Summary of Survey Findings:
West Oakland Neighbors’ Preferences for Eating and Buying Food

Why Ask People What They Eat?
A diet that includes fresh fruits and vegetables is important for people to maintain a healthy weight and to combat many chronic diseases, such as diabetes, heart conditions, and stroke. People have all of these conditions at a higher rate in low-income communities of color.

Why Ask People Where They Buy Food?
In order for people to include fruits and vegetables in their diet, they must be easily available; as easy (or easier!) as less healthy foods. However, full-service grocery stores have deserted low-income neighborhoods, making it hard to find high-quality, reasonably priced fresh produce. This is unfair. One way to increase access to fresh fruits and vegetables is for corner/liquor stores, which are plentiful in low-income communities, to carry them. The Alameda County Public Health Department (ACPHD) is encouraging corner stores to carry fruits and vegetables by offering training and assistance in how to purchase, stock, store, and market them.

Stocking fruits and vegetables is not easy for store owners. The obstacles are:

- Cost of refrigeration units.
- Increased electricity.
- How to purchase and get produce delivered.
- Spoilage.
- How to let customers know they have fresh fruit and vegetables (marketing).

Owners want to know whether people living in their communities will buy fruits and vegetables from corner stores if they stock them. To address this question, ACPHD, in partnership with community residents, surveyed people who live in West Oakland about their eating and shopping habits.
Results: What Did People Say?

Who took the survey?

62% Female
42% make < $15,000 per year

78% are African American
77% live in West Oakland

Community members and UC Berkeley students set up tables and gave out surveys outside of corner stores and at community events. They helped their neighbors fill out the surveys, which took between 10 and 15 minutes. Respondents received apples, oranges, and Five-A-Day Nutrition information and incentives.

What do people eat?
Fruits and vegetables

- Over half (56%) stated that they eat between 3-5 fruits and vegetables a day.

While the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) recommendation is at least 5 a day, very few Americans reach that goal. Nationally, Americans eat an average 3.9 servings a day, and only 1 of 4 say they eat 5 or more. So, we used the measure of eating 3 fruits and vegetables or more each day as the unit by which to analyze our results.
Snack food (potato chips, candy, ice cream, cookies)

- 70% said they eat 2 or more servings of snack food per day.
- 12% said that they eat no servings of snack food each day.
- 20% stated that they eat 5 or more servings of snack food per day.

![Bar chart showing servings of snack food](chart.png)

Meat

Meat is important to neighbors in West Oakland.

- Over 1 out of 5 people surveyed eat 5 or more servings of meat a day.
- And 3 out of 5 say they eat more than 3 servings of meat a day.
- Several people specifically mentioned the Meat Market where they shop.

A report of the USDA in 2000 noted that consumption of meat is at an all-time high in America. 2005 Dietary Guidelines for America advise eating lean meat and poultry, and varying protein intake to include more fish, beans, nuts, and seeds.

Milk

Milk, on the other hand, is not as important in West Oakland.

- 1 out of 3 do not drink any milk on a daily basis.
- 41% do not drink any low-fat milk on a daily basis.
- 71% of those under age 25 drank 2 or fewer servings of milk a day.

The last piece of information is somewhat concerning because children/teens need more milk than adults to nourish their fast-growing bones. However, African-Americans have more difficulty than whites digesting milk, so this makes sense.

Where do people shop?

92% of West Oakland residents surveyed shop at a grocery store. Of those, 52% shop at the Pak-N-Save/Safeway. However, 58% said that they currently “sometimes” or “always” shop at corner stores for food – although this means any kind of food. Interestingly enough, over half said that they sometimes go to a Farmer’s Market, which means that people are willing to travel outside of their immediate neighborhood to get fresh produce.
Are people willing to buy fruits and vegetables at corner stores?

Yes! 76% of the people filling out the survey said that they would be willing to buy their fresh produce at corner stores “sometimes” or “always”.

What matters to people when buying produce?

- 58% said that how close a corner store is to them is important.
- 73% said that price is important.
- 78% said that quality is important.

Corner store owners who carry fresh produce, such as the Friendly Market, stated that many neighbors believe that their fruits and vegetables are low quality and highly priced. This is not always the case. In efforts around the Bay Area, it has been shown over and over again that even if corner stores carry fruits and vegetables, the effort will not be successful without marketing and education to the community.

How do people pay for their food?

44% of people surveyed in West Oakland have Electronic Benefits Transfer (EBT), also referred to as food stamps. People who have EBT are equally as likely to eat 3 or more fruits and vegetables a day as people who do not.

Discussion: Looking Beyond The Numbers – What Does This Mean?

The people taking the survey were, for the most part, very appreciative that:

1. Someone is taking action to create healthier options in the community.
2. Their opinions were being solicited.
People are very passionate about the subjects of food and of social justice, and had many thoughts about how availability of fresh produce could impact their lives. Some examples of comments people made:

“Healthy food options within walking distance from my home would greatly improve my health and quality of life. Thank you!”

“The healthy prepared food (deli, etc) would be great to have nearby.”

“Locally produced foods and food producers from local areas should be factored and emphasized in any food security or food sustainability strategy.”

“Our Friendly Market is the only store in our neighborhood that has fresh fruits and vegetables (really, really fresh). Our friend Mary always brings the best and freshest fruits and vegetables to our neighborhood – and her customer service is impeccable.”

Some people who took the survey were not interested, but many people felt very strongly about how having fruits and vegetables in the neighborhood would impact their health positively. In a study done by a group called Social Compact and submitted to the City Council, they estimate that $59 million is leaving the neighborhood of West Oakland for retail sales, like buying fresh food.

In other words, people want to shop healthfully and they will – why not keep that economy in the community?
Some interesting observations were made about who is more or less likely to eat fruits/vegetables in this neighborhood.

- People who receive WIC are more likely to eat 3 or more servings of fruits and vegetables a day than those who do not receive WIC. This result is exciting from a public health perspective because it means that the nutrition education and coupons from WIC make a difference in the food choices that WIC recipients make.

- People who do not have a car are less likely to eat 3 or more fruits and vegetables a day than those who do have them, which could mean that nearby access to fresh produce is a factor to choosing healthy foods.

- People who buy food at Farmer’s Markets are more likely to eat 3 or more fruits and vegetables a day than those who don’t shop at Farmer’s Markets. This is not surprising. Also, people who shop at warehouse stores like Costco are also more likely to eat 3 or more fruits and vegetables a day than those who don’t.

**Limitations Of This Study**

A couple of things to remember:

- People have trouble remembering what they ate in the last week.
- People are often worried about what people will think if they see their answer so they might not say the full truth.
- It’s hard for people to accurately say what they will truly do in the future (buy fruits and vegetables at corner stores?).
- People were not always clear what a “serving” equaled.
- Two-thirds of the surveys were filled out in front of corner stores, so it is possible that folks who responded to the survey were more likely to say that they would shop (and buy fruits/veggies) at corner stores in the future.

**Conclusion**

The FRESH study clearly shows that most people are willing to buy fresh fruits and vegetables at corner stores if they know they are there, if the produce is good quality, and the cost is not too high. The Alameda County Public Health Department is moving forward to get help to the corner store owners who want to stock fruits and vegetables. Conversations with community members and store owners reveal a great need for a marketing component - residents must know that quality produce is in the stores, once the stores stock them.