



LOMA LINDA
UNIVERSITY
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Best food forward: One community's strategies for steering the food environment towards health

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OVERVIEW

The food environment can have a greater influence than nutritional knowledge and attitudes on how people make food-related decisions^{1,2}. This poster describes methods used to assess the food environment in and around Loma Linda, California that can be applied to other communities, and discusses ongoing initiatives and challenges to improving local access to healthy food.

BACKGROUND & RATIONALE



The food environment and its health consequences are increasingly being addressed both as public health and community planning concerns. Environmental cues related to food often override physiological signals of hunger and satiety¹, illuminating the need for making healthy food choices in a community accessible, attractive, and ubiquitous. Research suggests that focusing efforts on making the built food environment conducive to good health may have better outcomes in preventing and reducing obesity and other non-communicable diseases than individual-level education and prevention initiatives¹.

Termed a "Blue Zone" and internationally recognized for its innovative health sciences university and its population's vibrant longevity³, Loma Linda is a small southern Californian city with a legacy of good health currently threatened in part by a food environment with limited accessible healthy food options. A coalition committed to bridging the interests of the city, university, and community was created to address these concerns and others. Creating a food environment where the easy, default options are the healthy options could greatly contribute to the long-term health of individuals and the community as a whole.

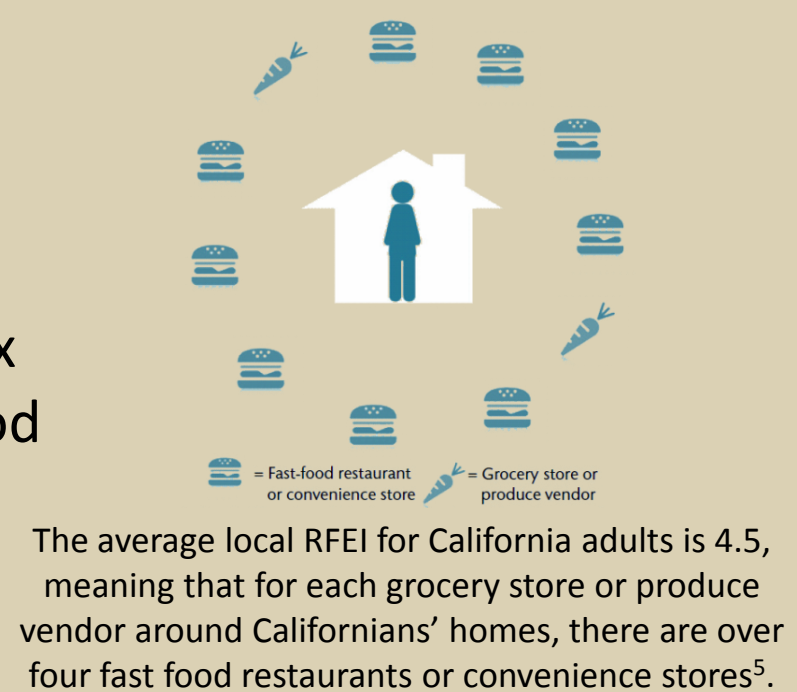
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- [1] Cohen, D., & Farley, T. A. (2008). Eating as an Automatic Behavior. *Preventing chronic disease*, 5(1).
- [2] Story, M., Kaphingst, K. M., Robinson-O'Brien, R., & Glanz, K. (2008). Creating healthy food and eating environments: policy and environmental approaches. *Annu. Rev. Public Health*, 29, 253-272.
- [3] Buettner, D. (2005). New Wrinkles on Aging Residents of Okinawa, Sardinia, and Loma Linda, California, live longer, healthier lives than just about anyone else on Earth. What do they know that the rest of us don't?. *National Geographic*, 208(5), 2.
- [4] California Center for Public Health Advocacy. (2007). *Searching for Healthy Food: The Food Landscape in California Cities and Counties – RFEI Detailed Methodology*.
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FOOD ENVIRONMENT ASSESSMENT METHODS & RESULTS | November 2012 – May 2013

Retail Food Environment Index (RFEI)

The RFEI is the number of fast food outlets and convenience stores in a city over the number of fresh produce retailers⁴. The index is most useful for setting food environment goals and making comparisons across different communities.



$$RFEI = \frac{\text{fast food outlets} + \text{convenience stores}}{\text{supermarkets} + \text{produce stores} + \text{farmers' markets}}$$

RESULTS: The RFEI is Loma Linda in 2.4, but is as high as 8.0 in adjacent cities. As community members frequently drive across city limits to eat, these numbers illuminate the need for making healthy food choices within the city accessible, attractive, and ubiquitous, and illustrate how the food environment in one city can affect residents of another, calling for inter-city food environment strategies.

Community Visioning Workshops & Focus Groups

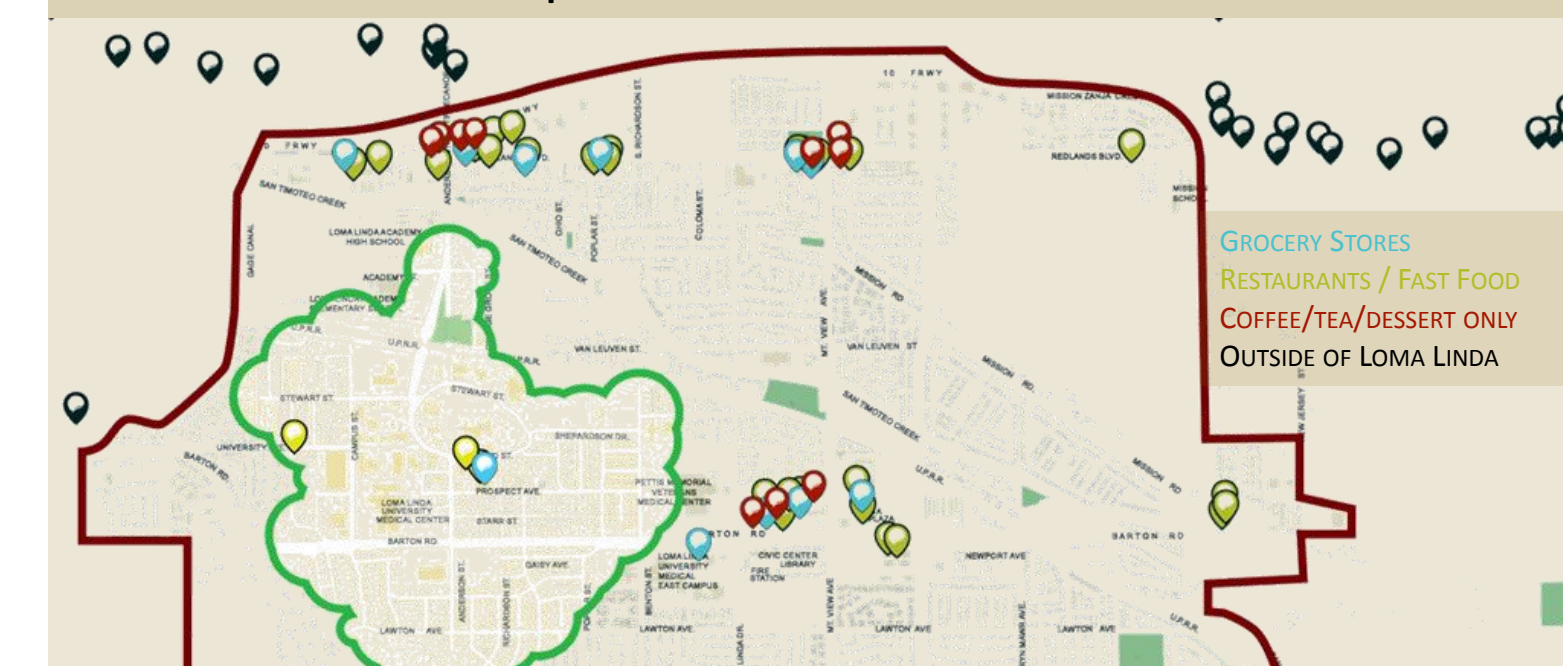


METHODS: Community members identified the food environment as one of three priority areas to address in the city. A workshop focused on the food environment brought together community members with city and university representatives to prioritize areas of concern and discuss solutions. Two focus groups were also conducted to obtain more detailed perspectives.

RESULTS: Suggestions during the workshop and focus groups included menu labeling, a 1.0 RFEI goal, incentives for health restaurant start-ups, food trucks, local farm direct produce, food zoning, and involving schools.

Retail Food Outlet Mapping

METHODS: Maps of the area were created outlining the city boundaries (red) and radius approximating a 15 minute walk from the campus core (green). Retail food outlets were marked with pins.



RESULTS: Very few eating establishments exist within walking distance from the city's core hubs of activity. Developing healthy meal options in these areas would increase community member health, benefit the local economy, reduce traffic, and help create a community culture and identity synonymous with well-being.

ONGOING FOOD ENVIRONMENT INITIATIVES | January 2013 - Present



- **Accessible Farmer's Market:** A weekday evening farmer's market was created in a central location to increase accessibility for residents, students, staff, and visitors. The new market provides local healthy food and a social gathering space for the community.
- **Farm Share Distribution:** A weekly farm share (CSA) distribution program of fresh produce from a consortium of local farmers is being planned with accessible workplace and community drop points. Farm to campus and farm to hospital ideas are also being explored.



- **Community Garden Revitalization:** Partnerships between community organizations are being formed to revitalize two currently-fallow community garden plots in the city into active hubs for community gatherings, workshops, and food production.
- **Fast Food Ordinance:** An ordinance was drafted, revised, and passed by city council to prevent additional formula-based fast food restaurants with drive-thrus from opening in the city. Supporting the establishment of healthy dining options is a next step.

LESSONS, CHALLENGES, & OPPORTUNITIES

- **Increasing the visibility, awareness, and citizen involvement** of healthy food initiatives within the community remains an area for improvement.
- Strategies to **incentivize healthy, sustainable food outlets** are called for, despite limited retail location options remaining a challenge for attracting healthy dining options to the city.
- **Aligning the goals** of the city, university, community members, and business developers remains another challenge.
- A **spectrum of initiatives** from community to policy levels are necessary to reshape the food environment.
- Potential exists for **increasing connections** with existing organizations that hold similar agendas and learning from the food environment strategies being implemented by other communities.

