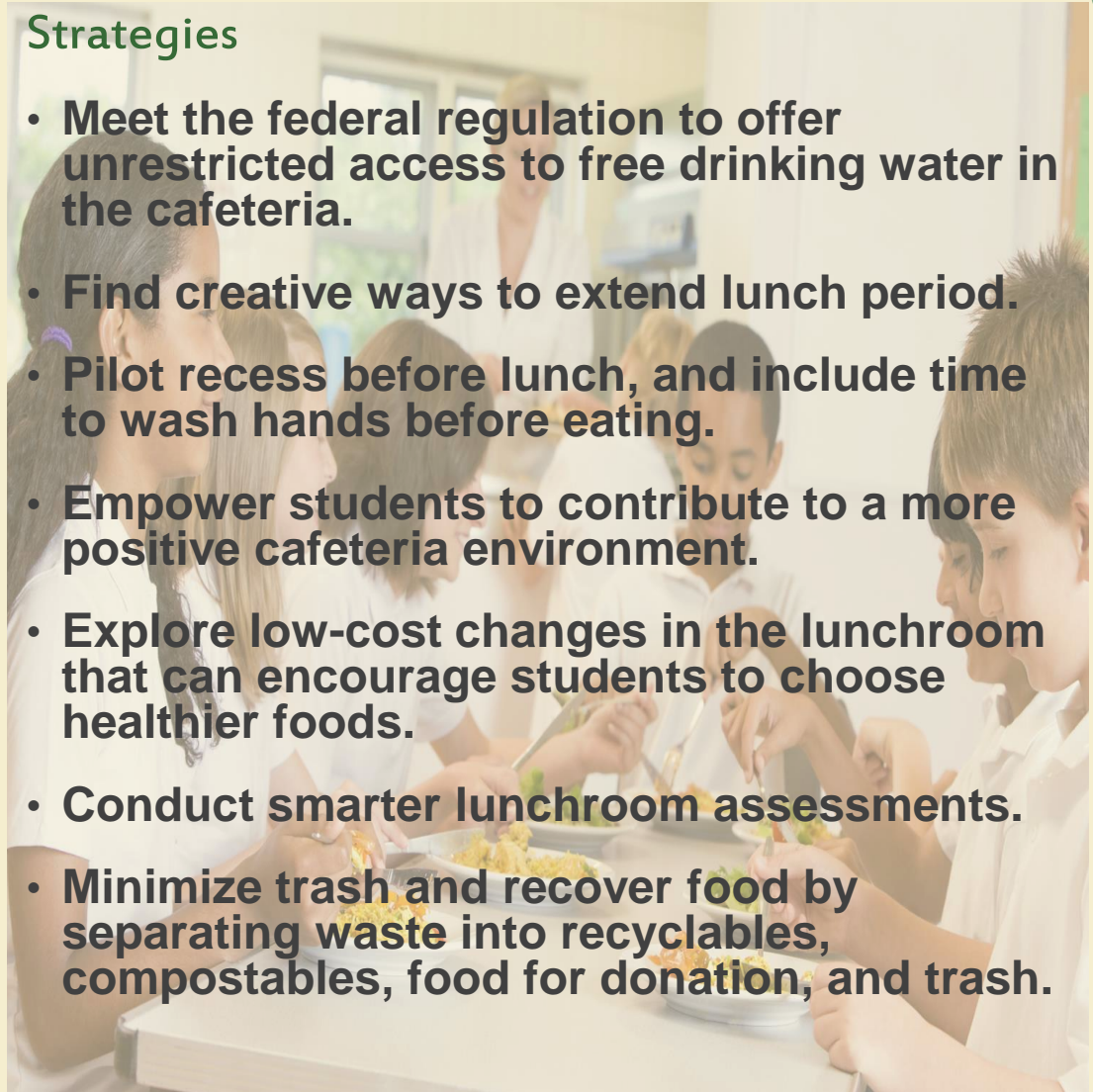
- Exceed the Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act of 2010 guidelines.
- Make healthy food attractive to students.
- Engage students in school food decisions.
- Establish a vegetable farm and an orchard for PGCPS to teach students healthy food production.
- Introduce or pilot salad bars into PGCPS.
- Offer healthy snack options between classes.
- Apply for USDA funds to improve kitchen facilities.
- Increase purchasing of local foods.

Policy 16:

Ensure that school cafeterias promote healthy and positive eating experiences.

Strategies

- Meet the federal regulation to offer unrestricted access to free drinking water in the cafeteria.
- Find creative ways to extend lunch period.
- Pilot recess before lunch, and include time to wash hands before eating.
- Empower students to contribute to a more positive cafeteria environment.
- Explore low-cost changes in the lunchroom that can encourage students to choose healthier foods.
- Conduct smarter lunchroom assessments.
- Minimize trash and recover food by separating waste into recyclables, compostables, food for donation, and trash.



Policy 17:

Develop food literacy in the school community.

Strategies

- Develop school food task forces.
- Send home educational materials about nutrition.
- Offer cooking lessons to parents.
- Serve healthy foods and drinks in all school events.
- Ensure up-to-date nutrition information about school meals is available on-line.
- Post product labels and ingredients on-line.
- Incorporate nutrition and food system education across the school curriculum.
- Develop educational farms for students to learn about agriculture, food, and nutrition.
- Develop student health councils.
- Utilize cafeterias and school gardens as part of the curriculum.



Policy 18:

Eliminate hunger and food insecurity in the County by ensuring access to affordable, sufficient, and healthy food for all people all the time.

Strategies

- Increase participation in federal nutrition assistance programs.
- Fund the County's "SNAP to Health" initiative.
- Apply to federal grants to develop local strategies to increase purchasing of fruits and vegetables among SNAP participants.
- Expand the Maryland Market Money program that doubles federal nutrition benefits to all farmers' markets.
- Encourage food pantries to offer healthy foods.
- Start a food recovery program to divert safe surplus foods from landfills and redistribute to food insecure residents.
- Encourage residents to grow their own food and gain cooking and food preservation skills.



Thank you!