The food environment can have a greater influence than nutritional knowledge and attitudes on how people make food-related decisions. 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 as public health and community planning concerns. Environmental cues related to food often override physiological signals of hunger and satiety, 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 initiatives.

Termed a “Blue Zone” and internationally recognized for its innovative health sciences university and its population’s vibrant longevity, 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 improve health outcomes. The index is most useful for setting food environment goals and making comparisons across different communities.

**OVERVIEW**

The Food Environment Index (REFI) is a score of 1.0 for each food environment characteristic measured, based on fast food restaurants, produce stores, supermarkets, convenience stores, and farmer’s markets. The REFI scores range from a low of 0.0 to a high of 6.0. The average local REFI for California adults is 4.1, meaning that for each grocery store or produce vendor around Californians’ homes, there are over four fast food restaurants or convenience stores.

**FOOD ENVIRONMENT ASSESSMENT METHODS & RESULTS | November 2012 – May 2013**

**Ongoing Food Environment Initiatives | January 2013 - Present**

- **Retail Food Environment Index (REFI)**
  - The REFI is the number of fast food outlets and convenience stores in a city over the number of fresh produce retailers. The index is most useful for setting food environment goals and making comparisons across different communities.
  - **RESULTS:** The REFI 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 city.

- **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 REFI goal, incentives for health restaurant start-ups, food trucks, local farm direct produce, food zoning, and involving schools.

- **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 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.

**REFERENCES**

2 Blyth, M. F., 
6 California Center for Public Health Advocacy, PolicyLink, and the UCLA Center for Health Policy Research (2006). Designed for Disease: The Link Between Local Food Environments and Obesity and Diabetes.