

Creating Healthier Food Retailers in Rural Vermont: Consumer Perspectives and Store Characteristics

Limited food retailers in rural areas make a healthy diet difficult to consume and may contribute to increasing rates of obesity and lifestyle-associated chronic diseases. This study aimed to determine whether retail intervention strategies were needed in rural Vermont and possible consumer responses to them. Consumer attitudes and behaviors were gauged by written survey. Healthy food and beverage availability, price, and quality at three supermarkets, 13 superettes, and 20 convenience stores were measured during fall 2010 using an adaptation of the Nutrition Environmental Measures Survey. Of the 107 consumers surveyed, 81% were female, 46.8% had incomes less than \$20,000 per year, 33.7% were under age 30, 33.7% were between 31-50, and 32.7% were older than 50. Overall, 62.8% are likely to shop at “healthy retailer” designated stores; of these consumers, 63.6% would expect high quality foods and 12.1% more local offerings. Chi square analysis revealed women were more likely to shop at healthy retailers ($p = 0.003$) and respondents with higher incomes were more likely to expect local offerings ($p = 0.006$). Few convenience stores and superettes had low sodium canned vegetables (0%, 23.0% respectively), whole grain breads (50.0%, 84.6%), seltzer (50.0%, 61.5%), and frozen fruit (0%, 50.0%) or vegetables (18.8%, 61.5%). Results indicate that consumers are likely to shop at “healthy retailer” designated stores and that retailers, especially convenience stores, could increase their availability of healthy food options. Healthy retailer projects may benefit from registered dietitians’ expertise in food systems, nutrition, and marketing to effectively facilitate improved individual and public health.