



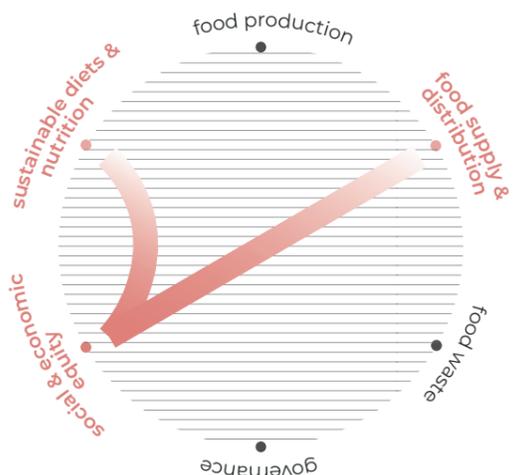
AUSTIN UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

Title of Practice AUSTIN: MAKE FRESH FOOD ACCESSIBLE FOR ALL

Milan Urban Food Policy Pact Category SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC EQUITY



Main impacts on other MUFPP categories



Contact EDWIN MARTY Food Policy Manager

Context

Recent studies indicate that one in four people in Austin is unsure of where their next meal will come from. Research has also identified a strong connection between food insecurity and increased rates of dietary-related health conditions such as obesity, diabetes, heart disease, and cancer. These health outcomes present a high cost for Austin in terms of treatment, educational attainment, and lost work days. The areas experiencing the highest rates of food insecurity are located primarily in Austin's Eastern Crescent neighborhoods. These areas have the longest average distances between residences and food retail, lowest household incomes, fewest mobility options, and disproportionately affect the African American and Latino communities. For these reasons, in 2016 the Austin City Council started a process to improve access to fresh, healthy and affordable food across the city.

Overview of the food practice

On 3 March 2016, the Austin City Council passed a resolution for City staff and community stakeholders to develop recommendations for improving food security and implementing the national Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP). The municipal Office of Sustainability organized a collaborative process in response to this directive involving representatives from six City departments and 33 community organizations. The process also provided opportunities for residents from neighborhoods with barriers to nutritious food to provide input on possible solutions to address food access in Austin. This collaboration resulted in more than 100 ideas, condensed in a list of six strategies for improving access to nutritious food in areas that have the highest rates of food insecurity. These strategies were detailed in the report called "Austin's Healthy Food Access Initiative", which resulted in a one-time funding of USD 300 000 from Austin City Council for a SNAP coordinated messaging campaign and ongoing funding of USD 400 000 for Healthy Food Retail Initiatives. A new full-time position for a Food Access Coordinator was also established.

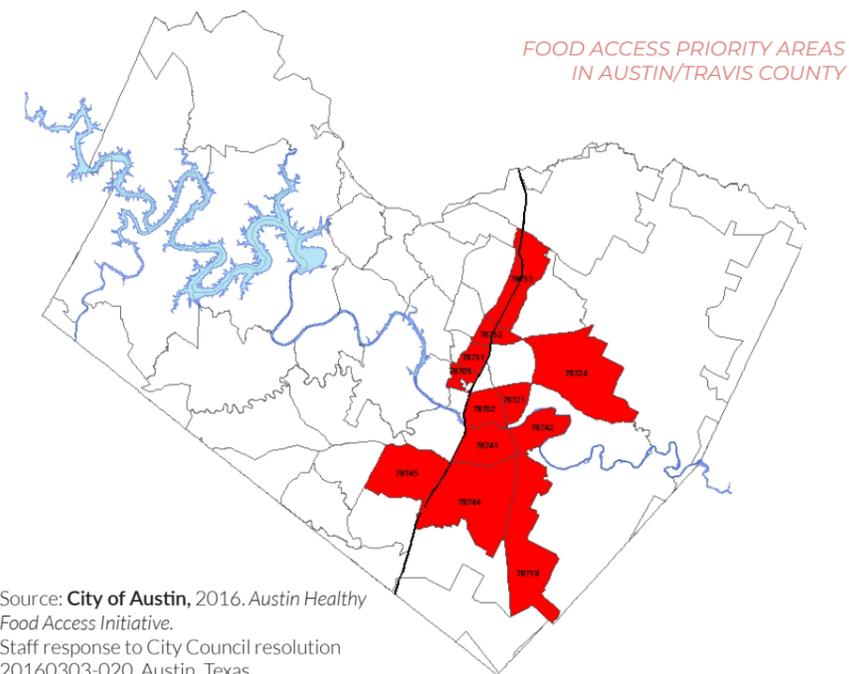
As part of the Healthy Food Retail funding, the City of Austin partnered with local nonprofit organizations to offer fresh, affordable, convenient and nutritious food in 19 low access areas. Known as the Fresh for Less program, these efforts provide access points for fresh fruits and vegetables, as well as some staple goods, through Mobile Markets, Farm Stands, and Healthy Corner Stores that are operated by community and nonprofit organizations. Almost all markets accept SNAP benefits, and many of the markets are able to double those benefits through a purchasing incentive program funded by the city. The Farm Stands and Mobile Markets have had over 2 000 customer visits in spring 2017. To support these efforts,

the City of Austin's Office of Sustainability initiated a comprehensive Food Environment Analysis study. The work involved data collection from over 900 food retail establishments to assess the availability of nutritious food at each store. This analysis, modeled after a similar project completed in Baltimore, Maryland will provide a more accurate understanding of where residents face the greatest barriers to accessing nutritious food in Austin, demographic information about the residents who live there, and the overall public health impact to Austin. The information will provide the basis for prioritizing City of Austin investments toward food access initiatives.

Results and lessons learned

This is the first time the City of Austin has developed a coordinated response to address food access. In order to do so, Austin looked to peer communities for best practices, which were adapted to the local context. For instance, to increase the efficiency and accuracy of Austin's Food Environment Analysis study, which is based on the City of Baltimore's collaboration with Johns Hopkins University, the Healthy Food Availability Survey was modified to better reflect Austin's unique circumstances. This allowed for the survey of food retail establishments and surrounding areas in under three months with minimal data errors. It also allowed expansion of the scope of research efforts to include surveys of food pantries throughout Austin, as well as a consumer behavior survey to assess individual food purchasing decisions and challenges. Austin's innovative data collection approach has allowed a more extensive survey than was possible in Baltimore. Austin has also convened representatives from the Cities of Houston, Dallas, and San Antonio to create an alliance that explores innovative approaches to improving access to nutritious and affordable food. The underlying message is that by working together, opportunities for larger systemic improvements will be possible.

The development and implementation of the Austin Healthy Food Access initiative has been facilitated through deep stakeholder engagement across the entire Austin community. The network continues to grow with a clear appreciation that food retail alone will not ensure that a community eats well; it is also necessary to provide safe, well-lit streets with complete sidewalks, reliable public transportation networks, access to health care, education, adequate and affordable housing, and jobs that pay a living wage, reflecting once again the importance of adopting a holistic approach in achieving a truly sustainable food system.



Source: City of Austin, 2016. Austin Healthy Food Access Initiative. Staff response to City Council resolution 20160303-020. Austin, Texas.



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