County Durham PCT’s retailers Project  
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Working with Local Retailers to improve access to fresh fruit and vegetables

The Easington Story:

County Durham PCT has a partnership with Shah’s Convenience Store, a family owned shop run by Ziggy Shah’s family. Working together, they have found ways to enable Shah’s Convenience Store to stock fresh fruit and vegetables whilst stimulating demand from the local community by promoting healthy eating and improving shop lay-out.

The workshop considered three main questions:

What are the common positive aspects of local food retailing?

- Local shops are known by local people, and are in a position to gain the trust and loyalty of the community. They are usually located in places convenient for local access and may have extended opening hours. Local retailers can use methods such as in-store promotions and healthy eating literature to educate and influence their customers. From a distribution angle, they may have access to a wider distribution/supply chain than, say, a community run food coop. This may contribute towards flexibility as they may be part of a network of local suppliers, and may adjust their sales according to customer demand. Local retailers are an integral part of the local economy and social capital, and can potentially be more long lasting as a profit making venture.

What are the common negative aspects of local food retailing?

- Local shops are known by local people, and as such, their reputation may act as a hindrance where a local retailer is located on a street with a high crime rate, or if they have been unreliable as fresh fruit and vegetable outlet over a prolonged period of time. Regaining the trust of the local community may be necessary before they would habitually shop there again. Fresh fruit and vegetables in local shops tend to be available along with other produce, such as cigarettes and alcohol, which can dilute the healthy eating message. Local retailers also need to make a profit to stay in business, so choices about stock will be heavily influence by current demand, prices of fruit and vegetables are often higher than supermarkets. Supplies of affordable fruit and vegetables can be challenging for the small retailer who is competing with the larger retailers. Poor infrastructure and limited space can also hinder success. There is often competition with major brand suppliers as to where produce is displayed (eg sweets and chocolate on counter).

What can be done to overcome the negatives?

- Working more closely with wholesalers,
- Using pilot schemes to connect with the local community,
• Using one promotional organisation to take a lead role,
• Communicating effectively,
• Using incentives
• and working with existing business services.
• Potentially using a sale or return scheme (if funding available)
• Present the evidence that selling fresh fruit and veg can work (from other retailers and from customers)

**In conclusion:**

What interventions are available for local retailers to overcome barriers to success?

• Healthy start vouchers to encourage healthy eating
• Creating links with Community Food Initiatives
• Regular in-store promotions on individual fruit and vegetable products showing how to use them in recipes at home
• Promoting fruit and vegetables in the same way as crisps/sweets are promoted, targeting particular consumer groups
• Running cookery demonstrations and taster sessions
• Providing recipes and giving advice on ingredients and what they can be used for
• Running cookery classes to develop cooking skills
• Working closely with local suppliers and other local outlets such as butchers and bakers to develop reliable and local distribution infrastructure
• Considering local regeneration strategies – encouraging people to use local food shop as part of community regeneration and well-being
• Lobbying for schemes to offer reduced rent/subsidies to local shops
• Creating links with food co-ops to share fruit and vegetable suppliers
• Encouraging retailing awareness,
• Engaging with local and national media
• Developing and providing promotional literature
• Having franchise concession stands
• Regular special offers on certain fresh fruit and vegetables.
• Developing support from wholesalers,
• Working to a seasonal planner to inform the stock of fruit and vegetables based on availability and seasonality.