Background

Diet is a significant contributor (or protective factor) to many chronic diseases, including obesity and other health outcomes. Food environments and community characteristics interact to influence food choices and dietary quality. As result, communities are now examining their food environments to determine if there is opportunity to improve access to healthy foods through public policy.

In January 2015, LiveWell Colorado HEAL Cities & Towns Campaign issued a Request for Proposals (RFP) to all Campaign participants to work with a food policy consultant on a food assessment. Northglenn responded to the RFP and was one of two municipalities selected for the project.

The Northglenn assessment aims to help address the following primary questions:

- What elements of Northglenn's food environment provide which residents with healthy food that they choose to eat?

- What is missing from Northglenn’s food environment that could positively influence healthy food consumption?

- What role can the city play to advance access to and consumption of healthy foods?
Methods

Healthier food retail efforts depend upon reliable information on the food retail environment. It is important to ensure that the findings and recommendations are based on a community need or problem. A wide variety of methods were used to gather data and information for this report. Guidance throughout the process was provided by the Northglenn Healthy Eating Active Living (HEAL) Committee, which consists of seven resident/business members and six staff from different city departments. Several data sources were used to inform the maps that show how food retail and resources are distributed throughout Northglenn.

- Demographics from the US Census
- Women Infant and Children (WIC) data from Tri-County Health Department
- Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) from the US Department of Agriculture
- Northglenn food retailers inventory from Northglenn Economic Development
- Transit information from Regional Transportation Department (RTD)
- Inventory of Northglenn’s streets, trails, parks, public lands and community gardens.

Community input was gathered primarily through a community survey as well as focus groups and key informant interviews.

Key Findings

The Food Access Assessment process revealed the following key findings about Northglenn’s food environment:

Food-Related Health Issues Exist

- 2 of the top 3 causes of death in Northglenn are food-related diseases.
- Under 17% of surveyed residents report eating the recommended 5 or more servings of fruits and vegetables a day.
Body Mass Index (BMI) data shows alarmingly high rates of overweight and obesity for children and youth.

**Food Environments Could Better Support Youth Health**

- About ¼ of youth in Adams 12 Five Star schools are consuming the recommended servings of fruits and vegetables per day.
- Close to a ¼ of high school students are overweight and obese according to their BMI.
- Youth have access to less healthy foods and limited access to fresh, healthy options in and around the school environment.
- Residents Have Access to Significant Numbers of Less Healthy Food Options
  - Northglenn has a good deal of less healthy retail options, including fast food restaurants and convenience stores. The overall ratio of less healthy to healthy food retail is 19:1.
  - The maps in the report show that less healthy food options are more available in lower-income and non-white neighborhoods

**The Food Environment May Cater More to Travelers that Residents**

- Many restaurants are located near or off of I-25 and the major arterials that run through Northglenn.
- There is an imbalance between healthy and less healthy food options (currently the ratio of less healthy to healthy foods retail is 19:1).
- Responses to the Healthy Eating Active Living (HEAL) survey showed that Northglenn residents are traveling outside of the city for food they need or want. This makes a case that Northglenn's food environment is not addressing the needs of residents.
Connectivity to Food Could be Expanded

- Many neighborhoods feel disconnected from food retail options, particularly in terms of walking, biking and busing, but also vehicular access.

- Resident survey results indicate that 15% of respondents live at least 3 miles from where they do their primary shopping, which is typically outside of Northglenn.

Opportunity Exists to Enhance Nutritious School Food Programs

- Northglenn has a higher percentage of students that qualify for Free and Reduced Lunch (FRL) than District-wide.

- There are opportunities to expand on existing programs such as school gardens, weekend/backpack food programs, after-school meals, summer feeding sites, farmers markets or Community Supported Agriculture at schools and community centers.

Northglenn has few Healthy or Culturally Relevant Food options for the Latino population

- There may be opportunities to expand food retail business or to work with existing convenience stores to provide more options for fresh, healthy, and culturally-relevant foods and shopping experiences.

Residents Feel Disconnected from Fresh Food Options Such as Gardens, Markets

- Focus group participants and key informants discussed the health and social benefits of community gardens and farmers markets, but expressed concern that they were hidden from the public, inaccessible, not well-promoted, and not integrated into community programming or activities as much as they could be.

- 72% of survey respondents selected that more farmers markets or produce stands in their neighborhood would improve their food environment.
Federal Food Assistance Programs Can be Leveraged

- Northglenn has a considerable number of SNAP-eligible but not enrolled residents.
- Participation in other federal programs such as Child and Adult Care Food Program, Women, Infants & Children (WIC), and even The Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP) older adult meal program could be increased across the City.
- These programs can help build bridges to consistent, healthier eating and bring in extra federal dollars to Northglenn.

There may be additional Food Insecure Populations that are not identified in this report that the City may want to continue to explore

- Northglenn has a fairly low home-ownership rate and a slightly higher poverty rate when compared to the state.
- The City may want to study if food insecurity is prevalent in populations that are currently hidden, which could include those older adults that do not come to the Senior Center and those low-income families whose incomes are just slightly too high to qualify for federal food assistance programs due to incomes slightly above the poverty level.
- Northglenn may want to explore if food insecurity, lower fruit and vegetable intake, and more pressing health concerns may be more present in residents that are not accessing any services and are therefore eating diets low in nutritional value.

Recommendations

Develop & Disseminate Monthly Community HEAL Messages

- Develop a month-by-month schedule of HEAL-related messages to demonstrate the City’s leadership and commitment to a healthy Northglenn.
- Provide tangible tips, tools, and resources for residents to access (and afford) healthier eating options.

- Give priority to issues raised in this report such as availability and benefit of food assistance programs for residents of all ages, and existing availability of community gardens, farmers markets, and other healthy community options.

- Use the City’s Facebook page, water bills, and Northglenn Connection to disseminate monthly messages.

- Work with community partners to ensure monthly messages reach older adults, lower-income residents, and youth.

**Promote Home Gardening**

- Use the new monthly HEAL messages in the late winter/early spring to increase awareness about when and how to start backyard gardening.

- Partner with Lowes to provide free lumber (and perhaps compost) for raised gardens for Northglenn residents.

- Explore the possibility of City-provided “gardens in a box” which could include seeds, soil, planting calendars and tips, and other materials.

- Consider sponsoring volunteer days for City staff to build raised beds for residents who may need extra support due to limited financial, time, or physical resources.

- Support more community gardens that can include low-income families as gardeners and grow more produce for distribution to food pantries and meal programs. Potential actions could include:
  
  - Connect new gardens with the Adams County Garden CO-OP.
  
  - Pay water fees associated with any gardens that donate food.
Reimburse gardens for supply costs (e.g., similar to a program funded by Keep Thornton Beautiful).

Coordinate a network of community gardeners and home gardeners to increase donations.

Enhance the Visibility of Existing Markets & Gardens

- Consider developing a branding and marketing campaign for community- or locally-grown foods in and around Northglenn such as community gardens and farmers markets.

- Improve signage around existing farmers market as well as all publically available community gardens.

- Advertise existing paths and bus routes to gardens or markets.

- Work with community partners to ensure all residents of all ages and ethnicities are aware of opportunities to use gardens and markets and tailor them to their unique needs.

- Use City marketing and communications channels to regularly advertise public community gardens and the farmers market. Highlight a “farmer (or gardener) of the month” as well as special, seasonal deals on fresh produce.

Develop & Adopt Healthy City Procurement Policies

- Healthy Meetings Policy: Develop and formally adopt guidelines for healthy meetings for all staff and council meetings.

- Healthy Vending Policy: Develop and adopt guidelines stipulating nutritional requirements for products in all city-managed vending machines.

- Healthy Events Policy: Develop and adopt goals for offering healthy options at all city-sponsored community events.
Healthy Procurement Policy: Develop and adopt nutritional guidelines for any food purchased for any occasion using public funds.

Allow Residential Food Sales

- Develop and adopt a city ordinance that would allow the sale of cottage foods by the grower, at their place or residence. Items could include produce, eggs, and honey.
- Develop means for tracking participation by requiring applications or permits or other communication.
- Require annual reporting from all participants on items sold and gross revenue.
- Promote and encourage the use of the ordinance through monthly HEAL messages and other communications.
- Amend existing Special Sales section of the Zoning Ordinance, Section 11-19-3(d), to allow fruit and vegetable stands on commercial properties.
- Encourage additional neighborhood-level produce markets including multi-stall farmers markets that focus on locally-grown foods as well as neighborhood produce stands.

Increase the Availability of Fresh Produce at Schools

- Partner with a food Co-op or other organization, such as Bountiful Baskets, to develop a school-site drop for weekly baskets of produce for staff, families, and youth.
- Work with Northglenn High students to develop, pilot, promote, and evaluate a mobile (healthy) food truck or weekly mobile fresh produce market to the high school.
- Work with schools to bring a garden to every school (including high schools) that sources direct to its cafeteria and includes nutrition education programming.
- Work with students of all ages to explore the potential for a youth-run farmers market that could integrate produce grown in a school garden.
Explore Healthy Retail Partnerships with Corner Stores

- Identify areas of most concern due to low access, low income, and high concentrations of convenience stores. Conduct additional in-store analysis on the nutritional environment, marketing and promotion, and ability to make changes.

- Identify corner or convenience stores that make up the food environment in low-income communities and Latino communities.

- Approach store managers about potential partnerships to assess the in-store nutritional environment and survey existing and potential clientele about shopping habits and needs.

- Discuss potential incentives for storeowners with Tri County Health Department.

- Adopt policies that focus on neighborhood-level improvements to strengthen healthy food access. Improvements surrounding retailers could include walkability, bikability, lighting and other safety measures, to ensure that residents feel safe and welcomed in areas around healthy retail.

- Provide incentives to healthy food retail and transit to locate nearby low-income housing.

Assess Primary Barriers to SNAP Enrollment

- Develop and administer a survey and/or focus group of SNAP clientele and potential SNAP clientele through the community center, senior center, and local food pantries in order to better understand primary motivators and barriers to enrollment for different demographic populations.

- Query residents about their experience in applying for and receiving SNAP benefits.

- Interview county human services staff to understand their goals for enrollment and how the city can support them.
- Work with Hunger Free Colorado to tailor outreach and enrollment efforts to Northglenn: [http://www.hungerfreecolorado.org/snap-benefits/](http://www.hungerfreecolorado.org/snap-benefits/).

**Next Steps**

To ensure that the findings and recommendations from the assessment will be used, the plan will be used as a guiding document, as Northglenn moves forward on several planning projects. The HEAL Committee has integrated several recommendations into their work plan. The information in the plan will also be used to inform policy plans and projects including the New Code Northglenn, the 112th Station Area Master Plan, and a Bicycle and Pedestrian Master Plan.