

Local Farm Produce: Making Healthy Choices More Convenient

Issue

Convenience stores are often the only food source in low-income, urban neighborhoods. They are not known for their fresh produce. Staff at Thurston County Public Health and Social Services saw an opportunity to connect small convenience stores with the county's thriving local farms. They wanted to bring fresh fruits and vegetables to downtown neighborhoods and make healthy choices the easy choices.

Thurston County Public Health and Social Services applied for funding through "Communities Putting Prevention to Work" (CPPW) for their Healthy Retail Stores project. CPPW provides federal stimulus dollars for towns and cities to make changes that encourage healthy eating, more physical activity and reduced tobacco use. Projects that receive funding focus on policies and neighborhood changes that are shown to be effective in reducing obesity and smoking.

Lucky 7 Food Store in downtown Olympia met the criteria for the project. Public health staff approached them with an opportunity to market fresh, organic produce, and they agreed to try.

Intervention

Two local farms partnered with Lucky 7 through the summer and fall of 2011. Rising River Farm set up an outdoor farm stand at the convenience store one day a week. Left Foot Organics marketed their produce from coolers inside the store. Left Foot Organics dropped off pre-wrapped bundles each week and any items that didn't sell were donated to the Thurston County Food Bank. Public health staff helped with promotion in the neighborhood.

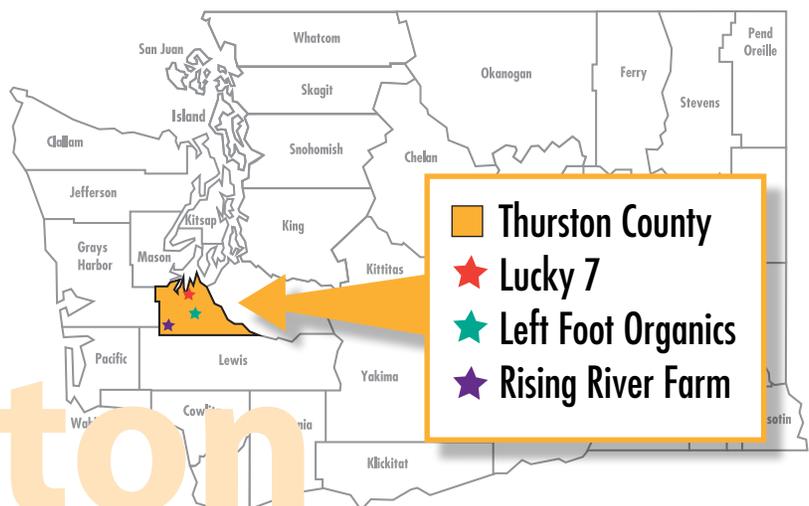
Ann Vandeman directs Left Foot Organics, a local non-profit organization. The farm provides employment opportunities for developmentally disabled adults and at-risk rural teens, who gain farming and business skills. Ann supports expanding the healthy stores project to include other convenience stores in the area.

Impact

People from the Olympia neighborhood expressed appreciation for the effort, and gave lots of positive feedback. Ann said, "We'd love to continue providing fresh produce for our community. It's important to us to support healthy eating and make a variety of fresh produce more visible and available." The local health department strongly supports farm-to-market connections and is looking at the best ways to make the project sustainable in the coming season. CPPW funding for these prevention efforts is making a difference in Thurston County.

Thurston County population: 252,264
Olympia population: 46,478

**Thurston County Public Health
and Social Services**
412 Lilly Road N.E.
Olympia, WA 98506-5132



Thurston