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Creating Store and Community-Level Feedback Reports for Food Establishments to Support Nutrition Environment Improvement

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INTRODUCTION. The availability of healthy options in food stores is important to healthy eating and obesity prevention. The Health Statistics and Geography Lab at UMass Medical School is conducting longitudinal surveys to determine the availability of healthy food in food stores throughout the state of Massachusetts as part the Community Transformation Grant and Mass in Motion initiatives. Providing feedback to store proprietors and managers as well as community workers is an important component to support community environmental interventions.

METHODS. The Community Nutrition Environment Evaluation Data System (C-NEEDS) was developed for food environment surveillance. C-NEEDS takes into account seasonal and geographic variations in food supplies, cultural relevance, and USDA dietary recommendations. Since May 2012, nearly 1300 food stores throughout Massachusetts have been surveyed and analyzed. Healthy Food Availability Index (HFAI) is calculated for each store (range: 0 to 56), with a higher score indicating greater availability of healthy items.

REPORTS. Store-level reports are provided to proprietors and managers of individual food stores in conjunction with community workers. The reports provide HFAI scores for the store for the current year, previous year(s), if available, comparing to the average scores of similar stores within the same community. Community workers and proprietors of food stores can use the store-level reports to determine areas of need and appropriate intervention methodology. Community-level feedback reports provide information on average scores, by store type, for their community as well as for communities of similar size and socio-demographic status. They can be used to compare community HFAI to comparable communities as well as track change in scores over time.

DISCUSSION. Providing feedback to community workers and food store owners is an essential aspect of community environment interventions. The information contained in the C-NEEDS feedback reports provides benchmarks for both store owners and communities to achieve.

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