

Fresh Fridays mean free produce at Northside corner stores

Written by Shaina Brassard, West Broadway Coalition and Megan Andrews-Sharer, Appetite for Change
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Every Friday during the month of April, fresh produce purchases at eleven participating Northside corner stores will be matched up to \$3 per customer. Customers can pay by cash,

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EBT or credit card. This exciting deal is called Fresh Fridays, a promotion of fresh fruits and vegetables at the neighborhood stores many depend on for snacks. During Fresh Fridays, shoppers can walk away with a bag of carrots and a few apples and oranges for only three dollars. Whoever said that fresh food had to be expensive?

The stores participating in Fresh Fridays are all part of the Healthy Corner Store Initiative, funded through the Statewide Health Improvement Program (SHIP). Store owners worked in partnership with community-based Appetite For Change, The West Broadway Business and Area Coalition, and the City of Minneapolis Department of Health and Family Support to set up displays of fresh fruits and vegetables. Produce available includes apples, bananas, oranges, lettuce, tomatoes, green peppers and more. The Healthy Corner Store Initiative is in its second year. Last year, the Lowry Food Market (628 Lowry Ave. N.) participated and continues to successfully sell fresh fruits and vegetables year round.

Introducing fresh food can be a risky step for small store owners as it takes time for customers to develop the habit of buying fresh food at corner stores. While bags of chips last forever, fruits and vegetables only last a week in the cooler.

Store owners have to keep high quality produce on display to entice customers. Another barrier to introducing fresh food to corner stores is customer perception. According to Appetite For Change community surveys, many people buy chips, pop, and cigarettes at corner stores. Owners have to hope that once customers have seen quality fruits and vegetables available for good prices for a period of time, perceptions will begin to change. Luckily, Appetite For Change's research suggests the public is hungry for healthy foods nearby. Of the 130+ survey respondents, more than 70 percent said they would buy fruit snacks, fresh trail mixes, and carrots and ranch at their corner store if these options were available.

Over 70 percent also said they would buy fresh and affordable oranges, apples and strawberries. More than half are ready to buy lettuce, bell peppers, peaches, cherries, mango, and sweet potatoes, among other items, at local corner stores where they are fresh and affordable.

Nationwide, communities are implementing Healthy Corner Store programs both to help owners cover the investment required for selling fresh food and to reach out to the community to change perceptions about corner stores. In the neighborhood of Bryn Mawr, organic produce options have come to the local corner store, the Bryn Mawr Market. Buyer Barb Anderson said that in her two years of testing which organic products are most profitable, she has always found that customers will buy the products that taste good. Last fall, she, "couldn't keep the \$1.25 Sweet Tango apple on the shelf." Maybe taste is the ticket for all corner stores. People buy fresh from the corner store when the corner store delivers a good product.

Participating Northside Corner Stores:

Fremont Gas 1120 West Broadway

Quick Stop 3601 Penn Ave N

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Penn Gas Stop 2606 Penn Ave N

Pantry Food Market 5200 Bryant Ave

Star Food Market 818 Lowry Ave N

Roger's Market 2007 Glenwood

Pennwood Market 2125 Glenwood

Skyline Market 1821 Glenwood Ave

Brix Grocery & Meat 915 W. Broadway

Janine's 1510 W. Broadway

K's Dollar 1021 W. Broadway