

The Food, the Friends, and The Hungry Collaboration



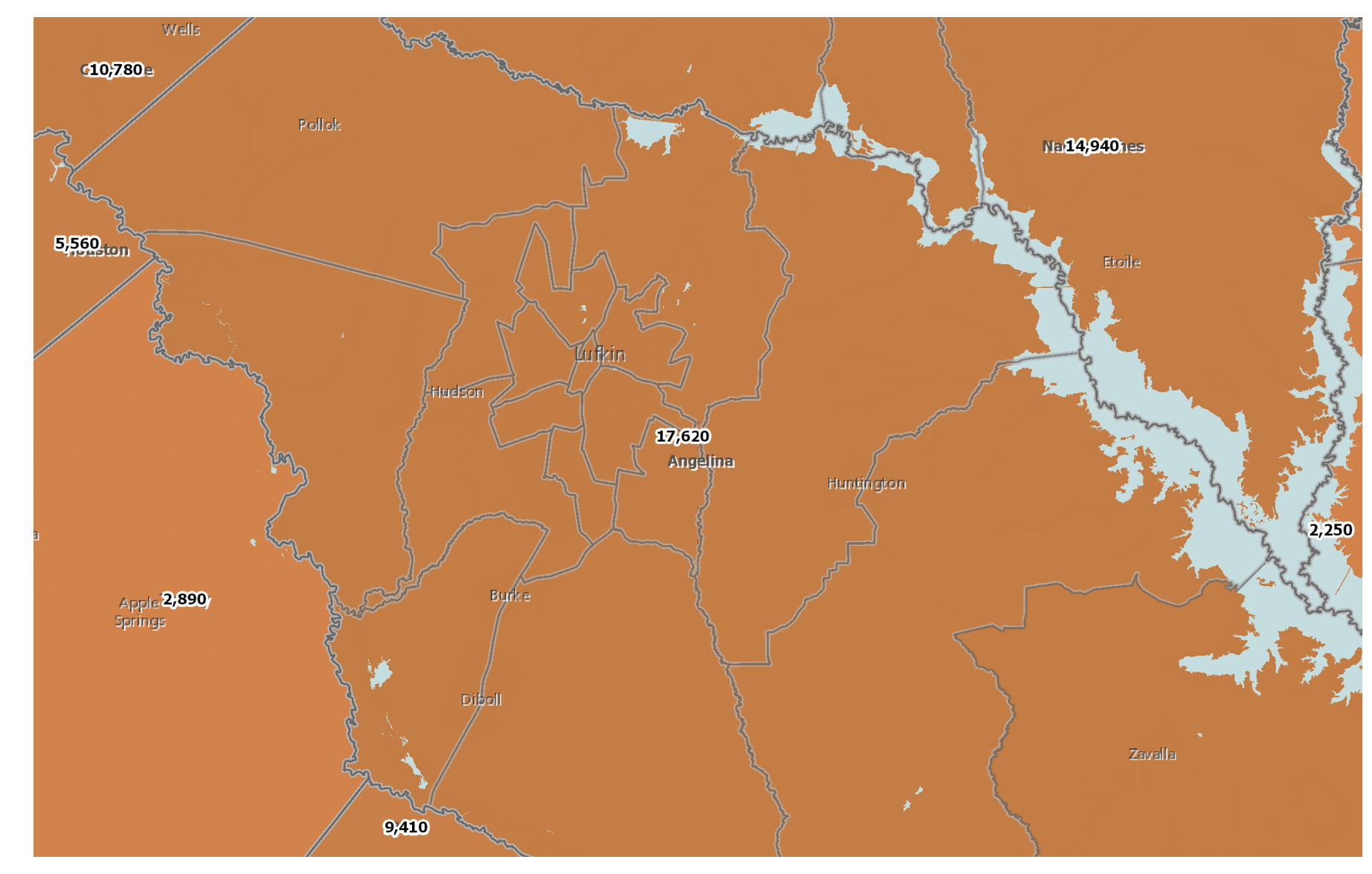
Angelina County Public Health Coalition | Angelina County & Cities Health District | Lufkin, TX | Kristina Childress, MPH & Shanelle Stewart RN, BSN

Introduction

This project sought to address the high food insecurity rates in Angelina County by improving access to fresh fruits and vegetables in rural food pantries. Food insecurity is a growing epidemic in East Texas. According to the Center for Disease Control, eight out of ten Angelina County residents have inadequate fruit and vegetable consumption compared to 76% in Texas. The Episcopal Health Foundation reports that one in three children is living in poverty and lacks nutritious food.

With Angelina County seated in a food desert obtaining nutritious foods poses a great concern. While lack of nutritious foods is a precursor for high rates of diabetes, cardiovascular disease, and obesity, many residents live far from supermarkets or grocery stores that provide nutritious foods.

With a mission of preventing chronic disease and improving access to healthy foods, the CPHMC leadership team formed a work group of three local food pantries, two of them representing rural communities, to play a key role in increasing fresh produce options at food pantries. There is also substantial evidence that many people may "not qualify for federal nutrition programs like SNAP and must rely on charitable food assistance" from food banks and pantries according to Feeding America's 2013 "Food Insecurity & Food Cost in the US" report.



Project Overview

The Angelina County Public Health Coalition's goal was to increase the number of food banks that offer healthy food in Angelina County in order to address low food access and high rates of chronic disease in the community. As a result of the CPHMC project we have established partnerships with the East Texas Food Bank, the Christian Information & Service Center, and two rural food pantries in order to establish a consistent schedule of produce deliveries.



Angelina County residents partake in the monthly "Produce Drop" at Huntington First Baptist Church where they receive free fresh produce.



Activities

Healthy Food Access Meeting



- Meeting with Coalition workgroup
- Discussed needs of client population
- Proposed plans to add new produce delivery

Distribution Planning



- Regional Food Bank agrees to add produce delivery route
- Local pantries attend a produce drop in neighboring county
- Rural pantry in Huntington, TX agrees to accept produce delivery

Distribution Site



- Huntington Food Program passes Regional Food Bank site inspection for produce delivery
- "Produce Drop" scheduled and volunteer base assembled

Outcomes

The collaboration influenced a systems change within the regional food bank's delivery route, and a change in the schedule of a rural food pantry by welcoming the idea of opening an extra day during the week. The regional food bank requested that the rural food pantry agree to a consistent schedule of monthly produce deliveries. By adding this delivery, two other neighboring pantries will have access to fresh produce. This new produce delivery will potentially reach more than 16,000 food bank clients in Angelina County. Also participating is one of our larger food pantries in the area, Christian Information & Services Center (CISC), which serves over 2 million pounds of food a year to local residents. They have agreed to share fresh produce deliveries and other healthy food resources if needed by the rural pantries.

Lessons Learned

- Addressing food insecurity in a rural area can be challenging, but if you foster partnerships with the right organizations, you can facilitate a great deal of change.
- Our coalition helped nurture a number of partnerships, but by having work-groups, coalition members tasked with specific objectives and activities, proved to be essential in meeting project goals.
- Be prepared to make changes along the way. Although you may anticipate your plan to follow through, you also need to be prepared to go in a new direction if need be.
- Make every effort to understand the goals and mission of those who you are partnering with in your community, it could be an indicator of whether or not the partnership will produce results.



ETFB workers deliver pallets of fresh produce to volunteers waiting to distribute to Angelina County residents.

Best Practices

- By developing partnerships with organizations that serve women and children you can ensure that the priority population will receive the benefits of policy, systems, and environmental improvements.
- For some, WIC may be easy to understand, but not for others, use every opportunity you are given to answer any questions partners may have and be ready to provide resources with factual information about WIC and your community.



Children at the "Produce Drop" pick out watermelons to take home.

Next Steps

Beginning in the Spring of 2016, CISC will be adding a community garden to help create a sustainable system and infrastructure to ensure that local residents continue to have access to fresh produce. CISC's community garden has created more partnerships by engaging the local sheriffs department, garden club, and agricultural extension office. The Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Office will recruit local gardeners to donate produce to area food pantries. We are also seeking to reach children by providing classrooms with service learning opportunities at the garden.



The Choose Fresh message is simple, straight forward, and facilitates the common WIC message to make choosing fresh fruits and vegetables the norm in the community.