



Healthy Checkout: Focus Group Final Report

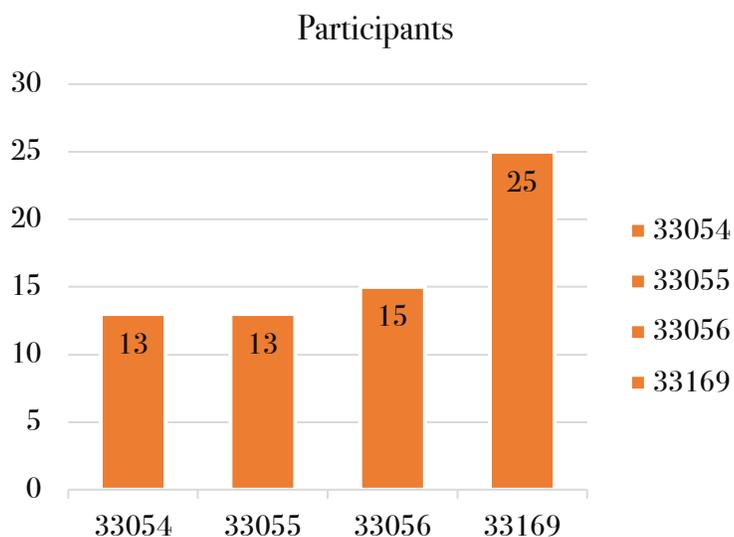
Introduction & Background

In December 2020, Florida Impact was awarded a grant from the Center for Science in the Public Interest (CSPI) to pursue a healthy checkout campaign in Miami Gardens. The goal of this project is to establish enforceable standards for offering healthier foods (and reduce the presence of unhealthy foods) in checkout lanes at large retailers. This project is intended to complement the Miami Gardens Healthy Corner Stores Project and form part of a holistic approach to improving health outcomes through interventions at food retailers. One of the most important steps in this project was conducting focus groups with residents to understand challenges and opportunities around accessing healthy foods and to gauge support and buy-in for the healthy checkout concept. This report outlines the results of these focus groups.

Overview & Procedure

The project budget allowed for 60 residents to participate in the focus groups. Each participant received a \$50 e-giftcard as compensation for their time (approximately one hour total). Florida Impact leveraged strong existing community partnerships through Live Healthy Miami Gardens to recruit participants. In total, 66 residents participated out of 132 sign-ups.

Recruitment began in February 2021 and the final focus group was completed in July 2021. Each focus group session was led by the Florida Impact team, including a Miami Gardens resident hired to support this work. Focus groups were divided by zipcode to ensure that participants shared a common geographic identity within the City, focusing on the four primary zipcodes for the City: 33054, 33055, 33056, and 33169. Although the opportunity was open to residents in minor zipcodes, no sign-ups were received from these areas. In total, 15 sessions were held, ranging from 2-9 participants per session. Average age of participants was 41 years, with an overall range of 18 to 74 years.



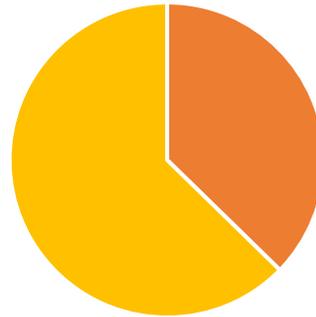
Grocery Shopping Behavior

Price, quality, and selection are the most important factors to the focus group participants in selecting a grocery store. Additionally, there is increasing demand across the City for high-quality, healthy food stores. Today, Miami Gardens is home to a relatively high number of grocery stores, supermarkets, and super centers, including Walmart, Winn-Dixie, Presidente, Price Choice, Publix, and others. However, for many of the focus group participants, grocery shopping requires either a trip beyond the city limits and into surrounding communities or multiple stops at a variety of stores. This has created a perception issue where participants strongly believed that quality was lacking in Miami Gardens retail stores, and that other surrounding municipalities often had better selection, better quality, and even better cleanliness in their stores. Although it was acknowledged that the products sold at these stores generally cater to the demand of local communities, especially lower income and certain minority ethnic groups, these retailers are failing to reflect changing demographics and demands. Residents are faced with an overabundance of unhealthy options specifically targeted at them. This theme also applies to restaurants operating in the City. These challenges represent a broken food system.

Health & Responsibility

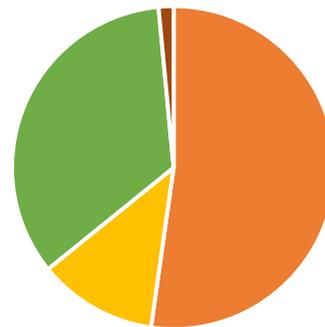
Most focus group participants recognized the importance of proper nutrition in living healthily. However, as addressed throughout this report, they also explained the extensive barriers around healthy eating in the City. No single solution stood out to overcome these barriers. In fact, participants placed responsibility for healthy eating, or enabling healthy eating, on three general areas: the individual, the City government, and businesses operating in the City of Miami Gardens. Together, these three key stakeholders share a responsibility for improving nutritional health and wellbeing in the community, and all three have room for improvement. Many recommended interventions spanned more than one of these groups, such as nutrition education provided by the City to improve individual choices, or implementing City policies to require businesses to make “the healthy choice the easy choice”. It is clear, however,

Does your grocery store make it easier to find and buy food that’s healthy or unhealthy?



■ Healthy ■ Unhealthy

What type of checkout do you most often use at your grocery store?



■ Regular checkout lane
■ Express/10-item-or-less checkout lane
■ Self-checkout
■ Other (customer service, pharmacy, etc.)

that the balance of power on this three-sided scale needs to be re-evaluated and reset to prioritize residents.

Checkout Lanes

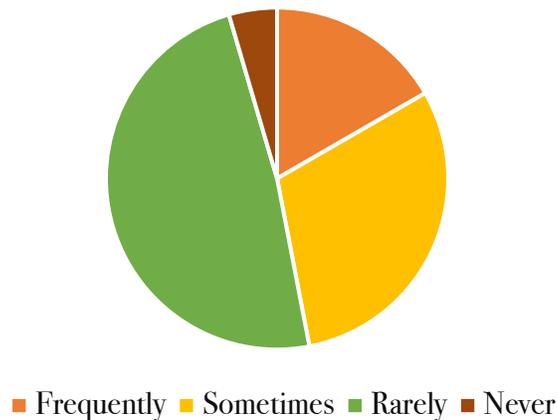
In-store analysis of more than 30 Miami Gardens large food retailers (super centers, grocery stores, dollar stores, and large pharmacies) revealed an overabundance of unhealthy snacks and beverages in the checkout lanes. When faced with images of these current checkout lanes, focus group participants easily recognized this overabundance and it’s connection to negative health outcomes. Participants reported that purchases made in the checkout lane are primarily made on impulse (both long and short wait times influenced these snap decisions, either with too much or too little time to make a good decision about grabbing an item. These impulse decisions are compounded when shopping with children. Checkout lanes are unavoidable, and many of the products target children. It was frequently acknowledged that the price per unit of products in the checkout lanes across all retailers is worse value for money compared to other size options of the same products sold in other parts of the stores. Despite all of this understanding, the checkout environment remains a significant obstacle to overcome, and places undue burden on healthy decision-making.

<i>How do Miami Gardens residents describe the items sold today in checkout lanes?</i>	
Unhealthy	Junk
Sugar	Processed
Comfort	Fat
Marketing	Kids
Garbage	Cheap
Sodium	Calories
Profit	Temptation
Candy	Treats
Diabetes	Snacks
Weight Gain	Cavities
Carbs	Normal
Eye-level	Tasty

Healthy Checkout

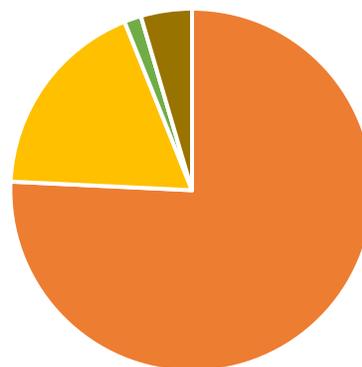
In order to combat predatory product placement in checkout lanes, Florida Impact is proposing a healthy checkout policy. This would establish standards for products allowable for sale in defined areas around cash registers. Discussion of this topic was prefaced by an explanation of potential components of the policy, utilizing the recently-passed Berkeley healthy checkout policy as an example. Opportunity for feedback and questions was provided. Based on this information, there was strong support from focus group participants for a healthy checkout policy intervention, and, more generally, the City of Miami Gardens developing policy to support healthier grocery initiatives. Primary concerns for both of these questions centered around the rights of private businesses, and whether such a policy would even be possible under the state government. However, with strong support for the idea, a number of suggestions were made by participants to ensure that a healthy checkout policy would appropriately address the unique needs of the Miami Gardens community, such as allowing some unhealthy items to remain in the checkout area to not impede personal choice.

How often do you purchase items in the checkout lane?



Additionally, participants reported that speed was the most important factor in selecting a checkout lane. Participants would not preferentially choose a healthy checkout lane over a regular checkout lane if the line was longer. This supports a policy design which applies to all cash registers, rather than designating a single healthy checkout lane. Overall, participants supported the proposed policy initiative with the aforementioned caveats to support local demands.

Does Healthy Checkout sound like something you would support?



- Strongly support
- Somewhat support
- Somewhat oppose
- Strongly oppose
- Don't know

Recommendations

Based on these conversations with Miami Gardens residents, Florida Impact has developed a series of recommendations to be pursued to improve the Miami Gardens food environment. These are:

1. Identify opportunities for the City to require healthier practices for businesses wishing to operate in the City.
 - a. Pursue a citywide healthy checkout policy to improve nutrition standards in checkout lanes.
2. Increase resident involvement in City planning decisions, especially those involving food retailers.
3. Provide new educational opportunities for Miami Gardens residents to learn about healthy eating, and to try new, nutritious foods.
 - a. Partner with food retailers, community organizations, and residents to create a consistent educational environment across places where residents live, work, and play.

Other Ideas

A number of additional ideas were proposed by focus group participants to improve the Miami Gardens food environment. These include:

1. Increasing community engagement through education and city zoning/business selection.
2. Attracting more fresh produce businesses, such as Whole Foods, Fresh Market, Trader Joe's, etc.
3. Implementing other fresh produce sources, such as community gardens, urban farms, and farmers markets.
4. Encouraging retailers to offer healthier options at more affordable prices (including comparable sale prices to unhealthy options)
5. Encouraging retailers to offer increased specialty and ethnic options reflecting the diverse and vibrant Miami Gardens community
6. Encouraging retailers to implement clearer labeling and signage on healthy options, training staff on these topics of health and nutrition, and offering samples and recipe cards for healthier options

Conclusion

Today, Miami Gardens faces a broken food system that is not meeting the needs of the community, especially as that community evolves over time. There is a lack of high-quality, healthy food options and an overabundance of unhealthy choices being unfairly pushed upon City residents and visitors. There is strong support amongst participating residents for interventions which support health and wellbeing through City policy, resident education, and retailer buy-in. The relationship between City, residents, and retailers must be realigned to prioritize the health of residents.

Should the City of Miami Gardens develop policy to support healthier grocery store initiatives, such as healthy checkout?

