Shop Smart, Eat Smart: Using Retailer Perspectives to Design a Statewide Healthy Food Retail Program

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Virginia’s Family Nutrition Program

Mission

FNP’s mission is to teach limited-resource families and youth how to make healthier food choices and become better managers of available food resources for optimal health and growth.

Our evidence-based programs focus on basic nutrition, physical activity, safe food handling and thrifty food shopping.

FNP is an educational arm of Virginia Tech and part of Virginia Cooperative Extension.
FNP Programs

**Teaching** limited-resource families and youth how to make healthy choices through comprehensive, short term, and online educational experiences

**Policy, Systems, & Environmental** (PSE) changes to encourage healthy behavior

**Social Media and Marketing** to encourage healthy behavior across various platforms including social media

eatsmartmovemoreva.org
SNAP-Ed Prioritizing Healthy Retail

• National SNAP-Ed prioritized healthy retail programming

Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)

• 42 million or 1 in 8 low-income Americans

• Participants visited over 260,000 authorized food stores to purchase US $63 billion dollars worth of foods and beverages in 2017


Choice-Architecture and Marketing-Mix Strategies

Profile

Use fresh and healthy ingredients to ensure that 50% or more of meals meet recommended nutrient targets.

- Chicken Nuggets
- Fried Fish
- Hamburger
- Mac & Cheese
- BBQ Chicken Breast
- Salmon Fillet
- Veggie Burger
- Skinny Chicken Sake
3 Portion
Reduce and standardize meal portion sizes to meet recommended nutrient targets:

- Kids: 550 calories/meal
- Teens: 600 calories/meal
- Adults: 660 calories/meal
4 Pricing
Use pricing strategies to increase sales and revenue for healthy choices that meet recommended nutrient targets:

Healthy Menu
- Half portions are half price every day!

WRAPS
- $8/3 (1/2 portion)
- Avocado Chicken
- Vegetarian
- Tuna Melt

SALADS
- $8/4 (1/2 portion)
- Kale Caesar
- Asian Sesame
- Mediterranean

ROLLS
- $8/4 (1/2 portion)
- Turkey Sesame Roll
- Spicy Chicken
- Tuna Melt

Eat Smart Move More
Virginia Cooperative Extension • Family Nutrition Program
5 Promotion
Use responsible marketing practices to promote healthy food and beverage products that meet recommended nutrient targets.
6 Picks

Establish healthy default choices for side dishes and beverages for all bundled meals sold to children, teens and parents.
7 Priming or Prompting
Offer menu labeling and contextual info to help customers make healthy choices.
8 Proximity
Place healthy choices at eye level and physically closer to customers at point of purchase.
SNAP-Ed Prioritizing Healthy Retail

• Need for research on creating a state-wide SNAP-Ed retail program to fit Virginia’s unique situation and needs
A Key Gatekeeping Population

• Food store owners, managers, and businesses
Retailer Perspective to Inform SNAP-Ed Approach

• SNAP-Ed programming must be evidence-based
• Gap in the research: Retailer perspectives on nutrition interventions
• Need input from the gatekeepers of sustainable change!
Study #1

Rural SNAP-Authorized Food Store Owners’ and Managers’ Perceived Feasibility to Implement Marketing-Mix and Choice-Architecture Strategies to Encourage Healthy Product Purchasing by SNAP Consumers
Methods

Mixed-Methods

• Convergent Parallel Design

Cross Sectional

• Summer 2017

Methods
Sampling and Recruitment

• 84 SNAP-authorized retailers eligible to participate in 2 purposefully sampled counties

  • Independently (n=42) and corporate/chain-owned (n=43)

Methods

Measures

- Recorded card sort with a prompt to elicit retailers’ perceived feasibility to implement 62 marketing-mix and choice-architecture strategies
Data Analysis

Quantitative

• Pearson Chi Square and Fisher’s Exact Test
  • Differences in strategy feasibility by independent or corporate designation (p<0.05)
Data Analysis

Qualitative

• Constant Comparison Method

  • Organized by **barriers and facilitators**, using implementation scale constructs:
    • acceptability, appropriateness, and feasibility


Key Results
Results
Descriptive Statistics

- 29 participants
Results
Card Sort

% sample indicating marketing-mix and choice-architecture strategies as feasible

Place – 52%
Profile – 72%
Portion – 62%
Pricing – 66%
Promotion – 69%
Priming – 76%
Prompting – 83%
Proximity – 90%

Results
Lowest agreement strategies

• Decrease shelf space of unhealthy foods and beverages
• Increase the price of unhealthy foods and beverages
• Move unhealthy options to the back of the store or away from high consumer traffic areas
• Offer a SNAP match program for fresh fruits and vegetables
• Decrease promotions of unhealthy foods and beverages
Results
Perceived costs to make changes

• Place strategies feasible, p<0.05
  • Corporate managers were more likely to indicate Place strategies as not feasible (11 out of 16) than independent owners/managers (3 out of 13)
Results

Qualitative

• Similar themes observed between independent and corporate retailers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Barriers Regarding Feasibility to Implement Marketing-Mix and Choice-Architecture Strategies</th>
<th>Not Profitable/Effective&lt;sup&gt;b&lt;/sup&gt;</th>
<th>n=52, 84.6% “People love to sample food, they won’t always buy it, but they love to sample it (IP23).”</th>
<th>Corporate Policy&lt;sup&gt;b&lt;/sup&gt;</th>
<th>n=93, 93.8% “Not that they couldn’t rearrange it, but I’m just saying, it would be a lot of hassle, red tape. It would have to be signed off by. There would be a lot of signatures, let’s put it the way (CP2).”</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Strategy Misaligned with Consumer Base or Store Model&lt;sup&gt;b&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>n=29, 84.6% “That requires remodeling and that requires also that you have the customer base. If you don’t have the customer base for that as a small man you cannot afford to do that (IP29).”</td>
<td>Strategy Misaligned with Consumer Base or Store Model&lt;sup&gt;b&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>n=44, 75% “…but in the way we’re set up and the way my customers drive my sales far as what their main reasons for coming in here, I don’t know if really expanding and putting a whole lot more in here would help (CP1).”</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lack of Store Space/Infrastructure&lt;sup&gt;c&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>n=30, 76.9% “We don’t have room for all of that (IP7).”</td>
<td>Choice Not Profitable/Effective&lt;sup&gt;b&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>n=26, 56.3% “…it never really helps anything, people don’t put attention to it (CP27).”</td>
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appropriateness: “perceived fit, relevance, or compatibility” within setting

Conclusions

- **Unhealthy** foods and beverages should not be targeted for environmental changes.

- **Prompting and Proximity** strategies seem an ideal medium to encourage healthy choices.

- Need to understand required adaptations of choice-architecture and marketing-mix strategies to **enhance appropriateness** to food store setting.

Limitations: small sample size; results non-generalizable/transferable; variable data collection environments.
Study #2

Rural SNAP-Authorized Food Store Product Availability and Owners’ and Managers’ Healthy Food and Beverage Perceptions Inform the Need for Retailer-Targeted Nutrition Education and Training
Methods

Measures

• Free list exercise to assess retailers’ perceptions of ‘healthy’

Methods

Measures

• Environmental measure of healthy food availability using a Market Basket Assessment Tool (MBAT)

• 2015 Dietary Guidelines for Americans & USDA Thrifty Food Plan


<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Measure #1: Grains</th>
<th>Avail.</th>
<th>Price</th>
<th>Size</th>
<th>Comments</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>100% Whole Wheat Bread</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Cold Cereal (≥3g fiber &amp; ≤7g sugar)</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Hot Cereal</strong></td>
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<td>Oatmeal without Added Sugar</td>
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<td>Whole Grain Cream of Wheat</td>
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<td>Whole Grain Grits</td>
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<td><strong>Other Baked Goods</strong></td>
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<td>Whole Grain Bagels</td>
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<td>Whole Grain English Muffins</td>
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<td>Whole Grain Tortillas</td>
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<td><strong>Other Grains</strong></td>
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<td>Brown Rice</td>
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<td>Whole Grain Pasta</td>
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<td>Unflavored or Low Fat Popcorn</td>
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<tr>
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<th>Canned</th>
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</table>

How many total varieties are available? 1-4 | 5-9 | 10+

What percent of fresh is acceptable quality? 25-50% | 50-75% | 75%+
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Measure #3: Vegetables</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Avail.</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Asparagus</td>
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<td>Beans</td>
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<td>Beets</td>
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<td>Broccoli</td>
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<td>Cabbage</td>
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<td>Carrots</td>
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<td>Cauliflower</td>
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<td>Corn</td>
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<td>Cucumber</td>
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<td>Green Beans</td>
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<td>Potatoes</td>
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<td>Spinach</td>
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<td>Tomatoes</td>
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<td>Other _____</td>
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<tr>
<td>How many total varieties are available?</td>
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<tr>
<td>What percent of fresh is acceptable quality?</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Measure #5: Dairy &amp; Eggs</th>
<th>Avail.</th>
<th>QUA</th>
<th>Price</th>
<th>Size</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Low-fat or fat-free milk</td>
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<tr>
<td>Low-fat or fat-free cheese</td>
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<tr>
<td>Low-fat or fat-free yogurt or Greek yogurt</td>
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<tr>
<td>Eggs</td>
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<tr>
<td>Egg mixtures/products</td>
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<td>Other</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Measure #6: Dried Beans, Seeds, Nuts, &amp; Nut Butters</th>
<th>Avail.</th>
<th>Price</th>
<th>Size</th>
<th>Comments</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dried Black Beans</td>
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<tr>
<td>Dried Garbanzo Beans/Chickpeas</td>
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<tr>
<td>Dried Lentils</td>
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<tr>
<td>Dried Pinto Beans</td>
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<tr>
<td>Pumpkin Seeds</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sunflower Seeds</td>
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<td>Almonds</td>
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<td>Cashews</td>
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<td>Mixed Nuts</td>
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<tr>
<td>Peanut Butter</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Data Analysis

- Descriptive statistics
  - Healthy food availability
- Free list item salience via ANTRHOPAC
  - Frequency and rank
Key Results
Results
Highly Available Healthy Products
Retailer Healthy Food Perceptions

- 100% Whole wheat bread (62.1%) 3 (10.34%)
- Eggs (72.4%) 8 (27.6%)
- Peanut Butter (96.6%) 0
- Sunflower seeds (79.3%) 0
- Bananas (55.2%)
- Canned green beans (82.8%)
- Sardines (82.8%)
- Tuna (75.9%) 2 (6.9%)

8 (27.6%) *higher due to some participants listing ‘fruits’
5 (17.2%) *canned vegetables
8 (27.6%)

EatSmart MoveMore
Virginia Cooperative Extension • Family Nutrition Program
Conclusions

• **Nutrition education and training** approaches are likely necessary to ensure intervention success and sustainability
  
  • E.g., Nuts, seeds, whole grains available and not perceived ‘healthy’
  
• Future research should engage with retailers to design protocols

**Limitations:** small sample size; results non-generalizable/transferable; variable data collection environments
Operationalizing the Research
SNAP-Ed Guidance

Store Partner Eligibility:

Retail locations serving low-income populations: Persons shopping in grocery stores when the store has been documented to redeem average monthly SNAP benefits of $50,000 or more or persons shopping in grocery stores located in census tracts where at least 50 percent of persons have gross incomes that are equal to or less than 185 percent of the poverty threshold. States may submit proposals to their respective Regional Office with alternate methods for defining grocery stores that serve the low-income target population as potentially eligible for SNAP-Ed. FNS recognizes that SNAP recipients do not necessarily shop at the stores that are closest to where they live. Census tracts in some cases may not be the right measure. For example, in rural areas a particular store may not redeem a monthly average of $50,000 in SNAP benefits but may be serving the majority of the SNAP low-income population or be the only grocery outlet in the community for the entire population, including the low-income population. When SNAP-Ed receipts are less than $50,000 monthly, a store may be show average monthly SNAP redemptions that are significant compared to overall sales or some other indication that the low-income population shops at that location.
SNAP-Ed Guidance

Store Partner Eligibility:

SNAP-Ed cannot fund infrastructure or inventory changes
Virginia SNAP-Ed

- 14 SNAP-Ed Agents across a very diverse state in both rural and urban areas
- Need for flexible programming with uniform evaluation
Market Basket Assessment Tool (MBAT)

• 4-page survey tool
• Only captures nutritious foods and beverages
• Cheapest healthy item available (price/unit)
• 2015 Dietary Guidelines for Americans & USDA Thrifty Food Plan
MBAT Research Used to Design SSES Logo
Approach

Results from the formative research directly informed a “Menu of Strategies” for retailers to choose from. This allowed for flexible programming across diverse partners.
Approach

Shop Smart Eat Smart Program
Family Nutrition Program
Virginia Cooperative Extension

Menu of Strategies for Retailers

Store Name:

In-Store Marketing
- Put up signs, posters, and/or pictures to promote healthy foods and beverages
- Incorporate shelf-labels with messages or nutrition info to highlight healthy foods and beverages
- Attached recipes to healthy foods and beverages
- Use cues (signs or floor arrows) to guide consumers to healthy foods and beverages
- Give away “prizes” (Family Nutrition Program incentives) for customers who make healthy purchases (reusable grocery bags, etc.)
- Use “For a limited time only” signs to create scarcity

Technical Assistance
- Develop appealing displays to highlight healthy foods and beverages
- Move healthy foods and beverages to check-out lanes/areas
- Move healthy foods and beverages to eye level locations rather than closer to the ground
- Use store aisle endcaps to display healthy foods and beverages
- Move healthy foods and beverages to the front of the store or to high consumer traffic areas (this could look like a “healthy food section”)

Direct Education & Customer Engagement
- Nutrition education for staff
- Food demonstrations with nutrition education
- Store tours
- Youth scavenger hunts
- Acknowledge consumer requests (Voice Your Choice, survey boards, etc.)
- MyPlate shopping lists
In-Store Marketing Materials
In-Store Marketing Materials
In-Store Marketing Materials
In-Store Marketing Materials

Healthy Food Here!

Shop EatSmart

EatSmart MoveMore
Virginia Cooperative Extension • Family Nutrition Program
In-Store Marketing Materials

FROZEN Fruits & Vegetables

- Long shelf life and ready to use!
- Great flavor and nutrients!
- Choose options without added sugar, saturated fat, or salt.

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In-Store Marketing Materials

Healthy Eating Starts Here
Look for the Basket!
In-Store Marketing Materials
In-Store Events
In-Store Events
In-Store Nutrition Education

Shop Smart, Eat Smart Grocery Store Tour

Objectives
- Introduce consumers to the layout of food stores and the healthy options that are available.
- Help consumers identify healthy food options that align with MyPlate guidelines, fit within a thrifty budget, and add variety to the diet.
- Teach consumers how to read nutrition facts, food labels, and calculate unit price.
- Help consumers make decisions to promote healthy living.
- Provide tips on how to save money when shopping for food.

Beginning of Tour
- Welcome participants.
- Explain objectives of the tour and what will happen.
- Review any relevant information from past lessons (including MyPlate & food groups).
- Ask if anyone has specific questions or concerns they would like you to cover.
- Optional: If stores have store layout maps, pass these out.

☐ Fresh Produce Section
- The fresh produce section is one of the advantages of shopping at a grocery store or super market.
- Bright, deep-colored produce often have a higher nutrient content (“eat the rainbow”).
- Leafy produce may lose some vitamins and minerals as well as be more expensive - this may be worth the extra money to save time and get produce in your diet.
- Some items are only or more readily available fresh during certain times of the year - the more readily available produce is often cheaper (seasonality).
- Ask: Are there certain fruits or vegetables you prefer to eat fresh versus canned, dried, or frozen? Why?
- We recommend that everyone eats 2 or more servings of fruit and 3 or more servings of vegetables each day. These servings can be fresh, canned, dried, or frozen.
- The unit price is often found next to the item retail price. Use the unit price to find the cheapest product per pound or ounce (compare different brands of the same product).
- Food labels and nutrition facts reveal serving size, servings per package, calories, saturated fat, sodium, sugar, and other nutrients.
- Convenience/prepackaged produce or salad bar items can be more expensive and may have more calories than whole product prepared at home.
- Compare price per pound of loose produce and the salad bar.
- Compare nutrition facts of different prepackaged salads of the same serving size.
- Tip: Pre-bagged bulk produce can have a better unit price than loose produce (e.g. bagged apples or potatoes, not pre-washed boxed lettuce), and organic produce is often more expensive.

☐ Fresh Meats Section
- Ask: What kinds of proteins do you enjoy? How do you prepare them?
- There are many different varieties of proteins - including meat, poultry, seafood, eggs, nuts, seeds, and canned or dried beans. (Mentioned in previous section?)

Scavenger Hunt for the Grocery Store

Bring this with you when you go to the grocery store. Hunt for all the healthy food you’ve been learning about!

1. Start by finding the FRESH Veggies! Find a veggie that matches the description, what is it?
   - Dark Green
   - Red or Orange
   - Starchy
   - Other
   - Other

2. Find the dairy section. What color is the cap for?:
   - Skim Milk:
   - 1% Milk:

3. Look at the aisle signs, what aisle number are these in?
   - Beans/Legumes:
   - Canned Veggies:
   - Canned Fruit:
   - Frozen Fruit:
   - Frozen Vegetables:
   - Pasta:
   - Rice:
   - Bread:

4. In the bread aisle, find “whole wheat” bread. Read the nutrition label for:
   - Serving Size:
   - Serving per Package:
   - Fat per Serving:
   - Sugar per Serving:

Eat Smart Move More

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Technical Assistance Training

• This is the most challenging category for Agents as not all have worked in retail

• Working with merchandisers and grocers to train on attractive displays and store layouts
Find a Partner Store Near You!

Online interactive map of partner stores as of February 2019.

https://eatsmartmovemoreva.org/shop/shop-smart-eat-smart
Process Evaluation

- The number of partner stores, frequency of SNAP-Ed indicators, and potential reach of SNAP-eligible individuals
- Number of strategies and related in-store marketing materials
- Each strategy has a set of evaluation questions gathering retailer perspectives of impacts on consumer purchasing
Agent-Facing Menu of Strategies

Shop Smart Eat Smart Program
Family Nutrition Program
Virginia Cooperative Extension

Agent-Facing Menu of Strategies
Store Name:

In-store Marketing

- Put up signs, posters, and/or pictures to promote healthy foods and beverages

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subject of Materials (MyPlate, Dairy, etc.)</th>
<th>Number of Materials</th>
<th>Date Materials Went Up</th>
<th>Date Materials Taken Down</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- Did the retailer perceive this impacting sales?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1 month</th>
<th>3 months</th>
<th>6 months</th>
<th>1 year</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- Incorporate shelf-labels with messages or nutrition info to highlight healthy foods and beverages

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category (Fruits, Vegetables, Dairy, etc.) of Product Varieties Labeled</th>
<th>Number of Materials</th>
<th>Date Labels Incorporated</th>
<th>Date Labels Stopped being Used</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Attached recipes to healthy foods and beverages

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Foods Highlighted in Recipe(s)</th>
<th>Number of Copies</th>
<th>Date Recipes Incorporated</th>
<th>Date Recipes Stopped being Used</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- Use cues (signs or floor arrows) to guide consumers to healthy foods and beverages

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Material</th>
<th>Number of Materials</th>
<th>Date Recipes Incorporated</th>
<th>Date Recipes Stopped being Used</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Evaluation Example

-Food demonstrations with nutrition education

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Lesson</th>
<th>Food(s) Highlighted</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Demo Lead</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fruits + Vegetables</td>
<td>Tomatoes, onions, bell pepper, carrots</td>
<td>9/11/18</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Whole Grains</td>
<td>Whole wheat tortillas</td>
<td>10/3/18</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proteins</td>
<td>Chickpeas, kale</td>
<td>11/3/18</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sodium</td>
<td>Low-sodium tomatoes, cabbage, oranges</td>
<td>1/4/19</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Calcium</td>
<td>Apples, yogurt, bananas</td>
<td>3/4/19</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Did the retailer perceive this impacting sales?</th>
<th>Was the impact negative or positive?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 month: Yes, impact on ingredients of recipes, F+V in general, + SNAP sales</td>
<td>Positive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 months:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 months:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 year:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Eat Smart Move More

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FY2018 Data

- 7 stores initiated the SSES program
- Potential reach of 95,726 individuals
- Average MBAT score of 33.6/40
Future Work for Evaluation

• SESS is in the first implementation year – ongoing data collection and analysis is needed to observe impact and inform improvement

• Future data collection may include consumer surveys (intercept or via Facebook) to assess behavior

• Sales data are challenging to get!
State-Wide Partnership Successes
Questions?

Bailey Houghtaling, MS, RDN (PhD May 2019)
baileyh@vt.edu
Two Phase Approach

- SSES is a 2-phase program: (1) Build demand of existing healthy foods in stores, (2) Support optional supply changes to increase healthy inventory
Optional Phase 2

- Agents act as nutrition consultants and food system liaisons to facilitate inventory changes
- Retailers are supply chain experts and SNAP-Ed Agents are nutrition experts
- FNP is developing partnerships with organizations who may be able to offer other services, such as infrastructure funding, wholesale and local food supply connections, and business planning resources
Evaluation Phase 2

- In addition to identifying qualifying potential store partners, the MBAT was used to capture a baseline assessment of healthy food items available.

- MBAT conducted each year and used to compare baseline to annual follow-up scores as a way to measure inventory changes.