

Expanding Access to Healthy, Affordable, and Sustainable Food & Beverage Products in UCen Convenience Stores

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Introduction

Food insecurity affects the lives of 48% of the UCSB population impacting the ability of students to thrive academically¹. With this information, identification of strategies to lower this statistic are needed. Given this, The University of California Global Food Initiative works to find solutions in feeding a growing global population in a sustainable and nutritious manner. UCen convenience stores are a main source of food for the UCSB campus community. The Healthy Snacking Project aimed to research existing Corner Store models that have successfully integrated health and sustainability into their company and products, compile data on the current products sold in UCen locations, and create strategies to increase healthy and sustainable products at an affordable price to ensure equitable access. The Healthy Snacking Project consisted of academic research, auditing, and collaboration to effectively create strategies backed by quantitative and qualitative data.



Project Goals

- Encourage equitable access to affordable, nutritious, and sustainable food sales on campus.
- Compile data from existing healthy corner store models and initiatives.
- Complete audits of UCen corner stores and cafés.
- Collaborate with the UCen to find ways to reach project goals in a manner that works for their business model and financial success.
- Work towards a more sustainable food climate at UCSB.



Identified Case Studies

The **Healthy Corner Store Initiative** is a component to the Food Trust and stands as a national resource on connecting public health with healthy corner store models². This organization contains a subgroup called the Healthy Corner Store Network, which corner stores have the choice to join to integrate healthy models into their store locations. UCen Corner Stores could gain consultation and access to resources by joining this network.

The **Baltimore Healthy Stores** is an intervention program that works to expand healthy food options⁴. While this organization is out of state, UCen could begin creating national ties to other organizations furthering their reputability.

The **Isla Vista Food Cooperative** has been serving the community for over forty years. Their work in the community has resulted in the testing of methods to get individuals to consider their grocery store options and what they choose to purchase. They are a part of the How Good Program, which ranks food on a scale of good, great, and best to indicate their impacts on sustainability, farmworker rights, and public health. This ranking is a labeling system that allows customers to gain information on the products they are buying quickly through the use of an app.

Identified Case Studies cont.

The **Inner City Muslim Action Network Corner Store** campaigns using street art to promote corner store culture and shift how the public views the health of food in these stores. This could be implemented within UCen dining and tie in with food demonstrations⁶.

Materials and Methods

RESEARCH:

The Healthy Snacking Project aimed to identify case studies that could serve as effective learning tools in creating healthier and more sustainable corner stores on UCSB's campus. Strategies used by the Healthy Corner Store Initiative included founding useful partnerships within the community, securing long term funding, and tiered product integration⁷. A tiered approach implements healthier options in gradual timeline along with training or marketing shifts. Another approach, The Healthy Corner Store Network uses is a four step process of preparation, involvement, integration, and longevity. Also, message framing and behavioral change are areas of intersection in the research on how to persuade individuals to make these healthy and sustainable buying decisions so that it is feasible for corner stores to sell the products. Research studies showed labeling can cause youth to choose healthier items in grocery store aisles. A caveat is this requires that there is enough product variety³. For corner stores this is relevant because it shows that simple images can alter buying decisions if enough variance in product options is given.

Labeling while useful has limitations. Behavioral change research showed that when an individual is able to cause the intended result, they are more likely to change their habits⁵. This told the project that empowering students to make decisions is more impactful than simply providing information to them.

DATA COLLECTION & AUDITS:

The data collection and audit stage of the project consisted of gathering information on what is currently being sold by the UCen at corner stores and cafes. The audit stage included data collection on what foods and beverages are sold at each location, examination of signage, and tracking of labeling. The data showed the UCen Corner Store locations are already offering some of the healthy snacking products listed in the research stage and had a basis to build off of going forward in furthering the quantity of healthy and sustainable options. Accurate data was important to condense and analyze for the collaboration stage of the Healthy Snacking Project. It is critical to note the perception of the amount of healthy food in the stores may be influenced by limited marketing or signage that indicates the options available. In addition, it became clear that it is important to identify what the desires and concerns of the student body are around the campus food system to gain information on what they would support in UCen locations. Another factor may be the range of perspectives on what defines health and sustainability.

COLLABORATION:

The Healthy Snacking Project conducted an informational interview with Melissa Cohen from the **Isla Vista Food Cooperative**. The Isla Vista Food Cooperative serves as a strong example in the Isla Vista community of a store with limited physical space that has successfully created a model around health and sustainability while considering affordability for various demographics. Melissa Cohen provided the Healthy Snacking Project with information on their product selection, signage choice, labeling, and pricing structure.

Additionally, Cisco Celis, **UCen Assistant Director**, was able to provide the project with more details on what the UCen is currently doing around health and sustainability in their stores. During the interview we learned that there is a variety of efforts to increase the healthy options within the stores. One part we recognize is that much of the information we gathered on the UCen's efforts are not known by a majority of the UCSB campus. The primary method the UCen uses for outreach is through vendors coming to UCSB to complete demos.

Next Steps & Conclusion

Going forward, further collaboration is needed with UCen Dining to begin the integration stage of the Healthy Snacking Project. With academically backed case studies and data collection complete, design of labeling and signage on health and sustainability is now ready to move into the implementation stage. In addition, tabling to gain campus support of existing healthy items and new options is necessary for the longevity success of the project.



Future Goals

The future goal for this project is to implement the techniques found in the research and collaboration phases. Expanding tabling to give students the opportunity to provide feedback to the UCen on what they would support along with giving the students evidence of what the UCen is already doing for health and sustainability on campus. Also, advertising healthy and sustainable products can be done in collaboration with the UCen to expand awareness of the existing products. Finally, labeling foods with graphics such as organic or vegan can make healthy snacking more accessible to the student body. These labels could be formed in collaboration with the dining commons to create consistency in food labels across campus.

Literature Cited

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