



Findings From an Evaluation of the CDFA Healthy Stores Refrigeration Grant Program

Policy Brief • January 2023

BACKGROUND

Lack of refrigeration is reported as a leading barrier to corner stores stocking fresh fruits and vegetables. The California legislature funded the Department of Food and Agriculture (CDFA) to offer a Healthy Refrigeration Grant Program, providing grants to corner stores in food resource-poor neighborhoods to purchase refrigeration units to increase access to CA-grown fruits and vegetables.

WHAT WE DID

We surveyed 51 storeowners and interviewed 14 before and after they installed the refrigerator, to understand the opportunities, challenges, and outcomes of the grant program. We also surveyed small cross-sectional samples of customers before and after the refrigerator installation to gather information about customers' shopping experiences and produce purchases.

KEY FINDINGS

At follow up, storeowners reported that...

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Lack of refrigeration” became a lesser barrier to stocking fruits and vegetables. 	<p>Only 14% of storeowners at follow up reported lack of refrigeration as a barrier to stocking produce, compared to 51% at baseline.</p> <p><i>“We are able to stock more fresh fruits and vegetables for longer periods of time.”</i></p>						
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Refrigeration Grant Program increased stores’ ability to sell produce and improved their profitability. 	<p>Percent of storeowners that reported the CDFA refrigerator increased their...</p> <table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th>Metric</th> <th>Percentage</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>Ability to sell produce</td> <td>94%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Profitability</td> <td>79%</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	Metric	Percentage	Ability to sell produce	94%	Profitability	79%
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<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The CDFA refrigerator allowed stores to increase the variety and freshness of produce they sell. 	<p><i>“Now we carry watermelon, pineapple, papaya, and like the bigger fruits. There wasn't room before.”</i></p>						
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Storeowners wasted less produce after installing the CDFA refrigerator 	<p>At follow up, 56% of storeowners reported almost all their produce sells out, compared to 39% of storeowners at baseline.</p> <p><i>“We don't throw away a lot of stuff like we used to because of the display— the refrigerator displays it like perfect.”</i></p>						
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Storeowners appreciated the program and would recommend it to other storeowners 	<p>97% of storeowners reported having a positive experience with the program.</p> <p><i>“I think there should be a lot more people taking advantage of this opportunity.”</i></p>						

KEY FINDINGS, CONTINUED

Storeowners also reported that...

- Getting the refrigerator helped stores better serve the community and increased their customer base.

96% of storeowners reported that the program helped them better serve their community



78% of storeowners reported they had more customers after installing the refrigerator



“The image the customer gets from our store is different now. They know that we carry healthier items so they are very happy with that.”

Customers reported that...

- Customers value having produce at their corner store.
- Customers go to the store to purchase produce more frequently at follow up, compared to baseline.

70% of customers at baseline and follow up reported it is very important that their corner store stocks fruits and vegetables.

46% of customers in the follow up sample reported going to the store to purchase **fruit** at follow up vs. 13% of the baseline sample.

42% of customers in the follow up sample reported going to the store for **vegetables** at follow up vs. 12% of the baseline sample.

ADDITIONAL FINDINGS

- **Sourcing, stocking, and promoting California-grown produce remains a challenge among storeowners.** Storeowners reported difficulty identifying California-grown produce, and customers reported that produce being California-grown is not very important. Storeowners requested assistance connecting with local farmers and increasing marketing of California-grown produce.
- **Some stores reported the Refrigeration Grant Program inspired them to make additional changes to their store,** such as sharing recipes with their customers, increasing social media advertising, or stocking other healthy products.
- **Storeowners appreciated the technical assistance CDFA provided for selecting and installing the refrigerator.** The few storeowners that reported criticism of the program mostly cited inadequate technical assistance.



Stocked CDFA refrigerator at a participating store

Research note: We collected quantitative data about produce prices and pounds sold at stores before and after the refrigerator installation. Unfortunately, findings were inconclusive due to disruptions in data collection resulting from COVID-19.

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Full report: <https://ucanr.edu/sites/NewNutritionPolicyInstitute/files/378174.pdf>

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