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For Immediate Release**

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### **Sonoma County Communities Lack Healthy Food Options**

The Community Activity and Nutrition Coalition of Sonoma County (CAN-C) and its community partners are launching two pilot projects that will help markets and restaurants in south Santa Rosa, Boyes Hot Springs and Petaluma's Payran/McKinley neighborhoods offer more nutritious foods and promote healthier choices for customers.

An assessment conducted by CAN-C in the neighborhoods found they each contained five to nine times more unhealthy food sources, such as convenience stores and fast food restaurants, than healthier food sources, such as supermarkets and farmers' markets. The assessment was conducted following the release of a 2008 study by the University of California, Los Angeles and PolicyLink showing that people who live in neighborhoods with an abundance of unhealthy food sources have a higher prevalence of obesity and diabetes. In south Santa Rosa, approximately 65 percent of adults surveyed by CAN-C were overweight or obese, compared to 60 percent of adults countywide. The general lack of healthy food options in these neighborhoods may be contributing to the high rates of obesity among residents.

The CAN-C assessment found deficits in a number of areas. None of the stores and restaurants surveyed met standards for the marketing of healthy food. Fruits and vegetables in the stores were priced at least 10 percent higher than stores elsewhere in the county. Only a few stores accepted vouchers for the Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) supplemental food

program. And only one of the four neighborhoods had a farmers' market nearby.

To break these barriers to good nutrition, CAN-C and its partners are launching the Smart Meal Program and the Healthy Food Outlet Project by working with store and restaurant owners, first in the Roseland and Kawana Springs neighborhoods of south Santa Rosa and later in the Boyes Hot Springs and Petaluma's Payran/McKinley neighborhoods. The programs seek to increase the offerings and marketing of healthy food options in these communities.

The Healthy Food Outlet Project helps store owners improve their inventory of fresh, local produce, low-fat protein and dairy items, and alternatives to soda. The project is being implemented in five food outlets: Maria's Market, Mekong Market, Rancho Mendoza Supermercado, and two Lola's Markets. Stores are ranked on various factors, such as whether they prominently place healthy foods near checkout areas and limit advertisements for less healthy foods. Those that meet the new standards receive help with promotions and consumer education from CAN-C and its partners.

The Smart Meal Program sets nutrition standards for restaurant meals and will be implemented initially with Perry's Deli, La Familia Market & Deli, and two Lola's Restaurants. Participating restaurants promote entrees low in fat, calories and sodium, and high in grains, fruits, and vegetables by branding them with a "Smart Meal" logo on menus. In exchange, restaurants receive assistance with marketing the Smart Meal label as a recognizable healthy meal option.

Because the choices that people make are shaped by the choices they have, working in neighborhoods, like those in areas of south Santa Rosa, Boyes Hot Springs and Petaluma, to increase healthy options can help to create an environment where making a healthy choice is the easy choice.

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# Communities of Excellence (CX3): Improving Community Health by Creating Healthy Food Environments

## THE FACTS

### WHAT

CX3 - a food environment assessment conducted in Kawana Springs/South Park and Roseland in south Santa Rosa, Payran/McKinley in Petaluma, and Boyes Hot Springs - found that these low income neighborhoods are out-of-balance from a nutrition and health perspective. These neighborhoods are characterized by limited access to affordable, healthy foods like fruits and vegetables. They are dominated by an abundance of stores where cheaper, pre-packaged, and less healthy foods dominate – namely convenience stores, small corner markets, and fast-food outlets.

### WHY

There is growing evidence that what people eat and the likelihood of being overweight is influenced by the environment where they live. A 2008 study showed that there are three times as many “unhealthy” food outlets (fast food restaurants and convenience stores) as “healthy” food outlets (supermarkets, produce vendors and farmers’ markets) in Sonoma County.<sup>1</sup> Convenience stores, small corner markets and gas stations are often the only food retailers available in low-income neighborhoods. Neighborhoods without access to healthy food from supermarkets or large grocery stores are being labeled “food deserts.” Residents are forced to drive to the nearest large grocery store and those who can’t drive are left to either take a bus or taxi, both of which are time-consuming and costly.

### WHEN

This report is based on local data collected from April to June 2008.

### HOW

Assessment results were determined by using an Index of Unhealthy and Healthy Food Sources (IFS). IFS was calculated by dividing the total number of food outlets, fast food restaurants, and other food sources meeting quality score standards by the total number not meeting quality score standards within a pre-defined geographic area with over half of the Latino/Hispanic population living at or below 185% of the Federal Poverty Level.

### WHO

The assessment was conducted by the Community Activity and Nutrition Coalition of Sonoma County (CAN-C), in partnership with the Redwood Empire Food Bank, the south Santa Rosa Healthy Eating Active Living Project (HEAL), and St. Joseph’s Health Systems.

## KEY FINDINGS

- Approximately 75 percent of the food outlets surveyed in Roseland and Southeast Santa Rosa did not meet healthy store quality standards.
- None of the fast-food restaurants surveyed met the healthy restaurant quality standards.
- None of the food outlets and fast food restaurants surveyed in Roseland and Southeast Santa Rosa met the standards for healthy food marketing inside the stores. Most of the marketing was for “unhealthy” food.
- Fresh produce is expensive at most neighborhood food outlets. Most food outlets in Roseland sell fruits and vegetables priced greater than 10% of the county average.
- Only three of the eight supermarkets, grocery stores, and small markets surveyed in Roseland and South Park/Kawana Springs accept vouchers for the Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) supplemental food program.

<sup>1</sup> Designed for Disease: The Link Between Local Food Environments and Obesity and Diabetes, April 2008, [http://www.healthpolicy.ucla.edu/pubs/files/Detailed\\_Methodology\\_042908.pdf](http://www.healthpolicy.ucla.edu/pubs/files/Detailed_Methodology_042908.pdf)

# **Communities of Excellence (CX3):**

## **Improving Community Health by Creating Healthy Food Environments**

### **Key Definitions**

#### **Communities of Excellence (CX3)**

The CX3 project takes an in-depth, on-the-ground look at select low-income neighborhoods in Sonoma County to measure the nutrition environment and identify opportunities for improvement. Through neighborhood assessments, the CX3 project examined factors ranging from food quality, affordability and availability, to healthy food alongside messaging and marketing practices. The local data and resulting performance measurements shows how a community currently “measures” and areas where it can improve to become a “community of excellence.” CX3 is funded by USDA's Food Stamp Program through the California Department of Public Health's Network for a Healthy California.

#### **Quality Standards**

The standardized scoring system was developed by CX3 including input from health department staff from many areas of California to evaluate the quality of local food and fast food outlets. Stores earned points for factors contributing to a positive nutrition environment. Access, availability, quality and the promotion of nutritious foods, especially fruits and vegetables, are key indicators of a healthy environment. For food outlets, there was a potential to receive up to 100 points, with stores scoring 75 or more points meeting “quality standards.” For fast food outlets, there was a potential of 50 points, with fast food outlets scoring 37 or more points meeting “quality standards.” Meeting “quality standards” was necessary to be considered a “healthy environment.”

#### **Index of Unhealthy and Healthy Food Source (IFS)**

The IFS is a ratio representing the relative abundance of different types of food distribution sites within a given geographic area. The index is an adapted and refined version of the Retail Food Environment Index (RFEI) developed by Policy Link (*Designed for Disease*, April 2008). Healthy food sources include supermarkets, large grocery stores, and small markets meeting quality standards as well as farmers markets and fruit/vegetable markets. High fat/sugar food sources, regarded as unhealthy, include fast food outlets, convenience stores, and small markets not meeting quality standards.

The IFS represents the ratio of unhealthy to healthy food sources in a given neighborhood. For example, in Roseland, the IFS is 5.3, meaning that within the geographic boundaries of Roseland, there are five times as many unhealthy food sources than healthy food sources.

#### **Supermarket Chain**

A large store that sells food and other items, including canned and frozen foods, fresh fruits and vegetables, and fresh (raw) and prepared meats, fish, and poultry. It is owned by a company that has many stores such as Safeway, Ralph's or Lucky. This type of store has 20 or more employees and at least four cash registers.

#### **Large Grocery Store**

A large store that sells food and other items, including canned and frozen foods, fresh fruits and vegetables, and fresh (raw) and prepared meats, fish, and poultry. It may be part of a small regional chain of fewer than five stores or may be independent. This type of store also has 20 or more employees and at least four cash registers.

#### **Small Market**

Usually an independent store that may sell food including canned and frozen foods, fresh fruits and vegetables, and fresh (raw) and prepared meats, fish, and poultry as well as convenience items and alcohol. This type of store has fewer than 20 employees and three or fewer cash registers.

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### **Convenience**

A store that sells convenience items only, including bread, milk, soda, snacks and may sell alcohol and gasoline. These stores do not sell fresh (raw) meat. These stores also are known as food marts.

### **Fast-Food Restaurant**

Fast-food restaurants are defined as restaurants offering (1) quick service based on criteria of the National Restaurant Association, (2) meal service (vs. snacks, dessert and coffee), and (3) prices less than \$7.00 per meal. A fast-food restaurant does not offer hosted seating and customers pay for food prior to consumption. Restaurants with more than five locations with the same name, major fast-food chains, and regional and locally-owned chains are included.

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## Smart Meal Program

The Smart Meal Program establishes nutrition requirements specifically designed for restaurant meals (including delis). Restaurants showcase entrees that are lower in fat, calories, and sodium and include components such as grains, fruits, and vegetables by highlighting them with the Smart Meal™ Seal (right). Promotional materials and publicity efforts educate consumers about what the Smart Meal™ Seal signifies when seen on a menu.



Smart Meal was developed by the Colorado Physical Activity and Nutrition program and was adopted in 2009 by the Community Activity and Nutrition Coalition of Sonoma County (CAN-C) and is endorsed by Health Action.<sup>2</sup> pilot project is currently being implemented in southeast Santa Rosa and Roseland (in southwest Santa Rosa).

### Adult Smart Meal Nutritional Requirements

- Two servings or more of beans, whole grains, fruits or vegetables. May substitute one serving for a serving of fat-free or low-fat milk or equivalent milk product (*only one serving for a side dish*)
- 700 calories or less (*300 calories for a side dish*)
- 30 percent or less of total calories from fat or 23 grams or less of total fat (*10 grams for a side dish*)
- 10 percent or less of calories from saturated fat or 8 grams or less of saturated fat (*3 grams for a side dish*)
- 0.5 grams or less of trans fat (no added or artificial trans fat)
- 1,500 mg or less of sodium (*650 mg for a side dish*)

### Smart Meal Kids Nutritional Requirements

- Two servings or more of beans, whole grains, fruits or vegetables. May substitute one serving for a serving of fat-free or low-fat milk or equivalent milk product
- 400-600 calories\*
- 30 percent or less of total calories from fat or 13-20 grams or less of total fat
- 10 percent or less of calories from saturated fat or 4-7 grams or less of saturated fat
- 0.5g or less of trans fat (no added or artificial trans fat)
- 600-800 mg or less of sodium\*

\* Calorie and sodium ranges represent approximately 1/3 of daily recommended allowance for children ages 4-8 and 9-13 years, respectively.

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<sup>2</sup> **Health Action** was created in 2008 by the County Board of Supervisors in the face of the mounting crisis in health and health care delivery in Sonoma County and elsewhere in the United States. More information can be found at [www.sonomahealthaction.org](http://www.sonomahealthaction.org).

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## Healthy Food Outlet Project

The Healthy Food Outlet Project was created to help food outlets (grocery stores, supermarkets, and small markets) provide customers with healthy food options while at the same time helping stores to increase customer loyalty and store profits.

The project seeks to establish a standard store quality threshold based on the availability and quality of fresh produce, healthy food, and advertising in stores. Once a participating food outlet has been assessed using the CX3 assessment, they receive a *Food Center Quality Scorecard* identifying areas that meet *Quality Score Standards* and areas that need improvement. Food outlet staff then make healthy changes needed to improve the score using the project's toolkit. After changes are made, a follow-up assessment is conducted to determine if the food outlet meets minimum requirements needed to be recognized as a Healthy Food Outlet. Stores that meet minimum *Quality Score Standards* receive promotional materials and publicity to educate consumers about the Healthy Food Outlet recognition program. Annual assessments are conducted to verify compliance with program guidelines.

The Healthy Food Outlet Project was adopted in 2009 by the Community Activity and Nutrition Coalition of Sonoma County (CAN-C) and is endorsed by Health Action.<sup>3</sup> A pilot project is currently being implemented in southeast Santa Rosa and Roseland (in southwest Santa Rosa).

### Commitment to Customer Health

A Healthy Food Outlet is a supermarket, grocery store or community market that has agreed to make changes in the store, and maintain a healthy environment, for the health of the community. These changes could include the following:

- Providing a variety of good quality, fresh fruits and vegetables at reasonable prices
- Offering whole grain products, such as brown rice and whole grain bread
- Selling reduced fat dairy products, such as 1% or non-fat milk and lowfat cheese
- Offering lean cuts of meat, tofu, and/or fish
- Keeping alternatives to soda in stock, such as unsweetened tea, milk, water, and 100% juice
- Offering healthy snacks, like baked chips, nuts, and unsweetened dried fruits
- Placing healthy foods in the checkout area
- Limiting unhealthy items, such as candy and soda, in the checkout area
- Working with distributors to provide and prominently display products that are good tasting and healthier for customers
- Limiting advertising for unhealthy foods and products, both inside and outside the store
- Posting ads or materials which promote healthy foods, both inside and outside the store
- Offering special events, such as tastings and/or promotions, so customers can try new, healthier foods
- Accepting vouchers for Food Stamps Program and the Women, Infants and Children (WIC) supplemental food program, if possible, and posting the signs provided by those programs

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<sup>3</sup> **Health Action** was created by the county Board of Supervisors in the face of the mounting crisis in health and health care delivery in Sonoma County and elsewhere in the United States. More information can be found at [www.sonomahhealthaction.org](http://www.sonomahhealthaction.org).

# Communities of Excellence (CX3):

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## Organizational Information



The Community Activity and Nutrition Coalition of Sonoma County (CAN-C) is a group of individuals, professionals and community based organizations concerned about the nutritional health, activity level and well-being of the residents of our community. The mission of CAN-C is to promote optimal nutritional and physical health for Sonoma County residents with an emphasis on children. More information can be found at [www.sonoma-county.org/health/prev/canc.htm](http://www.sonoma-county.org/health/prev/canc.htm).



The Healthy Eating, Active Living - Community Health Initiative (HEAL) is place-based healthy eating, activity living community health initiative focused on southeast and southwest Santa Rosa. The initiative engages community members – including worksites, schools, and healthcare facilities –in implementing policy, systems, and environmental strategies to increase the availability of healthy foods and places where people can be physically active. HEAL is funded by a grant from Kaiser Permanente Northern California Region and is a project of the Community Activity and Nutrition Coalition of Sonoma County. More information can be found at [www.sonoma-county.org/health/prev/heal.htm](http://www.sonoma-county.org/health/prev/heal.htm).



The *Network for a Healthy California* is a public health effort working with hundreds of partners and organizations to empower low-income Californians to live healthier lives. Funding is from the USDA Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (formerly the food stamp program). For information about the nutrition assistance program, call 877-847-3663.

For additional nutrition information, visit [www.cachampionsforchange.net](http://www.cachampionsforchange.net).

For more information about the *Network for a Healthy California—Northcoast Region*, visit [www.northcoastnutrition.org](http://www.northcoastnutrition.org).



Founded in 1987, the Redwood Empire Food Bank (REFB) is Sonoma County's largest hunger-relief organization touching 70,000 people each month in need of food assistance. REFB's mission is to end hunger in our community. REFB's vision is to be the leader in hunger relief work; serve vulnerable populations; build strategic partnerships; serve as a major provider of food and related resources; educate the public and advocate for effective hunger relief public policy. More information can be found at [www.refb.org](http://www.refb.org).

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The Community Benefit Department enriches St. Joseph Health System's (SJHS) mission by integrating strategic actions in the areas of healthy communities, community health, and advocacy in ways that generate positive health outcomes, foster relationships and cooperation, and empower individuals to care for themselves and others. Focused on grassroots empowerment and capacity building, its Healthy Communities programs include community organizing, collaboration and partnership development, and building grassroots leadership organizations. SJSC's Community Health programs promote health improvement and increase access to healthcare services for low-income and underserved vulnerable individuals, while fostering collaboration and incorporating healthy community strategies and its advocacy activities work to benefit vulnerable populations by affecting social and public policy change through grassroots advocacy and engaging persons of influence.