

Improving Access to Healthy Foods in Washington State: A Policy Feasibility Study

Overview & Preliminary Results **July 2011**

Donna Johnson, PhD, RD (Principle Investigator)
Mary Podrabsky, MPH, RD
Emilee Quinn, MPH



WA Policy Feasibility Study BACKGROUND

June 2010 – WA Food Systems Strategies Summit:

- CPHN presents the ***Opportunities for Increasing Access to Healthy Foods in Washington*** report for the Access to Healthy Foods Coalition (summit sponsor)
 - Based on statewide stakeholder interviews, the report discussed barriers, needed resources and promising strategies.
- Governor Gregoire announces an executive order for **interagency collaboration** and a **report** assessing the state's food systems by December 2011

WA Policy Feasibility Study PURPOSE

- To assess the **perceived impact, political feasibility** and **implementation feasibility** of policies with reported potential for increasing access to healthy foods in Washington State
- Compare and contrast perceptions of various stakeholder groups

*Also: Finding the right balance between **scientific rigor** and **practical utility***

WA Policy Feasibility Study METHODS

- Compiled a list of policies with potential for increasing access to healthy foods based on promising practices and stakeholder input

Rounds of Data Collection	Method	Primary Purpose
1) National nutrition policy and food system experts (e.g., NOPREN members)	Online Survey	Rate perceived impact of 50 policies
<i>Narrowed list of policies based on results</i>		
2) WA Stakeholders (e.g., WA NOPREN, advocates, program managers)	Online Survey	Rate perceived impact, political feasibility & implementation feasibility of 40 policies
<i>Narrowed list of policies based on results</i>		
3) WA State-Level Policymakers (e.g., legislators, gubernatorial staff)	Online Survey	Rate perceived political feasibility of 37 policies
4) Sample of survey respondents	Interviews	Explore rationales for perceptions

NOTE: Study design based on work described in Brescoll, VL, R. Kersh and KD Brownell (2008). Assessing the feasibility and impact of federal childhood obesity policies. *The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 615: 178—194.

WA Policy Feasibility Study POLICIES

POLICY CATEGORIES	SAMPLE POLICY APPROACHES
Food Marketing	Menu labeling, school advertising, voluntary “codes of practices”
Price Incentives	Taxes on sugar-sweetened beverages
Access to Food Retailers	Business assistance, public-private partnerships, tax incentives for fresh food retailers
Community Planning & Land Use	Revisions to the WA Growth Management Act, bans on restrictive land covenants
Nutrition	<i>Child Care:</i> Licensing standards, linking CACFP participation to quality ratings <i>Schools:</i> Technical support for implementation of federal policy, mandating participation in voluntary federal programs <i>State Agencies:</i> Nutrition standards for procurement, vending and meal service
Local Food Procurement	Guidelines that encourage or require state agencies to purchase local foods
Farmer Support & Agricultural Preservation	Incentives and technical assistance for farmer cooperatives, tax incentives/penalties for farmland preservation
Breastfeeding	Funding for staffing and a worksite program, inclusion of breast pumps in state-funded health insurance
Other	Joint use agreement regulations, requirements for water availability in public places

WA Policy Feasibility Study PRELIMINARY RESULTS

Highest Impact – National Experts (N=34)

Policy	Mean
Tax SSBs at 2 cents/oz., directing revenue to obesity prevention	4.1
Revise childcare licensing to reflect national guidelines and evidence	3.9
Nutritional standards for foods/beverage in settings frequented by children	3.9
Develop a public-private partnership for fresh food retailer financing	3.9
Issue state-determined nutrition standards for participation in CACFP above and beyond the federal minimum standards	3.8
Provide tax incentives for grocery stores locating in low income communities	3.8
Small business assistance programs to support healthy corner stores	3.7
Fund the Breastfeeding Friendly Worksite Program	3.7
Prohibit advertising of unhealthy foods on school grounds	3.7
Fund business training for farmers responding to emerging markets	3.6

WA Policy Feasibility Study PRELIMINARY RESULTS

Lowest Impact – National Experts (N=34)

Policy	Mean
Develop and mandate a standards-based school nutrition curriculum	3.0
Provide a transportation subsidy for SNAP beneficiaries	3.0
Fund pilot community gardening projects in schools	3.0
Require menu labeling at restaurants with 10-20 locations	3.0
Encourage a voluntary “code of practice” for food/beverage advertising aimed at children	3.0
Mandate that 30% or fewer calories in food items purchased for state agencies come from saturated fat	3.0
Make “local foods systems/healthy food access” an optional element for local comprehensive plans (per state guidance)	3.0
Develop a database of county-adopted variations of the state Right to Farm Act	2.9
Develop state agency guidelines for procurement of locally sourced items	2.9
Develop a state charter emphasizing local production and markets	2.8

WA Policy Feasibility Study PRELIMINARY RESULTS

Feasible to Implement – WA (N=60)

	Policy	Mean
<i>Most</i>	Prohibit advertising of unhealthy foods on school grounds	4.0
	Prohibit advertising of foods and beverages on school buses	3.9
	Technical support for farmers markets to acquire/use EBT terminals	3.8
	Cover breast pump rentals or purchases for working mothers through state-funded health insurance	3.7
	Fund media campaigns to promote healthy eating	3.6
<i>Least</i>	Issue state-determined nutrition standards for participation in CACFP above and beyond the federal minimum standards	3.0
	Dinners served by state agencies: \leq 700 calories	2.9
	Nutritional standards for foods/beverage in settings frequented by children	2.9
	Lunches and dinners served by state agencies: \leq 800 mg. of sodium	2.9
	State funds for infrastructure must not be detrimental to agriculture	2.9

WA Policy Feasibility Study PRELIMINARY OBSERVATIONS

National experts more likely to emphasize the impact of policies based on mandates (vs. incentives or encouragement)

- ❖ *I think anything with a mandate, requirement, etc. and with funding attached is more likely to make an impact than guidelines, suggestions, and voluntary programs.*
- ❖ *"Voluntary" standards to limit advertising of less healthy foods in schools, restaurants, etc. may not be successful due to an enforcement issue.*

WA Policy Feasibility Study PRELIMINARY OBSERVATIONS

Among WA stakeholders:

- More challenging to identify consistent themes among WA stakeholders related to "impact" – likely due to diversity of respondents.
- Considerable discussion about education and greater anti-mandate sentiment
 - ❖ *#1 is education of young children on eating healthy. Include parenting food preparation classes on a budget.*
 - ❖ *The ones most likely to succeed have to do with education. We need to impact people's thinking and starting with the very young. Younger parents and families have more of a chance to change.*
 - ❖ *I think the policies that educate vs. mandate the consumer will build the "desire" for healthy food. Our job is to make sure that when someone makes the choice for healthy food they get the best tasting and most appealing food/meals.*
 - ❖ *Too much regulation and mandates do not ensure a better system.*

WA Policy Feasibility Study PRELIMINARY OBSERVATIONS

Among WA stakeholders, cont'd:

- Political feasibility: many references to cost, potential opposition, and perception that mandates limit choice and/or impede profit
 - ❖ *Policies which appear to benefit the economy and environment or appear to have little negative impact on the economy are more likely to be embraced, adopted and implemented.*
 - ❖ *Programs that promote business growth, [such as] infrastructure investments are more feasible than others. Policies that focus on regulations only are less feasible where they are perceived to take away local control or increase costs associated with the changes.*
- Implementation feasibility: frequent references to availability of funding, resistance and/or lack of political will
 - ❖ *Requiring changes in procurement, sourcing more locally, etc. will have cost implications for schools, institutions, child care, etc. If there isn't a way to easily offset those costs, there will be reluctance/resistance to change.*

WA Policy Feasibility Study STATUS & NEXT STEPS

- Completed Rounds 1 and 2 of data collection
- Survey of state-level policymakers in progress
- **Next steps:**
 - Conduct interviews to understand the rationales behind the ratings (July-August)
 - Data analysis, reporting and dissemination (July-August)
- Intended **audiences** for dissemination:
 - State Interagency Food System Workgroup
 - State stakeholders and advocates, to inform priorities and areas for potentially fruitful advocacy
 - National audiences interested in food policy feasibility