



Stimulating Healthy Food Retail in Rural America: Case Studies

Across the country, residents in rural areas struggle to access healthy food in their community. Innovative public funding sources can encourage and incentivize healthy food retail development in rural areas known colloquially as “food deserts.” Read below for some success stories:

Ford’s Food Center, Winnsboro, Louisiana

In 2012, residents of Winnsboro, Louisiana were eager to welcome the opening of Ford’s Fine Foods, a 19,500-square-foot, full-service grocery store in a U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA)-designated “food desert.” Winnsboro is a small city of 5,000 residents in Franklin Parish, a rural area of Louisiana located in the Mississippi Delta Region, and has persistently suffered from high rates of poverty and unemployment. With the help of a \$5 million USDA Rural Development Guaranteed Loan, the city was able to attract this experienced independent grocery chain to an underserved community on the south side of town.



The USDA funding allowed developers to construct a new store and purchase machinery and equipment for its operation. Ford’s Food Center has contributed in many ways to the local economy: the grocery store sells fresh produce grown by local producers and also created approximately 15 jobs for area residents.

Onaga County Market, Onaga, Kansas



In the last few years, Kansas has lost a number of its small-town grocery stores. In 2010, after a fire destroyed a Thriftway in Onaga, a town of 700 residents, the owners decided to not rebuild the establishment. This closure was a tragedy for the community, forcing many residents to travel 50 miles round-trip to other food retail outlets to purchase groceries. Onaga needed a long term solution to improve food access for its children and families and the surrounding rural community.

Residents of the town committed themselves to opening a healthy food retail establishment in their community. A local bank and county officials helped put together a package of low-interest loans, and the Onaga City Council provided \$375,000 towards the development of a new market housed in a 7,500-square-foot building. To offset additional development costs, the retailer secured a low-interest loan specifically for rural development with support from the Pottawatomie County Rural Economic Development Corp. and Network Kansas. Local residents and members of the surrounding rural community are continuing to support Onaga Country Market.

MyTown Marketplace, Highland Falls, New York

MyTown Marketplace, a supermarket that serves the Highland Falls community of New York State, opened in 2011 with a grant provided by the New York Healthy Food Healthy Communities (HFHC) Fund. The HFHC Fund is a financing program that supports healthy food retail projects in communities where residents struggle with limited access to healthy foods.



In the years before the arrival of MyTown, Highland Falls' only grocery store closed its doors, leaving the community with an 11-mile commute over mountain roads to the closest full-service grocery store. This distance was notably challenging for the population of senior citizens in the community who had limited car access.

Fortunately, Lisa Berrios and Albert Rodriguez, a husband and wife team, stepped up to the challenge of bringing healthy foods back to Highland Falls. The couple applied to the HFHC Fund and was awarded \$300,000 in grant funding along with a \$500,000 loan to help build out a new supermarket in the vacant retail grocery space. After additions and a needed expansion of the store's fresh produce department, MyTown Marketplace, now a 12,000 square-foot retail space, is serving the Highland Falls community.

MyTown Marketplace has brought 20 full- and part-time jobs to the community while improving access to healthy food for local families and individuals. The addition of these jobs to Highland Falls has complimented MyTown's bottom-line, by improving the local economy. The store is also a member of the "Pride of New York" local agriculture promotion program.

Bloss Holiday Market, Blossburg, Pennsylvania



Bloss Holiday Market is located in Blossburg, PA, a small but growing community in Tioga County. It is a 7,500 square-foot store that has operated since 1970, and the only other grocery store within 15 miles is a Walmart. Current store owners Ryan and Melanie Shaut purchased the store in 2008, through a combination of a bank loan, a grant from the Pennsylvania Fresh Food Financing Initiative, and a low interest loan from North Tioga CDC.

After purchasing the store, the Shauts focused on the needs of the community while providing a much-needed renovation. They purchased refurbished meat and deli cases that have more product space, better lighting and energy efficient features. In addition, the Shauts re-organized the store and removed cluttered displays in the entrance, creating an open walking space that draws customers to the deli, meat and produce cases. Bloss Holiday Market caters community events and supplies fresh, healthy snacks to nearby Blossburg Elementary. Mr. Shaut feels "the community deserves a good market" and that "without the PA Fresh Food Financing Initiative, the market wouldn't be here."