



The challenges to increasing healthy food access in low-income communities of color—from businesses’ misperceptions about local purchasing power, to corner store owners’ fears about stocking new food items that might not sell, to the need for funds to hire a coordinator for a farmers’ market—can be overcome. There are stories of communities in California and across the country that have successfully overcome the “grocery gap.” This report presents strategies and policy

opportunities to help other underserved communities replicate these successes.

With a realistic assessment of the challenges, an eye on effective models, and organized communities advocating for change, success can be achieved. The result is a double bottom line profits for food retailers, and social, economic, and health benefits for residents and the community.

West Fresno Food Maxx Supermarket⁶

In 1995, little new development was occurring in West Fresno, a once thriving community composed of mostly African American and some Latino residents. For many years, residents had hoped that the Fresno City Council would allocate funds to improve neighborhood conditions. Concerned residents gathered together to prioritize what they most wanted from the city to spur development and decided construction of a supermarket was at the top of their list. The small food stores in the area charged high prices for little selection, and many residents had to depend on the bus to access the selection, quality, and prices available at supermarkets in other parts of the city.

Residents began advocating to bring a supermarket to their community. The Affordable Housing Coalition, which included churches and community groups, held a news conference in front of a supermarket in another part of the city, where members carried empty grocery bags and demanded that the Fresno City Council set aside money from its \$11 million Community Development Block Grant to build a shopping center in their community. Over several years, these concerned residents continued to strategize and advocate in a variety of settings. They attended public hearings conducted by the city on community development block grant funds and met with city council members, the director of the city’s redevelopment agency, and other public officials. Coalition members got residents to sign petitions and turned out hundreds of residents at city council meetings. They also worked with the media, held press conferences, wrote editorials, built relationships with local reporters, and received ongoing coverage of their struggle in the *Fresno Bee*.

Once their supermarket campaign gained political support, the coalition continued to move the project forward. They ensured that the city allocated redevelopment funds to help build the super-market; helped local government officials negotiate with local property owners to secure the land for the site; worked to ensure that jobs went to local residents; urged the city to make an agreement with a developer; got a police station built to ensure security at the shopping center; and urged the city to approve final zoning for the market.

Four years later, the supermarket opened. It has now been serving the community successfully for more than five years.