Routt County Community Food Assessment:
Understanding food insecurity; federal and community food and nutrition assistance programs; fruit and vegetable consumption; and factors and strategies that impact healthy eating.

Part II

LiveWell NW Colorado is a not for profit organization whose mission is to reduce obesity in Routt County by introducing healthy eating and active living choices and empowering residents to select them.
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Executive Summary

A. Introduction to Routt County Food Assessment Part II

LiveWell Northwest and the Northwest Colorado Food Coalition completed Part I of the Routt County Community Food Assessment in January 2013. The Assessment was conducted in order to better understand the condition of the local food system and to develop a strategic plan to increase healthy eating within Routt County. Two key issues identified by Part I of the Food Assessment were: 1) the higher rates of overweight/obese children and adults than expected in the county, and 2) the high percentage of food insecure residents.

Part II of the Food Assessment was designed to further share the story of obesity and food insecurity in our County, State and County; to briefly review the economic impact of disease with fruit and vegetable consumption; and, to review the evidence base around what factors influence healthy eating.

This report aims to contribute to LW NW’s overall goals of increasing access to and consumption of fruits and vegetables through the development of community food security. The goals for Part II are:

- **Goal 1**: To present information on the existing status of food-related health indicators of Routt County residents including obesity, diet, and food insecurity.
- **Goal 2**: To establish a shared understanding of the many factors that affect healthy eating.
- **Goal 3**: To identify potential strategies that address the local data and leverage what we know of the evidence base to increase healthy eating.

Part III of this Food Assessment, coming in Summer 2014, will further explore and address community food security by examining critical pieces of the local food system that include the economics of farming, processing, distribution, and the local policies impacting these systems.
B. What We Know About Obesity, Food Security, Nutrition Programs, and Diet

The full report includes the most current national, state, and county data on obesity and its related diseases, food insecurity rates, federal and community food assistance program eligibility and participation, and fruit and vegetable consumption rates.

**Obesity**

The current adult obesity rate would have made Colorado the “fattest” state in the nation in 1995.1 If obesity rates continue on their current trajectories, by 2030, the obesity rate in Colorado could reach 44.8%.2 Between 2003 and 2007, the state’s childhood obesity ranking dropped from 3rd leanest in the country to 23rd. Data from 2012 shows that 12% of 10-17 year olds were overweight and 11% were obese. Also, while obesity and morbid obesity among U.S. low-income, preschool-aged children went down for the first time in recent years, Colorado was one of three states that experienced a statistically-significant increase in rates of childhood obesity for this age group.3

The picture is a little less bleak in Routt County with approximately 48.5% of adults being overweight or obese in 2012, down from 51% in 2010.4 Obesity and overweight rates have been tracked in Routt County Schools for the last 4 years. According to school district data, obesity/overweight rates of Routt County K-12th graders reached a new high of 21.3% in 2013.

**Food Security**

Food insecurity rates are available from Feeding America’s Map the Meal Gap for the US, CO, and Routt County from 2009 to 2012. As expected, the national levels have been fairly consistent for the population over the last three years. However, the State increased from 14.3% of the general population in 2009 to 15.5% in 2010, stayed the same in 2011 and has dropped to 14.6% in 2012, almost to 2009 levels. Routt County showed an increase from 11.8% to 13.9% from 2009 to 2010, with a drop in 2011 to 12.5%. This increased, however, in 2012 12.9% of the population, remaining higher than 2009 levels.

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For Routt County, it is also important to review the influence of the cost of living on poverty and food insecurity rates. For a family of four (2 adults with 1 preschool and 1 school aged child) in 2011, to meet basic needs (i.e., housing, child care, food, transportation and health care), residents need to make $67,571 per year in Routt County. The median household income in Routt County in 2011 was $64,998, or $2,573 less than the estimated self-sufficiency standard. That means approximately 50% of Routt County households were not earning enough to meet their basic needs in this County.\

**Food and Nutrition Assistance Programs**

There are nine Federal Food and Nutrition Assistance Programs made available through Colorado state agencies and provided in Routt County for people of all ages. Each has unique eligibility requirements and various levels of participation rates by eligible populations. Two programs that provide a strong indicator of how eligible populations are being reached are the SNAP (Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program) program and Free & Reduced School Meals.

For SNAP, eligible participants must be at or lower than 130% FPL which for a family of four (2 adults and 2 school aged children). According to Hunger Free Colorado, in 2013, 956 of the 2,890 eligible Routt County residents participated in SNAP meaning that 67% of those eligible in Routt County have not enrolled.

Regarding school meals, to qualify for free meals, the students’ household income must be at or below 130% FPL and for reduced meals it must be between 131% to 185%. In school year 2013-2014, 708 or 22.5% of Routt County students received free and reduced lunch benefits. Approximately 30 out of the 708 eligible students in Routt County participated in the School Breakfast Program. While there has been a slight increase in free and reduced lunch participation in the County over the past several years, in 2013, SOROCO showed a significant increase while Hayden saw a decrease of students participating in the program. Map the Meal Gap shows that 48% of Routt County students were eligible for free and reduced lunch, summer food, WIC, and SNAP in 2011 while only about 18% were accessing the FRL portion of the benefit.

In addition to federal food programs, most communities also provide community food assistance as well – most often in the form of food pantries. Almost all of the community food assistance in Routt is through Lift-Up of Routt County, the local food pantry. Lift-Up “provides charitable

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assistance to meet basic human needs, while promoting personal growth and self-sufficiency”. They have three sites in Routt County: Steamboat Springs, Oak Creek and Hayden.

Their major programs are providing emergency food assistance and running the local food pantry. SNAP participants (130% FPL) can access the Lift-Up food pantry four times per year and those from 131-250% FPL can access the pantry two times per year. Students who participate in FRL are eligible for the summer food and weekend program. In 2013, Lift-Up distributed 6,097 bags, each with approximately $40 in grocery and personal items.

Fruit and Vegetable Intake

In 2009-2010, data from Routt County residents indicated that about 28% ate 4 or more servings of fruits and vegetables a day, much lower than the 39% reported in 2007-2008. Additionally, in 2012, the Northwest CO Food Coalition completed a countywide Food Assessment that included a community survey. Over 700 adult residents across the County responded to questions about fruit and vegetable consumption. 48% of respondents reported consuming 3 or less servings of fruit and vegetables a day (most servings = ½ cup) and the average amount of servings per day was 3.7.

Over the last two years, Routt County parents of students in K-5th and 6th-12th grade students completed a survey asking about servings of fruits and vegetables consumed. Only 28% of the students were eating 4 or more servings of fruits and vegetables each day in 2011. The average increase of fruit and vegetable consumption for all students from 2011 to 2013 was insignificant; averaging about 3 servings/day across all years. K through 5th grade students averaged the most fruits and vegetables with 3.3 in 2013, while 6th to 8th graders and high school students both averaged 2.9 servings per day.
C. Factors that Influence Healthy Eating & Strategies to Address Them

Understanding What Affects Healthy Eating

Many complex, inter-woven factors influence the consumption of fruits and vegetables and healthy foods overall. Whether a community develops strategies to address each of these areas or only one of them, understanding the many different factors at play is critical before developing and implementing community strategies. The full report highlights the many following factors and presents some of the recent evidence about when and how they influence dietary intake:

- **Food Literacy**
  - Family & Social Environments
  - Food Messaging & Marketing
  - Food & Nutrition Education
  - Food System Knowledge
- **Food Availability**
  - Healthy Food Production
  - Healthy Food Distribution
  - Healthy and Unhealthy Food Retail Environments
- **Economics**
  - Socioeconomics
  - Poverty & Food Insecurity
  - Cost of Food
  - Actual Food Expenditures
  - Federal Food & Nutrition Assistance Programs

Inspiring Strategies

The strategies to increase fruit and vegetable consumption are just as complex and complicated as the factors that influence consumption. Strategies range from gardening networks to food labeling, healthy shopping skills courses, public land for food production, community buying clubs, community kitchens, healthy retail store incentives, SNAP at farmers markets, and to farmer business training programs, and much more.
D. Next Steps

Healthy foods should be abundant and easy to find and to cook, and people should have the means to do so. Food system changes, particularly local ones, can only achieve some of this, but Part III of this food assessment will further explore the contributions that local food system strategies have to building community food security for all.

I. Introduction

A. Summary: Routt County Community Food Assessment, Part I

LiveWell Northwest Colorado’s (LW NW) mission is to reduce obesity in Routt County by introducing healthy eating and active living choices and empowering residents to select them.

LW NW and the Northwest Colorado Food Coalition (NCFC) completed Part I of the Routt County Community Food Assessment in January 2013. The Assessment was conducted in order to better understand the condition of the local food system and to develop a strategic plan to increase healthy eating within Routt County; a need identified by the Northwest Colorado Food Coalition, which designed and implemented the assessment plan. The goal of Part I was to address the question “are we maximizing our food environment and programs to increase fruit and vegetable consumption for all residents?” The Assessment focused on examining the four tenets of food access: physical, nutritional, economic, and social/cultural, using a consumer based approach.

Two key issues identified by Part I of the Routt County Community Food Assessment were the higher rates of overweight/obese children and adults than expected in the county, and the high percentage of food insecure residents. These results, among others, were presented to five governmental organizations, 22 businesses and non-profits, and three School Districts throughout Routt County with over 400 community members receiving the report summary.
Part II of the Routt County Community Food Assessment was designed to further share the story of obesity and food insecurity in our Country, State and County; to briefly review the economic impact of disease and fruit and vegetable consumption; and, to review the evidence base around what factors influence healthy eating.

This report aims to contribute to LW NW’s overall goals of increasing access to and consumption of fruits and vegetables through the development of community food security.

The goals for Part II of the Routt County Community Food Assessment are:

- **Goal 1**: to present information on the existing status of food-related health indicators of Routt County residents including obesity, diet, and food insecurity.

- **Goal 2**: to establish a shared understanding of the many factors that affect healthy eating.

- **Goal 3**: to identify potential strategies that address the local data and leverage what we know of the evidence base to increase healthy eating.

Following sections will address these goals based on existing data from Part I of the Routt County Community Food Assessment and additional data and information from a variety of local, state, and national resources.
C. What to Expect in Part III

Following up on this report, the NCFC will complete Part III of the community food assessment. Part III will further explore and address community food security by examining critical pieces of the local food system that include the economics of farming, processing, distribution, and the local policies impacting these systems. It will also review the role of local food systems in economic development.

Additional goals of the overall food assessment that will be addressed in Part III include:

- **Goal 1**: to highlight existing and potential assets in the local food system that support the economic feasibility of increasing production, processing, and sale of Routt County agricultural products to local residents.

- **Goal 2**: to identify the potential for local food systems to provide healthy foods to all residents, especially those most vulnerable.

All of these goals touch upon an aspect of building “community food security”, a concept mentioned throughout this report and explored in much more depth in Part III. The USDA Economic Research Service describes community food security as thus:

“There is no universally accepted definition of community food security. In the broadest terms, community food security can be described as a prevention-oriented concept that supports the development and enhancement of sustainable, community-based strategies:

- To improve access of low-income households to healthful nutritious food supplies.
- To increase the self-reliance of communities in providing for their own food needs.
- To promote comprehensive responses to local food, farm, and nutrition issues.” 8
II. What We Know: Diet and Obesity

A. The Obesity Health Crisis

Across the country, the obesity epidemic is taking a toll on our health, our children, our schools, our communities, our workforce, and our bottom line. This section includes current national, state, and local statistics on: rates of obesity and diabetes; the true costs of obesity and diabetes; current consumption rates of fruits and vegetables; and, costs of fruits and vegetables.

B. Obesity & Overweight Rates Among Adults

In the US in 2012, 35.8% of American adults were overweight and 27.6% were obese, according to data reported by the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). Adult obesity rates have nearly doubled — from 15% in 1980 to 27.6% in 2012. If current trends continue, forecasts suggest that by 2030 51% of the population will be obese. Nationally, by 2030, 13 states could have adult obesity rates above 60 %, 39 states could have rates above 50%, and all 50 states could have rates above 44%. 

Colorado is often touted as the “leanest” state in the Nation, with 55.7% of our adults being overweight or obese in 2012: 20.5% of adults in the state were obese and 35.2% were overweight. However, the current adult obesity rate would have made it the “fattest” state in 1995. If obesity rates continue on their current trajectories, by 2030, the obesity rate in Colorado could reach 44.8%. Also, as discussed below, Colorado will likely very soon see their status as the leanest state disappear given the rising rates of obesity and overweight amongst children.

The picture is a little less bleak in Routt County with approximately 48.5% of adults being overweight or obese in 2012, down from 51% in 2010.

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C. Obesity & Overweight Rates Among Children

In the US, approximately 31% of American children aged 10-17 years are overweight or obese\textsuperscript{15}. This translates to more than 12 million children and adolescents who are obese and more than 23 million who are either obese or overweight. The rate of obesity among children ages 2–19 has more than tripled since 1980.\textsuperscript{16}

Data for children and youth are collected across different years for different age groups at the state level, but information from various data sets highlights the alarming rates of overweight in children and youth in Colorado. Twenty-three percent (23.2\%) of CO’s 2-to-under 5 year olds\textsuperscript{17} were overweight or obese according to the most recently reported CDC pediatric and youth data from 2010\textsuperscript{18}. The Colorado Child Health Survey also found that 12\% of 2-14 year olds were overweight and 14\% were obese in 2010\textsuperscript{19}. Data from 2012 shows that 12\% of 10-17 year olds were overweight and 11\% were obese.

\textsuperscript{15} National Survey of Children’s Health, 2011-12. Available from: Data Research Center for Child and Adolescent Health. \url{www.childhealthdata.org/learn/NSCH}


\textsuperscript{19} Health Statistics Section, 2012. Available from Colorado Child Health Survey, Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment. \url{www.chd.dphe.state.co.us/topics.aspx?q=Maternal_Child_Health_Data}.
Between 2003 and 2007, the state’s childhood obesity ranking dropped from 3rd leanest in the country to 23rd and the number of obese 10-17 year olds rose from 48,000 to 72,000\textsuperscript{20}. Also, while obesity and morbid obesity among U.S. low-income, preschool-aged children went down for the first time in recent years, Colorado was one of three states that experienced a statistically-significant increase in rates of childhood obesity for this age group\textsuperscript{21}.

Locally, obesity and overweight rates have been tracked in Routt County Schools for the last 4 years. According to school district data, in 2010 19.4\% of Routt County’s K-12\textsuperscript{th} graders were overweight or obese. Obesity/overweight rates have increased to 21.3\% in 2013, which is demonstrated in the Figure 1. Also see Appendix A for obesity and overweight summary data for the US, Colorado, and Routt County.

\textbf{Figure 1: School District Measures of Obesity & Overweight}

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{figure1.png}
\caption{Combined Routt School Districts BMI Data}
\end{figure}


D. Diabetes Rates

One of the major chronic diseases that results from obesity is type 2 diabetes. In the US in 2010, 12% of the adult population was diabetic and 28% were considered pre-diabetics. If trends continue, approximately 50% of the US population will have diabetes or be pre-diabetic by 2020. Obesity could contribute to more than 6 million cases of type 2 diabetes in the next two decades.

Six percent (6%) of CO residents currently have diabetes, compared to 4.3% in 2004. Over the next 20 years, obesity could contribute to 519,150 new cases of type 2 diabetes in Colorado. In Routt County, 2% of the population had diabetes in 2010 and that increased to 3.3% in 2012. For a graphic display of the rates of overweight and diabetes in the State and County, see figure 2.

Figure 2: Percent Overweight, Obese, and Diabetes Over Time

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E. Economic Impact of Obesity

Nationwide Economic Impact

In the US nearly $1 in $5 generated by the US economy is spent on health care costs. Seventy-five percent (75%) of the US dollars spent on health care are spent on preventable chronic diseases.

Medicaid and Medicare are the only two line items in our federal budget that are increasing, because of rising chronic disease costs. If trends continue, the combined costs if Medicaid and Medicare can be expected to double – to just over $1.3 trillion – by 2020. If this occurs, federal expenditures for these two programs alone would exceed current federal spending on all defense and non-defense discretionary programs.

There is an estimated $190.2 billion price tag for annual medical costs due to obesity in the U.S., or nearly 21% of annual U.S. medical spending. Medical care costs are 20% higher for overweight and 50% higher for obese patients. The annual cost of treatment for a case of diabetes is $6,649/year; for undiagnosed cases it is $1,744/year and for pre-diabetes the cost is $443/year.

Besides the health care cost, there is also a productivity cost associated with obesity. Workers who are overweight or obese and have other chronic health conditions miss an estimated 450 million additional workdays a year, resulting in an estimated $153 billion in lost productivity annually. The loss in economic productivity could be between $390 billion and $580 billion annually by 2030.

On the other hand, every dollar on employee wellness returns $3.27 in health care cost savings and $2.73 in reduced costs for absenteeism.

Statewide Economic Impact

In 2009 an estimated $1.637 billion was spent to treat diseases related to obesity in Colorado. By 2030, obesity-related health care costs in

Colorado could climb by 28.5%, which could be the third highest increase in the country.\textsuperscript{33} If BMIs were lowered by 5%, Colorado could save 7.1% in 2030. If Colorado's adult obesity rate returned to 1996 levels, Colorado employers and employees could save an estimated $228.9 million annually in health care costs. If Colorado were the "leanest" state in the nation for children, Colorado employers and their employees could save an estimated $38.4 million annually in health care costs.\textsuperscript{34}

III. What We Know: Food Insecurity

A. Poverty & Self-Sufficiency Levels in Routt County

\textit{Poverty Levels}

To better understand the prevalence of food insecurity locally, it helps to first understand the presence and significance of poverty and self-sufficiency rates in a community.

According to the Food Research and Action Center (FRAC), the 2012 poverty rate for Colorado was 13.7%, with a total of 694,842 individuals living in poverty\textsuperscript{35}. The child poverty rate for Colorado in 2012 was 18.5%. Colorado ranked 32nd out of all states in the US for child poverty (number 50 having the highest child poverty rate)\textsuperscript{36}.

The American Community Survey 5-year estimate (2008-2012) of overall poverty rates in Routt County was 7.5%, or 1,725 people and for children (0-17yo) was 6% or 285 children. Additionally, ACS 5-year estimates show that approximately 454 families currently live at 130% of the Federal

\begin{thebibliography}{99}
\end{thebibliography}
Poverty Level, 421 families live between 130% and 185% of the FPL and 5,584 families live above 185% of the FPL. See Appendix B for federal poverty level information.

Cost of Living

It is important to review the influence of the cost of living on poverty and food insecurity rates, especially in Routt County. For a family of four (2 adults, 2 school aged children), 100% of the FPL income was $23,550 in 2011. In Routt County, families need income more than three times the federal poverty level to make ends meet. For a family of four (2 adults with 1 preschool and 1 school aged child) in 2011, to meet basic needs (i.e., housing, child care, food, transportation and health care), residents need to make $67,571 per year, which is equivalent to the two adults each making $16/hr. The median household income in Routt County in 2011 was $64,998, or $2,573 less than the estimated self-sufficiency standard. That means approximately 50% of Routt County households were not earning enough to meet their basic needs in this County.37

To further complicate the story, for that family of four to qualify for SNAP benefits, their annual income must not be greater than $30,615 (130% FPL). For a household of four, to be eligible for SNAP benefits ranging from $15 to $632/month, the annual income cannot exceed $30,615. It is important to note that the closer a family of four is to the $30,615, the lower the allotment of SNAP benefits38.

The cost of living issue is further complicated by the cliff effect. For many low-income families, working hard and getting a raise may actually leave them with less money. The cliff effect occurs when a family loses eligibility work support benefits (e.g., child care assistance, food stamps or health care) due to increased earnings. This sudden drop-off in benefits can leave a family worse off financially than it was before the breadwinner took a promotion or raise.39

Presented here is a hypothetical story of the impact of the cliff effect on a family of four with one preschooler and one school aged child living in Routt County. Let’s say the family’s annual income is $30,000, which is equivalent to $2500 per month or $577 per week or $14.42 per hour. This family is eligible for SNAP but the allotted amount is at the low end of the range due to annual income, and is approximately $20 per week. If one of the parent’s receives a raise of $11.83/week or $0.30/hour, that family would no longer qualify for SNAP because their annual income would be $30,618. So they would lose about $20 per week in SNAP benefits for the

38 Routt County Department of Human Services, 2013.
$11.83 more they are earning each week. In addition, they may lose other benefits for child care and health care as a result of that very small raise.

Routt County residents are even more impacted by the cliff effect due to high food costs and the high cost of living (i.e., self-sufficiency index), issues that are discussed more thoroughly later in this report.

**B. What is Food Insecurity?**

In 2006, the United States Department of Agriculture Economic Research Service introduced new language to describe levels of food security. People with “high food security” report no indication of food access problems or limitations. Those who are “marginally food secure” report one or two indications (e.g., anxiety about shortage of food in the house) but little or no changes in diets or food intake. People who have “low food security” report reduced quality, variety or desirability of diet with little or no indication of reduced food intake. Lastly, people with “very low food security” report multiple indications of disrupted eating patterns and reduced food intake, and report feelings of hunger.40

The USDA-ERS also reports that “The defining characteristic of very low food security is that, at times during the year, the food intake of household members is reduced and their normal eating patterns are disrupted because the household lacks money and other resources for food.”41 Annual food security surveys from the USDA demonstrate the effects on health of very low food insecurity. Survey respondents reported several detrimental effects of food insecurity including: concerns about food running out before they could buy more; not being able to afford balanced meals; adults skipping or cutting back the size of meals because there was not enough money for food; losing weight due to not being able to buy food; and, feeling hungry but not being able to buy food.

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C. Trends in Food Insecurity

Figures 3 and 4, below, from the USDA-ERS show recent trends in food insecurity and very low food security rates nationally as well as state prevalence of food insecurity.

Figure 3: State Prevalence of Food Insecurity, average 2010-12


Figure 4: Trends in Food Insecurity in the US

![Graph showing trends in prevalence rates of food insecurity and very low food security in U.S. households, 1995-2012. Source: Calculated by ERS based on Current Population Survey Food Security Supplemental data. Prevalence rates for 1996 and 1997 were adjusted for the estimated effects of differences in data collection screening protocols used in those years.]

D. Food Insecurity in Colorado and Routt County

Rates of Measured Food Insecurity

According to 2012 FRAC data, just over 14% of Colorado households were food insecure (a three year average from 2010 to 2012), or 293,710 unique households. This data is very similar to data collected by Map the Meal Gap and detailed below. From 2009 to 2012, Map the Meal Gap collected food insecurity data in the US, State and at the local levels. Feeding America - Map the Meal Gap calculates food insecurity by analyzing the relationship between food insecurity and indicators of food insecurity and child food insecurity (poverty, unemployment, median income, etc.) at the state level. The coefficient estimates from this analysis are used, plus information on the same variables defined at the county level, to generate estimated food insecurity rates for individuals or children at the county level.

Figure 5 includes information on food insecurity rates in Routt County.

Figure 5: Prevalence Rates of Food Insecurity in the US

![Trends in prevalence rates of food insecurity (2000-2012)](image)

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44 For details on how this data was gathered and the methodologies used to arrive at data conclusions, visit [http://feedingamerica.org/hunger-in-america/hunger-studies/map-the-meal-gap/how-we-got-map-data.aspx](http://feedingamerica.org/hunger-in-america/hunger-studies/map-the-meal-gap/how-we-got-map-data.aspx).
Table 1 shows food insecurity rates from Map the Meal Gap for the US, CO, and Routt County from 2009 to 2012. As expected, the National levels have been fairly consistent for the population over the last three years. However, the State increased from 14.3% in 2009 to 15.5% in 2010, stayed the same in 2011 and has dropped to 14.6% in 2012, almost to 2009 levels. The County showed an increase from 11.8% to 13.9% from 2009 to 2010, with a drop in 2011- 12.5% but in 2012 this increased to 12.9% of population that is described as food insecure, remaining higher than 2009 levels. In 2013, there were 3,010 residents in Routt County identified as food insecure.

For children, national data showed a decrease from 2009 to 2010, then a slight increase in 2011, and in 2012 a decrease (23.2, 21.6, 22.4 and 21.6% respectively). The good news for CO children is that the food insecurity percentages have continued to decrease from 22.7% in 2009 to 21.3% in 2012. Children in Routt County experienced a four-year high in 2010 with 18.8% of children described as food insecure. While this has dropped to 17.2% in 2012, there are still 830 food insecure children in Routt County.46

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>2009</th>
<th>2010</th>
<th>2011</th>
<th>2012</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>% in all US</td>
<td>16.6</td>
<td>23.2</td>
<td>16.1</td>
<td>21.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% in CO</td>
<td>14.3</td>
<td>22.7</td>
<td>15.5</td>
<td>22.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% in Routt CO</td>
<td>11.8</td>
<td>17.7</td>
<td>13.9</td>
<td>18.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>number in Routt CO</td>
<td>2650</td>
<td>770</td>
<td>3180</td>
<td>890</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It is also important to note that food insecurity is a real, and increasing, problem for older adults as baby boomers age. Nationally, more and more older adults are at risk of going hungry.

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Hunger Free Colorado reports the following through their site on older adult nutrition (http://www.hungerfreecolorado.org/senior-nutrition.html):

- From 2001 to 2010, the number of older adults experiencing a threat of hunger has increased by 78%.
- In 2009, 18% of Coloradans aged 60 or over were living at or below 150% of the poverty line, an income that is widely considered to be insufficient to meet the basic needs of housing, food, and healthcare.
- An estimated 9.65% of seniors in Colorado did not know where their next meal was coming from in 2010.
- This problem is perhaps less obvious in Routt County, where only 10% of the population is over 65 and only 7% (136 people) of that population lives below the poverty level. However, 223 individuals live between 100% and 175% of the FPL, which could have significant affects on food security levels. Also, given the increasing older adult population this importance of this issue will increase.
Food Insecurity and Eligibility for Federal Food Programs

To complicate matters, while 12.9% of Routt County was food insecure in 2012, only 50% (1,505 residents of the 3,010) were eligible for national food programs. And while 16.7% of our children were food insecure, only 42% (349 youth of the 830) were eligible for national food programs. See Appendix C for Colorado and Routt County data from Map the Meal Gap 2012 as well as Figure 6 for a visual picture of food insecurity in Routt County and eligibility for federal food programs.

Figure 6: Routt County Food Insecurity

Community Findings on Food Insecurity

As noted throughout this report, Routt County residents are accessing federal, state, and local supplemental food programs. As part of the Routt County Food Assessment conducted in 2012, residents who were currently using one or more of these programs completed surveys and a key informant focus group was convened to discuss food insecurity based on the USDA’s Community Food Assessment Toolkit. (For more details about this toolkit, surveys and discussion questions, see the Routt County Community Food Assessment - Part I report and appendices at the Routt County Extension Website, [http://rcextension.colostate.edu](http://rcextension.colostate.edu)).

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The informants from the focus group all agreed that food insecurity affects all age ranges in the County and see it as a “hidden” problem. They see families relying on both national and local food programs. They identified the cost of living, unemployment, underemployment, and low wages as strong contributing factors to food insecurity.

The majority of survey respondents had incomes of less than $33,000 and access SNAP, WIC, FRL, Lift-Up of Routt County, and/or Meals on Wheels (for detailed explanation and discussion of all food assistance programs available in Routt County, please see the following section). Twenty-five of the 26 respondents indicated that food assistance programs were “very important” to their family. The majority saw the programs as important because they help cover the costs of food and alleviate stress associated with feeding the family healthy and balanced meals. They report a high degree of satisfaction and convenience with the federal and local programs and report few challenges. In addition, they reported that the best part of the SNAP and WIC programs is that it allowed them to purchase and eat healthier foods.48

IV. What We Know: Federal and Community Food and Nutrition Assistance Programs

The United States Department of Agriculture provides food and nutrition assistance program funds to the state, primarily the Colorado Department of Public Health & Environment and Colorado Department of Human Services, which then provides funding at the county level through a variety of organizations.

The sections below will describe the program, eligibility, and relevant local data for the 10 Federal Food and Nutrition Assistance Programs, along with state and local data. The section concludes with program, eligibility, and other local data on community food assistance programs such as food pantries and congregate meal sites.

A. Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)

Description
SNAP is the largest food assistance program in the US. It provides a monthly benefit to qualifying individuals and households for food purchases. It was formerly called the Food Stamp Program. In 2013, an average of 47.8 million individuals participated for an average monthly benefit of $133.07. Ninety five percent of eligible individuals participate in the US.\(^{49}\)

Eligibility
To be eligible, participants must be at or lower than 130% FPL which for a family of four (2 adults and 2 school aged children) would be an income up to $30,615.\(^{50}\)

County Data
The Department of Human Services provides SNAP resources in Routt County. According to Hunger Free Colorado, in 2013, 956 of the 2,890 eligible Routt County residents participated in SNAP. Nearly 70% of those eligible in Routt County have not enrolled.\(^{51}\) Authorized SNAP stores in Routt County include: Yampa- Kum & Go and Montgomery’s; Oak Creek- Select Super; Hayden- Kum & Go and Hayden Mercantile; Steamboat Springs- 2 Kum & Go’s, WalMart, City Market, Safeway, Natural Grocers, Loaf N’ Jug, and Walgreens.

2011 Census numbers show that Routt County had 999 persons eligible for, but not enrolled in SNAP. Routt County has lower numbers of eligible, but not enrolled persons when compared to other similar neighboring counties, including Summit, Eagle, Jackson, and Grand with numbers between 1,000 and 10,000.

From 2007 to 2012 the amount of SNAP distribution has increased significantly in the County, averaging 416 households in 2011,459 in 2012, and through March 2013 956 households (note that these numbers are more current than those represented in the graph below).\(^{52}\) In 2007 the total amount distributed was $226,268. The first major increase was in 2009 with $618,796 distributed, followed by 2010 at $1,104,311, 2011 at $1,462,908 and 2012 at $1,534,427\(^{53}\). Figure 7 presents the number of households accessing SNAP assistance programs in Routt County from 2008 to 2013\(^{54}\).


\(^{52}\) Colorado Department of Human Services, 2013. Compiled by Hunger Free Colorado.

\(^{53}\) Routt County Department of Human Services, 2013.

\(^{54}\) Routt County Department of Human Services, 2013.


**Figure 7: Number of Routt County Households Receiving SNAP**

![Graph showing the number of Routt County households receiving SNAP from 2009 to 2013. The graph shows a steady increase in the number of households receiving SNAP over the years.](Graph.png)

**B. National School Lunch and Breakfast Program**

*Description*

The National School Lunch and Breakfast Program (NSLP) is the second largest supplemental nutrition program in the US. It was first established in 1946 with two goals: 1) to ensure food security for American youth, and 2) to increase demand for US agriculture goods.\(^{55}\) School lunches must meet meal pattern and nutrition standards based on the latest Dietary Guidelines for Americans.

The current meal pattern increases the availability of fruits, vegetables, and whole grains in the school menu. School food authorities that are certified to be in compliance with the updated meal requirements will receive an additional six cents of federal cash reimbursement for each meal served.

Schools are reimbursed on a per meal basis and rates for the 2013-2014 school year are $2.93 for a free meal, $2.53 for a reduced meal and $0.28 for a full pay meal.\(^{56}\) This program is also available for school breakfast with reimbursements at $1.58 for free, $1.28 for reduced- the state of Colorado pays an additional $0.30 for reduced meals (turning reduced meals into free meals), and full pay at $0.27 per meal.\(^{57}\)


In addition to cash reimbursements, schools are entitled to receive USDA Foods (commodity foods) or "entitlement" foods, but they are provided at a value of 23.25 cents for each meal served in Fiscal Year 2012-2013. These foods are provided at no cost to school districts (who must pay for storage, processing, and some transportation) but they still make up a small proportion of a district’s revenue\(^\text{58}\).

**Eligibility**

To qualify for free meals, the students’ household income must be at or below 130% FPL (or an income of up to $30,615 for a family of four) and for reduced meals it must be between 131% to 185%, which for a family of four means an income of $30,615 up to $43,567 per year.\(^\text{59}\)

**County Data**

Applications for the NSLP are available at the local school district in Routt County. In school year 2013-2014, 708 or 22.5% of Routt County students received free and reduced lunch benefits. Approximately 30 out of the 708 eligible students in Routt County participated in the School Breakfast Program.

While there has been a slight increase in free and reduced lunch (FRL) participation in the County over the past several years, in 2013, SOROCO showed a significant increase while Hayden saw a decrease of students participating in the program. According to the Map the Meal Gap from 2011, many more students may be eligible for the program, but are not accessing it. Map the Meal Gap shows that 48% of Routt County students were eligible for free and reduced lunch, summer food, WIC, and SNAP while only about 18% were accessing the FRL portion of the benefit.\(^\text{60}\)

In the SY2013, only the Steamboat Springs School District provides the breakfast program. In the county as a whole (all elementary schools in three school districts) in SY2012, 381 out of the 635 eligible students participated in the School Breakfast Program.\(^\text{61}\) During academic years 2011-2012 and 2012-2013, South Routt Elementary provided a free breakfast to all students with approximately 98% of the students participating. However due to budgetary constraints, this program was eliminated for the 2013-2014 school year.\(^\text{62}\)

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Based on the 2012 Map the Meal Gap data, 481 of the 830 food insecure youth (58%) in Routt County are NOT eligible for the FRL program or other federal nutrition programs.63

Figure 8 shows the NSLP trends from 2009 to 2013 from all Routt County Schools.

**Figure 8: Percent of Students Qualifying for Free and Reduced Lunches from 2009-2013 by District**

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**C. Summer Food Service Program (SFSP)**

**Description**

The SFSP provides nutritious meals to children 0-18 years old during the summer or other school calendar vacations. The programs can be sponsored by public and private organizations. Reimbursement rates for breakfast are $1.94, $0.80 for a snack, and $3.41 for lunch or dinner.64

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Eligibility
Open sites operate in low-income areas where at least 50% of children residing in the area are eligible for FRL meals based on data from the local school or census. The meals are then served free to any child who comes to the site. Closed enrolled sites are established for those children who enroll in an organized program or who do not reside in an eligible low-income area. The site is eligible for the free meal program if 50% of the enrolled children qualify for FRL. The site is not open to the community and meals are only served free to those children enrolled in the program. If the site qualifies as an open site, free meals are available to all children.65

County Data
In 2012, only 31 Routt County residents participated in the SFSP. Until the summer of 2012, Routt County did not have any SFSP sites. In 2012, Hayden's Totally Kids (an afterschool and summer program), working with LW NW, became qualified as an open site and implemented the first free summer meal program in Routt County. During the pilot year, 1,279 breakfasts and 1,946 lunches were served. In 2013, the number of meals served increased with 1,289 breakfasts and 2,626 lunches served to an estimated 100 students from mid-May through mid-August.

D. After Care Snack Program (ACSP)

Description
This program assists schools that operate organized programs of care for children afterschool. It is funded through the National School Lunch Program. Reimbursement rates are $0.80 for an eligible free snack, $0.40 for a reduced-price eligible snack, and $0.07 for a paid snack.

Eligibility
"The reimbursement rate for NSLP snacks is determined either by the afterschool program's eligibility or the individual child's eligibility. An afterschool program is eligible if it is located in a low-income area (where at least 50 percent of the children in the local elementary, middle, or high school are eligible for free or reduced-price school meals). In this instance, all of the snacks are reimbursed at the free rate of reimbursement for all of the snacks served. If an afterschool program is not located in a low-income area, it is reimbursed based upon each child’s eligibility for free, reduced-price, or paid school meals."66

County Data
No organizations in Routt County currently participate in this program.

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E. Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program (FFVP)

Description
This program was established in the 2002 Farm Bill with the goal of creating healthy eating habits early by exposing elementary school children to fresh fruits and vegetables during the school day. It is administered by the USDA’s Food and Nutrition Service at the national level and is run by the state department of education at the local level. Fruits and vegetables provided through the Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program are served to children outside of school meal time. For elementary schools participating in the FFVP, the school receives between $50-$75 per student for each school year. Schools use the funds to purchase additional fresh fruits and vegetables to serve free to students during the school day.67

A 2011 evaluation from the USDA estimated that students who participated in the school-based Fresh Fruit & Vegetable Pilot Program (FFVP) consumed 14.6% more fruits and vegetables than schools without FFVP. It has been estimated that the $150 million FFVP program (an average of $50 to $75 per student per year) led to a ¼ cup increase in fruit and vegetable consumption for each student participating.68

Eligibility
To be eligible the school must participate in the National School Lunch Program and have at least 50% of students eligible for free and reduced lunches.69

County Data
No Routt County School Districts currently meet the eligibility requirements for this program.

F. The Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP)

Description
TEFAP is a Federal program that helps supplement the diets of low-income Americans, including elderly people, by providing them with emergency food and nutrition assistance at no cost. Through TEFAP, the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) purchases USDA commodity foods, processes and packages the food and then, makes it available to State Distributing Agencies.

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The amount of food each state receives out of the total amount of food provided is based on the number of unemployed persons and the number of people with incomes below the poverty level in the state. States provide the food to local agencies that they have selected, usually food banks, which in turn distribute the food to local organizations, such as soup kitchens and food pantries that directly serve the public.

Prior to Oct 2013, distributions occurred quarterly. As of Oct 2013, distributions occur monthly. Under TEFAP, States also receive administrative funds to support the storage and distribution of USDA Foods. These funds must, in part, be passed down to local agencies.  

**Eligibility**
Eligibility is 185% FPL or below. For a family of four the eligibility income is $43,567 or less per year.  

**County Data**
Lift-Up distributes TEFAP in Routt County to 44 participants a month. Pick up is available at all three Lift-Up sites.

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G. Women, Infants and Children Program (WIC)

Description

WIC provides nutritious foods, nutrition education (including breastfeeding promotion and support), and referrals to health and other social services to participants at no charge. WIC serves low-income pregnant, postpartum and breastfeeding women, and infants and children up to age 5 who are at nutrition risk. WIC began in 1974 as a food voucher program. Congress authorizes a specific amount of funding each year for program operations. The Food and Nutrition Service, which administers the program at the Federal level, provides these funds to WIC State agencies (state health departments or comparable agencies) to pay for WIC foods, nutrition education, breastfeeding promotion and support, and administrative costs.

Eligibility

To be eligible on the basis of income, applicants’ income must fall at or below 185% FPR, for a family of four the eligibility income is $43,567 or less per year. A person who participates or has family members who participate in certain other benefit programs, such as the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, Medicaid, or Temporary Assistance for Needy Families, automatically meets the income eligibility requirement.72

County Data

County resources for WIC are available at the Northwest CO Visiting Nurse Association. In 2012, 190 Routt County children under the age of five participated in the WIC program.73 In Routt County, there were 296 WIC participants in 2011 (74% children), and 349 participants in 2012 (79% children). In 2013, there were 344 Routt County WIC participants (107 women, 112 infants, 125 children). The following are authorized WIC sites in Routt County: Safeway, City Market and the Hayden Mercantile.

H. Commodity Supplemental Food Program (CSFP)

Description

CSFP offers free, nutritious foods to seniors aged 60 years of age and older and to some women and children (up to six years old) that are not eligible for WIC. This program provides food rather than food vouchers, one time each month. CSFP food packages do not provide a complete diet, but rather are good sources of the nutrients typically lacking in the diets of the target population. The program is specifically designed to supplement SNAP benefits, helping recipients access essential nutritious foods that they

74 NW CO VNA, 2013.
might not get otherwise. The program also serves as an outlet for commodity agriculture products from the US government.

Food packages include a variety of foods, such as infant formula and cereal, nonfat dry and ultra-high temperature fluid milk, juice, farina, oats, ready-to-eat cereal, rice, pasta, peanut butter, dry beans, canned meat or poultry or fish, and canned fruits and vegetables. In addition, CSFP provides: guidance in preparing nutritious meals, including cooking demonstrations; nutrition and health information provided by nutritionists and referrals to health care and social service agencies for other needed services.75

**Eligibility**
CSFP is available to low-income (at or below 130% FPL, or a family of four whose income is at or below $30,615/year) “pregnant and breastfeeding women, other new mothers up to one year postpartum, infants, children up to their sixth birthday, and elderly persons at least 60 years of age.”76

**County Data**
Lift-Up of Routt County distributes this to seniors in Routt County. To date (as of October 2013), 51 Routt County citizens are enrolled; 20 from Steamboat Springs, 15 from Hayden, and 16 from Oak Creek. Clients can pick-up monthly distributions at any of the three sites.

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### I. Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP)

**Description**
CACFP is a nutrition education and meal reimbursement program helping providers serve nutritious and safely prepared meals and snacks to children and adults in day care settings. For participating child care centers, breakfast reimbursement rates are: $1.58 for free, $1.28 for reduced, and $0.28 for paid. Lunch and supper reimbursement rates are: $2.93 for free, $2.53 for reduced, and $0.28 for paid. Snack reimbursement rates are: $0.80 for free, $0.40 for reduced, and $0.07 for paid.77 Family day care homes are provided with similar reimbursements, with some slight differences.

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Eligibility
Eligibility for the program requires that day cares must have at least 25% of the eligible enrolled participants classified as FRL or receiving Child Care Assistance Benefits. For the adult programs, 25% of eligible enrolled participants must receive Medicaid or Adult Day Care Participant benefits.

County Data
Grandkids and Young Tracks Early Childhood Centers and four home-based child care programs utilize this program.

J. Older American Nutritional Services

Description
Two programs are available to Seniors: Congregate Nutrition Services (Senior Meals) and Home Delivered Nutrition Services (Meals on Wheels). Federal funding is available to states based on the population aged 60 and over. Meals and nutritional services can be offered in a variety of settings including homes and senior centers. Nutritional screening, education and counseling may also be provided.

Eligibility
Americans aged 60 and older and their caregivers are eligible for this program.

County Data
Meals on Wheels is also sponsored by the Routt County Council on Aging. Through this program, hot, low cost, nutritious meals are home-delivered to seniors. The recommended contribution for meals is $3.00 for persons 60 and older and mandatory fee of $6.00 for those under 60 years old. 2,818 meals were served through this program in 2013, averaging 54 meals each week.

The Senior Eat and Greet is sponsored by the Routt County Council on Aging. Meals are served in Steamboat Springs on Monday, Tuesday, Thursday and Friday; in Hayden on Tuesday and Thursday; and in Oak creek.
Creek on Monday, Wednesday, Friday. The recommended contribution for meals is $3.00 for persons 60 and older and a mandatory fee of $6.00 for those under 60 years old. On average, 3 attend the meals in Hayden, 15 in South Routt and 25 in Steamboat Springs in 2013. This program is partially funded with federal dollars (approximately 49%). 6,436 meals were served in 2013, averaging 123 per week.

See Appendix D for a summary of the federal nutrition programs. See Appendix E for a summary table of eligibility and enrollments in Routt County and the state for most of the programs discussed above.

K. Community Food Assistance Programs

Typically community food assistance programs are run by local, nonprofit organizations. These organizations can include food banks, food pantries or shelves, soup kitchens, and congregate meal sites. Formerly referred to as “emergency” food assistance sites, such community organizations have played an increasing and critical role in provide foods to food insecure families who do not or cannot access federal programs or when federal programs do not provide enough assistance to last all month. Fresh foods, processed foods, and prepared meals are provided to clients at no or minimal charge. Each program will have slightly different rules around eligibility. The sections below describe the types of community food assistance available in Routt County.

**Food Banks**

Food Banks are nonprofit organizations that collect, inventory and store donated food. Food is then distributed to social service (member) organizations that give the food directly to those in need. Feeding America is a network of over 200 Food Banks across the U.S. that "brokers, negotiates, receives and distributes to its member food banks donations of food and beverages from large companies, manufacturers and growers. Nationally and locally, Feeding America fosters relationships with food producers and retailers who contribute substantial donations to food banks in the Feeding America network".78

As Food Banks have moved from more emergency food to a source of supplemental food, they have developed programs and outreach activities to support their clients. In a survey of 137 Feeding America food banks, 81% offer SNAP outreach, 77% a backpack program, 66% mobile pantries,

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78 Center for Weight and Health, 2013. California Food Policy Advocates Report: Convening of key stakeholders to consider the findings of an RQF-funded study examining nutrition-related policies and practices within the emergency food network. University of CA, Berkeley.
64% nutrition education, 58% kids cafes, 25% community gardens and 14% afterschool programs.\textsuperscript{79}

Additionally, there has been a growing focus on the quality of food that is provided (i.e., nutritional value). In the survey mentioned above that was sent to all 202 Feeding America food banks, 137 food banks (68%) responded to questions addressing commitment to nutrition, policies to increase healthful foods, and challenges to providing more healthful foods.

Results of the survey indicated:

- Food banks had a strong commitment to nutrition (37% had a high level and 60% moderate level of commitment).
- 50% of respondents thought that most/all of donors were supportive of policies to address the nutritional quality of food. The remaining 50% did not.
- 55% reported that they had policies or guidelines to increase healthy foods distribution (e.g., fresh fruits and vegetables).
- 30% reported they had a policy to decrease unhealthy food (e.g., SSB, high fat snacks, desserts).
- Challenges to providing more healthy foods included: responding quickly to offers of perishable food, staff to deal with perishables, limited storage and refrigeration and refrigerated transport for perishables, and limited ability by member organizations to distribute perishables.

Feeding America is working to increase access to healthy food. They have developed the “Healthy Food Bank Hub” which they describe as such: “A project and platform developed in partnership with Feeding America and network food banks, Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics and National Dairy Council. The Hub provides a platform of evaluated tools and resources, showcases existing best practices and nutrition initiatives, and engages health and nutrition professionals to help fight hunger while promoting health.”

Additionally, many food banks across the US are now addressing the root causes of food insecurity. For example, a Food Bank in Northern Alabama’s goal is to “feed hungry today and create solutions to end hunger tomorrow.” Oregon has one State Food Bank with many sites and is leading the nation in creatively addressing the root of hunger. Their programs include: seed to supper, FEAST, Cooking Matters and Community Food Assessments (oregonfoodbank.org). Other creative food bank programs include providing revolving loan funds to farms, creation of food hubs, and developing value-added processing centers.

\textsuperscript{79} Center for Weight and Health, 2012. Nutrition policies and practices in the Feeding America network: Report provided to 202 Feeding America Food Banks. University of CA, Berkeley
Colorado Food Banks

There are five Food Banks in Colorado; all members of Feeding America. Services include emergency food provision and food distribution to multiservice groups, soup kitchens, seniors, shelters, rehabilitation, residence programs, youth programs, and day care. At the Food Bank of the Rockies, Colorado’s largest food bank, of their clients: 42% are children, 10% are children 5 or younger, and 5% are seniors, 14% are homeless, and 71% have incomes below the federal poverty level. Additionally, 42% of the households receiving food assistance have at least one working adult.

According to the Food Bank of the Rockies, the primary source of food is donations (60.2%) followed by USDA commodities (27.1%) and purchases (12.7%) (foodbankrockies.org). The 60.2% of donations come from: reclamation (4.9%), Denver’s table food rescue (24.5%), local produce (8.8%), food drives (2.9%), local food industry (43.7%), and from Feeding America (15.1%). In addition, Food Bank of the Rockies states that 96 cents of every dollar received goes directly to food distribution programs.

For donated food, Food Bank of the Rockies charges an average of 2 cents per pound to cover transportation and warehouse expenses. However, the average value of this food is $1.69/pound. Fresh produce, dairy and bread are distributed free. They also offer a Purchased Food Program so that agencies can purchase staples at wholesale costs (e.g., peanut butter, rice, bean, fruits and vegetables).

The following is a list of the 5 Food Banks in Colorado and programs they support (feedingamerica.org):

- **Care and Share** serve 31 counties and distributed 13,402,588 pounds of food in 2013. Basic programs include: fresh produce, back pack, purchase programs, mobile pantry, nutrition education, after school snacks, SNAP, on-site agency shopping, farm/orchard/raise fish, community garden and composting.

- **Food Bank for Larimer County** serves 1 county, with 7,825,047 pounds of food distributed in 2013. Programs include: production
kitchen, fresh produce, back pack, repack bulk, Kids Cafes, purchase program, nutrition education, after school snacks, on site client pantry, on site agency shopping, community garden, and composting.

**Weld Food Bank** services 1 county with 6,222,620 pounds of food distributed in 2013. Programs include: production kitchen, back pack, repack bulk, job training, kids cafes, eligibility counseling, purchase program, SNAP, on site client pantry, and on site agency shopping.

**Community Food Share** serves 2 counties with 7,537,782 pounds of food distributed in 2013. Programs include: fresh produce, repack bulk, purchase program, mobile pantry, SNAP, Senior Brown bag, on site client pantry and on site agency shopping.

**Food Bank of the Rockies** serves 53 counties (including Routt), and distributed 46,537,863 pounds of food in 2013, which equates to 106,251 meals/day. They serve more than 350,000 people annually from 1410 hunger-relief programs. Programs include: production kitchen, fresh produce, back pack-Totes of Hope, kids cafes, salvage, purchase program, mobile pantry, after school snacks, SNAP, Senior Brown-bag (Totes of Hope), and reclamation (Denver’s Table Food Rescue Program).

**Food Pantries**

Food pantries provide food and household products for community members to take home. Typically, clients visit a local food pantry, not the Feeding America food bank. Pantries typically get a majority of their food items that are not directly donated from a Feeding America food bank, and thus are USDA commodity foods. The majority of food pantries are operated by faith-based organizations. In 2011, 5.1% of all US households accessed emergency food from a food pantry (Feedingamerica.org).

According to Hunger Free Colorado, there are approximately 685 food pantries in Colorado. Most of these receive USDA commodity food and donated foods distributed from one of the five Colorado food banks.

In a survey conducted by Feeding America, 44.7% of responding food pantries indicated that they needed more fruits and vegetables and 38.1% needed more milk, yogurt and cheese. A separate survey conducted by Feeding America of 325 food pantry clients found that the most desired items at a pantry were: vegetables, meat/poultry/fish, fruits, eggs, refrigerated milk, cheese, whole grains, beans, soups, packaged meals, peanut butter and frozen meals, with sweet snacks and desserts, savory snacks and sweetened beverages falling at the very end of the list of choices given. Healthy foods and staple items were seen as very important or important to over 85% of clients. Having treats available was seen by 43% of clients as very important or important. However, very few pantries in
the country have nutrition guidelines for donations or for what they offer and market to clients.  

**Routt County Food Pantries**

Lift-Up of Routt County, the local food pantry, is a 501(c)3 founded in May 1996 by the Steamboat Springs Ministerial Association and several local church communities. Lift-Up “provides charitable assistance to meet basic human needs, while promoting personal growth and self-sufficiency”. They have three sites in Routt County: Steamboat Springs, Oak Creek and Hayden. Their major programs are providing emergency food assistance and running the local food pantry. Those who are participating in SNAP (130% FPL) can access the Lift-Up food pantry four times per year and those from 131-250% FPL can access the pantry two times per year. Students who participate in FRL are eligible for the summer food and weekend program.

The Lift-Up food pantry manager estimates that 70% of the food comes from Food Bank of the Rockies, 25% from community donations and food drives, 3% purchased from grocery stores and 2% donated from grocery stores. Food drives are primarily run by churches and neighborhoods and donations come from Safeway, City Market, Natural Grocers, Walmart, Starbucks, Meadowgold and Steamboat Springs Ski and Resort Corp. Funding for purchased foods come from local donations (community groups, churches), grants, and Thrift Store revenues. Consistent with the survey conducted by Feeding America, the Director of the Lift-Up Food Pantry shares that clients desire fresh fruits and vegetables, eggs, milk, and beans, that is, healthy food.

In 2011 6,334 food bags were distributed to 2,751 households. In 2012, 5,547 food bags to 2,677 households and in 2013, 6,897 bags were distributed. Each bag holds approximately $40 in grocery and personal items. See Figure 9 for the number of food bags distributed from 2009-2013. Please note: If you divide the number of bags by two, it gives you an approximation of number of clients served.

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80 Webb K, Campbell E et al, 2012. Improving the nutritional quality of food distributed to lower income families through emergency food services. Center for Weight and Health, University of CA, Berkeley.
81 Since May 2012, residents at 250% FPL are eligible for services. It used to be capped at 200% of FPL. This allows approximately 10 more families access to the program.
Other supplemental nutrition programs provided at Lift-Up include:

**GO, SLOW, WHOA** (example of a Traffic Light campaign). In 2013, Lift-Up launched a new education program in the pantry; Go, Slow, Whoa. All food items are identified as a Go, Slow, or Whoa items and clients were provided educational materials about choosing more Go items. In addition, those who are donating to the pantry are encouraged to “give nutritiously”. See Appendix F for an outline of the GSW program.

**Point Program**: In 2014, Lift-Up will launch a new food distribution program based on a point system and allow monthly shopping. Clients will be allowed 60 points in three months, or 20 points per month. Each food item available is given a 1, 2, or 3 depending upon the nutritional value and amount.

**Student Summer Lunch program**: In 2012 Lift-Up launched a summer lunch and school backpack program in Steamboat Springs, Hayden and South Routt. The summer program provides lunch for 5 days and runs for 13 weeks for youth K-12th grades. The summer food program began with 924 bags distributed to 153 children in 2012. In 2013 they distributed 823 bags to 262 children. On average, the food pantry distributed 75 bags a week and served a total of 4,115 lunches in 2013.

**Weekend Back Pack Program**: Provides a weekend supply of nutritious food for preschool and elementary aged children and contains enough food for two breakfasts, lunches, snacks and dinners. The Weekend backpack program has 157 youth participating (45 from SOROCO, 80 from Steamboat Springs, 30 from Hayden, and two from private schools). 4,128 bags were distributed from Aug 2012 through

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June 2013. The cost per bag for each program is estimated at $6.00/week per child. 85

**Routt County Congregate Meal Sites & Soup Kitchens**

Congregate meal sites and soup kitchens provide prepared meals for individuals in a group setting. These programs are typically run by faith-based organizations, rely on community volunteers, and use donated food for their meals. It is thus difficult to know how many such sites exist across the state.

In Routt County, several agencies and organizations provide free or low-cost meals to residents.

- The Senior Eat and Greet is sponsored by the Routt County Council on Aging. See Older American Nutrition for more details.
- A free community dinner is sponsored by the United Methodist Church on Thursday evenings from 5:30-7:30PM. The church serves between 75 and 100 community members each week.
- Holy Name Parish also offers a free community dinner which is held the 2nd Thursday of the month in Steamboat Springs and the 1st Monday of the month in Oak Creek. The parish serves between 40 and 100 meals each month.

**L. Summary of Federal & Community Program Eligibility**

As a reminder, 21% of the population of Routt County is income-eligible for the federal and local food assistance programs described above. This is only about 50% of the entire food insecure population in the county. Figure 10 below captures eligibility for various programs.

**Figure 10: Federal Food & Nutrition Assistance Program Eligibility**

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V. What we know: Fruit and Vegetable Consumption

A. Trends in the American Diet

Given all of the data that has just been presented on food insecurity locally and nationally, it may seem surprising, but Americans eat more pounds per person of food today than at any other time in history. This food tends to be highly processed and high in fat and sugar. In fact, the average American eats 165 pounds of added fats and sweeteners a year, 17% of all food consumed by weight.  

Caloric consumption is one indicator of health. The average American aged 2 and over consumes about 2,157 calories/day. One-half of these calories come from carbohydrates, 34% from fat, 15% from protein and 2% from alcohol.  

We also tend to snack a lot and eat out a lot more than we used to. Research indicates that in 1977 children consumed 418 calories each day from snacks and 586 calories in 2006. About 30% of food budgets were spent on foods eaten away from home in 1965, and by 2006 this increased to 49%.

According to one in-depth study published by the Centers for Disease Control, approximately 80% of Michigan adults went to fast-food restaurants at least once per month and 28% at least twice a week, and the prevalence of obesity increased consistently with an increase of fast food consumption. A fast food meal, on average, provides 37% of daily recommended calories.

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B. Adult Fruits & Vegetable Consumption Rates

National Statistics
A diet high in fruits and vegetables has been clearly associated with lower health risks. Eating more fruits and vegetables lowers risks of Type 2 Diabetes and helps to manage weight. The USDA has highlighted three primary reasons for encouraging Americans to eat more fruits and vegetables: they are major contributors to under-consumed nutrients; they are associated with reduced risk of many chronic diseases; and, they are low in calories.

Given the importance of produce in our diets, current USDA recommendations for consumption is 9 to 11 servings of fruits and vegetables each day (4.5 to 5.5 cups), where a serving is defined as a ½ cup. The “5 a day” goal (3 servings of vegetables and 2 of fruit) is still the standard against which much information about our diets is still measured, however.

In 2010, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reported that fewer than 33% of Americans eat two servings of fruit per day, and fewer than 27% eat three servings of vegetables. Consumption rates have declined in recent years as well. In 2004, Americans consumed 2.97 servings of fruits and vegetables on average each day. By 2013, national consumption of fruits and vegetables had decreased to an average of 2.7 servings a day, or 1.1 servings of fruit and 1.6 servings of vegetables.  

State Statistics
Data collected in Colorado show similar trends. According to 2009 CDC data, 25% of Colorado adults reported eating 5 or more servings of fruits and vegetables a day. In 2012, the average intake of fruits was 1.1 servings per day and 1.7 servings of vegetables per day, totaling 2.8 servings per day.

Routt County Statistics
In 2009-2010, data from Routt County residents indicated that about 28% ate 4 or more servings of fruits and vegetables a day, much lower than the 39% reported in 2007-2008.

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Additionally, in 2012, the Northwest CO Food Coalition completed a countywide Food Assessment that included a community survey. Over 700 adult residents across the County responded to questions about fruit and vegetable consumption. 48% of respondents reported consuming 3 or less servings of fruit and vegetables a day (most servings = ½ cup) and the average amount of servings per day was 3.7. Data collected from clients who participated in the Women, Infants and Children Program (WIC) and Lift-UP Food Pantry reported eating an average of 2.7 servings of fruits and vegetables each day, although the survey did not capture consumption rates of residents who would be eligible but not participating in such food assistance programs.

C. Youth Fruits & Vegetable Consumption Rates

State Statistics
Currently in Colorado, only 10% of children under 14 years old and 21% of high schoolers consume at least 5 fruits and vegetables per day.

Routt County Statistics
Over the last two years, Routt County parents of students in K-5th and 6th-12th grade students completed a survey asking about servings of fruits and vegetables consumed. Only 28% of the students were eating 4 or more servings of fruits and vegetables each day in 2011. The average increase of fruit and vegetable consumption for all students from 2011 to 2013 was insignificant, averaging about 3 servings/day across all years. K through 5th grade students averaged the most fruits and vegetables with 3.3 in 2013, while 6th to 8th graders and high schoolers both averaged 2.9 servings per day.

See Table 2 for fruit and vegetable consumption summary data from the US, Colorado, and Routt County. The Routt County adult data was collected by LW NW using a survey format. Appendix G summarizes data from state and national sources.

| Table 2: Summary of Servings of Fruits/Vegetables (serving = 1/2 cup) |
|------------------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|
| 9 to 11                | 2.7             | 2.8             | 3.7             | 2.7             | 3               |

For Routt County students in 2013, K through 5th grade students averaged the most fruits and vegetables with 3.3, while 6th to 8th graders and high schoolers both averaged 2.9 servings per day.

1 serving = ½ cup
D. The Disconnect Between What We Know & What We Actually Eat

USDA’s Dietary Guidelines (MyPlate) recommend we fill half our plates with fruits and vegetables – up to 9 servings a day. This recommendation is based on sound scientific evidence. The connection between diet and health is clear – food is medicine. Most Americans are also well aware that we should be eating more fruits and vegetables. So why aren’t we? Significant gaps still remain between what we eat, what we are told we should eat, what we know we should, and even what we want to be eating or feeding our families.

Making a healthy food choice is influenced by a number of factors; some that are within an individual’s control (e.g., food tastes, preparation skills), and some beyond their control (e.g., economics, family, marketing). Each one of these factors can have a positive or negative affect on healthy eating patterns. Extensive research has also shown that risk factors and support factors are not the same for everyone.

Research in recent years has examined the inequities that are built into the United States food system – whether it be about the lack of full-service grocers or the over-abundance of fast food and corner stores in low-income communities or the disproportionate degree of junk food marketing to communities of color, or the significant distances to markets in rural communities, all key findings of PolicyLink’s recent literature review, “Access to Healthy Food and Why It Matters” (see page 9).

Since there are so many influences on what we choose to eat, strategies that combine education with environmental and policy change are critical to successfully addressing changing dietary habits.

The following sections of this report will highlight the many personal, community, environmental, and policy factors that influence healthy eating.

Each section pulls together some of the current evidence and several sample strategies to address the following questions that are fundamental to selecting and eating health foods:

- Do I know what to select and how to prepare healthy food? (food literacy);
- Is healthy food available to me? (availability); and,
- Can I afford the healthy food? (cost).

Yes or No answers to these questions can assist community partners in determining how to prioritize strategies within these categories -- food literacy, availability or affordability -- in a way that advances equitable healthy food access for residents who are the most underserved.

Table 3 demonstrates how this process could be used within a community to select strategies for different populations.

Table 3: Strategic decision making outline

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Do they have knowledge &amp; skills?</th>
<th>Is it available?</th>
<th>Can they afford it?</th>
<th>Strategies focused:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Where we want everyone to be!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>address availability</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>address availability and cost</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>address food literacy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>No</td>
<td>address food literacy &amp; cost</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>address food literacy &amp; availability</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>address food literacy, availability &amp; cost</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The following sections will address the research related to influences on healthy eating and will include strategies to address the influences that have shown some impact on increasing healthy eating. Please note the field of research on this topic is growing daily, as are model strategies. We do not aim to present all of the evidence or all of the potential strategies here; rather, we present a sampling of the evidence to demonstrate the importance of each factor. The section on availability will be briefly outlined as Part III of this Assessment will address this topic more completely.
VI. Factors that Influence Healthy Eating: Food Literacy

This first section will address the fundamental question for all of us: Do I know what to select and how to prepare healthy food? The evidence reviewed in this section, and some of the sample strategies presented in the following section, will touch upon building the knowledge and skills related to healthy eating within the community and family environment.

A. Family & Social Environments

In Phase I of our community food assessment, “taste” was the number one reason why individuals in Routt County indicated that they did not eat more fruits and vegetables. This is commonly found in national research as well. Other individual factors that influence our food choices come from our family and social environments: emotional states and stress; attitudes, values and habits; and, social and cultural norms.

**Family Environment**

Families are busy. Kids are over-scheduled, more and more households have two working parents (a trend that is only just now starting to decline), and quick and easy, good-tasting, prepared foods are plentiful.

The county-wide survey for Part I of the Routt County Food Assessment found that for those survey respondents who did report barriers to consuming fruits and vegetables, the most common response was “time to prepare food” and “tastes of household members”.

A large number of survey comments also indicate that most available fresh produce is overripe, spoils quickly and cannot be kept around the house for several days. These conditions may put additional pressure on busy household to visit the grocery store several times a week in order to maintain healthy, balance diets.

Recent national research confirms the supportive – or not – role that families can play in promoting healthy eating. One Robert Wood Johnson Foundation study, “A Poll about Children and Weight: crunch time during the American Work and School Week- 3 PM to bed”, looked at barriers to consumption of healthy food. Data from the 1,018 caregivers showed “in their crunch time window, a substantial share of children are consuming foods and drink that can lead to unhealthy weight gain, largely with parents’ approval and driven by taste”.  

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Other research is increasingly showing how parental and family behavior can positively support healthy eating choices. Extensive research shows that when parents eat more fruits and vegetables, so do the children\textsuperscript{96}. Research on rural environments out of Maine has confirmed previous research as well – that parents who eat healthy and eat together as a family are the most determinant of children’s healthy eating habits, no matter what types of foods are available in the home\textsuperscript{97}.

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{image.png}
\caption{Family eating together.}
\end{figure}

\textbf{Social and Cultural Norms}

It is clear that we all have social and cultural ties to food that begin when we are born. Every culture across the world has traditions and habits around food. These habits are hard to break, and sometimes when they are, then cultural habits that promoted good health are negated - as in the case with Native Americans in the Southwest whose incidences of diabetes skyrocketed in the late 20th century after an emergence of contemporary American eating establishments.

Our social networks may play a role in our health as well. A 2007 article titled “The spread of obesity in a large social network over 32 years” looked not just at food access and income levels but also at the role of relationships in affecting healthy habits and ultimately, obesity. The research found that obesity seems to spread through social ties. As one author of the 2007 study put it, "it’s true that your environment has an impact on you, but it doesn’t seem to be the reason" for your body weight.

\begin{itemize}
\end{itemize}
Having an obese neighbor did not make a person more likely to be obese, but having a friend or relative who was—even if that person lived hundreds of miles away—did.

Additionally, researchers in the United Kingdom conducted a systematic review of several experimental studies, each of which examined whether or not providing information about other peoples’ eating habits influences food intake or choices. Their results, published in the *Journal of the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics*[^1], reveal consistent evidence that social norms influence food choices. The study found that if participants were given information indicating that others were making low-calorie or high-calorie food choices, it significantly increased the likelihood that participants made similar choices. Also, data indicate that social norms influence the quantity of food eaten. Additionally, the review indicated that suggesting that others eat large portions increased food intake by the participants. There was also a strong association between eating and social identity.

### B. Food Messaging & Marketing

Food messaging and marketing can have a very powerful influence on what we understand is healthy and on what we choose to buy and eat. For example, while food labels can provide valuable information about the nutritional content of a product, marketing tools using words such as whole grain, low-fat, and low-sugar can be confusing to the consumer.

Marketing tools include ads (e.g., TV, billboards, newspapers), product packaging and other media outlets. Some nutrition messaging can be positive - simply requiring labels about nutritional contents is a form of nutrition education as well as marketing. Food labeling is becoming increasingly common as the federal government aims to reduce obesity rates through increasing awareness of portion sizes and nutritional contents by requiring labeling that is easy to read.

Food and food service companies spend more than $10 billion annually on direct media advertising. For every dollar spent on direct marketing, another $2 is spent on incentives (e.g., coupons, prime shelf space). Nationally, the most highly processed foods and fast foods are the most highly promoted.

highly promoted. Less than ½% of what food and beverage companies spent on marketing to children in 2009 went toward fruit and vegetable marketing.  

The Prevention Institute (www.preventioninstitute.org) maintains a resource titled “The facts on junk food marketing and kids” that presents several statistics on the extent of marketing and how effective it is at influencing children’s diets. Some of the facts presented include:

- The food and beverage industry spends approximately $2 billion per year marketing to children.
- The fast food industry spends more than $5 million every day marketing unhealthy foods to children.
- Nearly all (98 percent) of food advertisements viewed by children are for products that are high in fat, sugar or sodium. Most (79 percent) are low in fiber.
- One study found that when children were exposed to television content with food advertising, they consumed 45 percent more food than children exposed to content with non-food advertising.

Other examples of messaging and marketing tools that aim to influence people to eat healthier include nutritional content labeling, on menu items or packaged products. One recent study evaluated recent menu labeling regulations in King County, Washington. The report summary concluded that, “Like prior studies, researchers found no significant changes in calories purchased six months after implementation, but found a modest decrease in the calories purchased after 18 months, particularly among women and customers of taco and coffee chains. The average calories per purchase at food chain restaurants fell by 38 calories and at coffee chains by 22 calories.”

In addition to menu labeling, many front-of-package (FOP) nutrition-labeling systems have been developed by food retailers and manufactures to help consumers identify more healthful options at the point of purchase. One recent paper examined two alternative FOP nutrition labeling systems.

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and their effect on shoppers’ product evaluations, choices, and retailer evaluations. “Reductive” FOP systems extract a reduced amount of information from the Nutrition Facts panel and place them on the front of the package. “Evaluative” FOP systems provide an overall evaluation of a product’s healthfulness. The research found “that when a single food item was evaluated in isolation, both the reductive and evaluative systems had a positive effect on product evaluations. However, when several options were presented simultaneously in an actual retail environment, the evaluative system had a stronger influence on product evaluation and choice.”

C. Food & Nutrition Education

The importance of nutrition education in altering eating behaviors is well-established, and is a core tenet of public health practice. Food and nutrition education can include courses and training on shopping, cooking, food handling, and food storage.

The effectiveness of nutrition education has been shown to increase knowledge, improve attitudes and improve behavior. (Nutrition Education: Linking research, theory and practice. 2007, Sudbury, MA: Jones and Bartlett Publishers. Often, nutrition education focuses primarily on elementary school-aged children. One study assessed seven different school-based nutrition interventions including the Integrated Nutrition Project, Colorado 5 A Day Program, California’s 5 A Day Power Play! Gimme 5, CATCH, 5 A Day Power Plus and the Alabama High 5 program. Results showed that at the individual level, the net increase in daily fruit and vegetable consumption by participants was 0.45 servings and the net relative increase was 19%.

Data from the national Cooking Matters (http://cookingmatters.org) program, discussed more below, supports the importance of nutrition education for youth and adults as well. After graduating from Cooking Matters for Teens, 67% of teens are eating more fruits and 50% are eating more vegetables. An evaluation conducted by DotWell, an organization partnering with Cooking Matters to teach cooking, nutrition, and food shopping on a budget to patients at a physician’s office, revealed the impacts of food and nutrition education on healthy eating.

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- 97% of participants made changes in their eating habits
- Participants realized a 65% increase in eating at least two cups of fruit a day
- 40% increase in eating at least two and a half cups of vegetables a day
- They are using 30% less salt in preparing meals
- 63% increase in using low-fat or fat-free dairy products

D. Food System Education

Recently, there has been a resurgence across the country of programs that aim to educate the population not just on nutrition but on the entire food system behind the food. Such programs are typically centered around children and children’s programs such as farm to school and school gardening. Increasingly, research and evaluation is showing how food systems knowledge – knowing where food comes from, touching it, seeing it grow, and tasting it fresh – has positive, life-long impacts on healthy food consumption.

More and more studies are documenting the effects of eating – and knowing – more locally-produced food whose origins are known by the consumer. The National Farm to School Network’s “Bearing Fruit: Farm to School Program Evaluation Resources and Recommendations” summarize the findings of many farm to school studies. Across all studies cited in the report, the increase of fruit and vegetables intake reported by students

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participating in a farm to school program was in the range of 0.99 to 1.3 servings per student per day.

In comparison, several other (not farm to school) studies focused on school-based nutrition education interventions reported a range of 0.2 to 0.99 more servings of fruits and vegetables per student per day. However, the authors are also quick to point out that many other confounding variables may be at play -- including school meal participation rates overall, food quality, meal cost, cafeteria environments, lunch schedules, and more.

Here in Colorado, Denver Urban Gardens and the Colorado School of Public Health (www.dug.org/gghc) conducted a study of the physical, social, and emotional health benefits of community gardening. Some of their findings indicate a strong connection between gardening and fruit and vegetable consumption as well as overall positive health outcomes:

- More than 50% of community gardeners meet national guidelines for fruit and vegetable intake, compared to 25% of non-gardeners.

- As well as eating better and being more active, gardeners are more involved in social activities, view their neighborhoods as more beautiful, and have stronger ties to their neighborhoods.

- 95% of community gardeners give away some of the produce they grow to friends, family and people in need; 60% specifically donate to food assistance programs.

VII. Strategies to Improve Food Literacy

As indicated previously, knowledge and skill development alone will probably not move the bar to impact behavior change around healthy eating without combining with environment and policy changes. While this is not an exhaustive list of strategies, we have included a menu of those that can be implemented at the local level and have data showing an impact of increasing consumption of fruits and vegetables. Each of the sections below includes several case studies or model programs that provide a sense of all of the available strategies at our disposal.
A. Family & Social Environment

Almost all of the sample strategies presented below, as well as under the “Socioeconomics” section much further below, can address some of the challenges and build upon the assets of family and cultural environments related to food. Strategies below to increase cooking skills, grow network of gardeners, and more can help communities and busy families find more time and more pleasure in cooking and eating healthy together.

B. Food Messaging & Marketing

While the evidence clearly points to the need to reign in corporate spending on junk food marketing, there are also several local-level strategies that can help counteract the effects of national marketing and provide additional information that helps influence decision making about food.

Package & Menu Labeling

Massachusetts General Hospital
Nutrition labeling efforts can include nutrients on a specific food item (package labeling) or efforts to capture the nutritional value of an entire menu item.

One example comes from a study conducted by Massachusetts General Hospital in Boston. The hospital successfully promoted healthy eating through a labeling program at the hospital cafeteria. Food was labeled with green, yellow, and red lights (green being healthy foods and red being junk food). “Green-labeled items sold at a 12 percent higher rate compared to before the program, and sales of red-labeled items dropped by 20 percent during the two-year study. Sales of the unhealthiest beverages fell by 39 percent.” 109

Yampa Valley Medical Center
Recently the Yampa Valley Medical Center has adopted a Green, Yellow and Red labeling program for the foods in their cafeteria and has changed the daily menus to reflect more green and yellow food. Data has not yet been collected regarding the impact on food selection.

**Marketing Campaigns**

**Buy Local Campaigns**  
At the State level, research indicates that states with Agricultural Branding Campaigns (e.g., Colorado Proud marketing and labeling) showed consumption of fruits and vegetable consumption was greater than those States without a campaign. Consumers ate 1.7 fewer servings of fruits and vegetables in states without a campaign and women tended to respond more to campaigns than men suggesting campaigns can have an impact on increasing fruit and vegetable consumption.\(^{110}\)

**Eat Local, Eat Healthy**  
Close by in Montezuma, Colorado, The Eat Local Eat Healthy campaign promotes restaurants who use local produce and offer meals that meet specific nutrition requirements. The ELEH logo is placed in the front window of participating restaurants and right next to qualifying items on the menu. ELEH items contain an ingredient grown locally and have a balance of vegetables and whole grains or beans, dairy or protein as well as reasonable calories, good fats, limited sodium and no MSG. In addition, ordering an ELEH item also supports local farmers and the local economy.

**C. Food & Nutrition Education**

**Cooking & Shopping Courses**

**Cooking Matters**  
Share Our Strength’s Cooking Matters empowers families with the skills to stretch their food budgets and cook healthy meals so their children get nutritious food at home. The program teaches participants to shop smarter, use nutrition information to make healthier choices and cook delicious, affordable meals. Community partners that serve low-income families offer six-week Cooking Matters courses to adults, kids and families. Each course is team-taught by a volunteer chef and nutrition educator and covers meal preparation, grocery shopping, food budgeting and nutrition. Adult and teen participants take home a bag of groceries at the end of each class.  
[http://cookingmatters.org](http://cookingmatters.org)

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Cooking Matters at the Store

Cooking Matters at the Store is a stand-alone component of Cooking Matters. Cooking Matters at the Store tours provide families with hands-on education as they shop for food, giving them skills to compare foods for cost and nutrition. Participants learn how to plan and budget for healthy, affordable, and delicious meals for their families. According to Share our Strength, 2010; 65% of graduates intend to read ingredients to look for whole grains, 58% intend to compare food labels to choose healthier items, 58% intend to find the best healthy deal, and 88% of WIC graduates intend to make the most out of their Fruit and Vegetable vouchers.

http://cookingmatters.org/node/2246
Family Programs

The Eat Well, Eat Local, Eat Together Nutrition Education Campaign

Eat³ provides a one-stops shop for new ideas about how to cook, where and how to eat local foods, and tips for enjoying eating together as a family. Resources include recipes, quick tips, and connection to Extension educators. The multicomponent campaign was developed by the Healthy Start Partnership Coordinating Committee, a group of health and nutrition professionals from 6 rural counties in New York State and Cornell University faculty. In 2009, with funding from Cornell Cooperative Extension, well over 10,000 individuals from 20 counties were reached. Self-reported behaviors shifted significantly towards healthier eating after participation¹¹¹. http://eat3.org

The Family Dinner Project

One specific project devoted to improving the skills and capacity of busy families to improve nutrition is TheFamilyDinnerProject.Org. The website contains research, tips, games and other resources to help families cook and eat together. Additionally, there are myriad examples across the country of culturally-relevant, peer-led nutrition networks that include education, cooking together, community events, and more. http://thefamilydinnerproject.org

Nutrition Education Campaigns

5-A-Day Campaigns

There have been a number of campaigns designed to increase awareness of need to consume more fruits and vegetables. Probably the most familiar campaign, “5-A-Day” was launched by the National Cancer Institute (NCI) in 1991 and was aimed at increasing awareness of the importance of consuming fruits and vegetables. After 10 years only 20% of Americans were aware of the campaign’s message and after 16 years about 30% where aware of it.¹¹² Researchers using a national survey found that adults who know the recommendation and are aware of the campaign are more likely to eat more fruits and vegetables.¹¹³

¹¹¹ Olson C & Graham M, 2013. The Eat Well, Eat Local, Eat Together (Eat³) Nutrition Education Campaign, Journal of Hunger & Environmental Nutrition, 8:1, 1-10
¹¹³ Erinosho, Temitope O, et al, 2013. Adults who are knowledgeable of the daily fruit and vegetable recommendation and are aware of the United States fruit and vegetable campaign eat more F&V. The IFava Scientific Newsletter, No 79. Available from: http://www.ifava.org/media/42627/the_ifava_scientific_newsletter_80_07-08_2013.pdf.
5210 Campaigns

Over the last 5 years, 5210 Campaigns to address obesity and healthy lifestyles have begun at local, state, and regional levels. One example is Let’s Go, founded in 2006 in Maine. The goal of the campaign is to educate families and children about healthy eating and active living in settings where they live, learn, work and play. The Campaign aim is to increase awareness about 5210 and educate about what the numbers mean. The campaign is in 324 childcares, 252 school cafeterias, 194 schools, 152 health care organizations and 117 after school programs across the State (letsgo.org). In 2013, 58% of parents surveyed across the State were aware of the Campaign.

Locally, since 2011 LWNW has been promoting the 5210 Campaign with elementary-aged students. The most recent survey of 1362 students, grades K-12th, in three School Districts shows:

- 9.8% of elementary-aged students in Routt County are eating 0-1 servings/day
- 60.6% are eating 2-3 servings/day
- 23.6% are eating 4-5 servings/day
- 6% are eating greater than 5 servings/day

Please note that a serving size was defined as ½ cup. Students’ intake of fruits and vegetables has consistently remained about 3 servings/day across the years of the Campaign.

Pre-program data collected on 5210 from a County adult postcard survey with 302 showed:

- 31% were aware of the 5210 Campaign
- 8.6% were eating 0-1 servings/day
- 44.7% were eating 2-3 servings/day
- 31.5% were eating 4-5 servings/day
- 15.2% were eating greater than 5 servings/day

Interestingly, there was statistical significance between awareness of the 5210 and meeting the 4 goals of the campaign.

The 5210 Campaign was extended to the community in 2013, and included a Routt County 5210 Community Challenge in October. Community Post data is anticipated to be collected in Fall 2014.
D. Food Systems Education

**School-based Programs**

**The Growe Foundation**
The mission of the Boulder-based Growe Foundation is to use experiential learning to educate children about the benefits of healthy eating and environmental stewardship. Gardens act as living classrooms, providing students with hands-on education in food awareness and environmental sustainability. Through planting, harvesting and tasting fresh fruits and vegetables, students learn about making healthy food choices. The Growe Foundation’s Garden to Table is a comprehensive elementary school program that incorporates academic learning into a school garden standards-based lesson that provides students with opportunities to use science, math and language arts in a garden setting. [http://growefoundation.org](http://growefoundation.org)

**An Ounce of Nutrition**
An Ounce of Nutrition, a Colorado organization, provides curriculum to schools and supplies teacher trainings on how to successfully implement the “Food for Thought” High School curriculum, which addresses topics related to how food is grown, processed, distributed, marketed, sold and consumed. [http://www.anounceofnutrition.com](http://www.anounceofnutrition.com)

**Gardening Networks**

**Re:Vision**
Since 2009, Re:Vision International in Denver has helped over 200 low-income families learn how to grow food organically in their backyard. Re:Vision provides all of the resources, along with free workshops and technical assistance to each family. Re:Vision then trains and hires local residents to become gardening and healthy eating “promotoras”, who work directly with each family. Promotoras develop deep relationships amongst their network of gardening families, building community, as neighbors begin helping each other, sharing produce, and working together on other issues. [http://www.revisioninternational.org](http://www.revisioninternational.org)

**Heirloom Gardens**
In 2009, Heirloom Gardens, LLC developed 6 gardens in Northwest Denver on individual house garden plots covering 8,000 square feet and has grown to 11 gardens with over 26,000 square feet of urban farmland in Denver, Arvada, Lakewood, and Wheat Ridge. Volunteers cultivate gardens in the front and back yards of the Denver metro residents. From these home gardens, Heirloom Gardens produces and distributes fresh heirloom vegetables and herbs to members of its Neighborhood Supported Agriculture (NSA), a very local form of CSA. Heirloom Gardens prides itself in making personal connections with farmers and community members,
utilizing sustainable food production practices, and building community. http://eatwhereulive.com

Farm to School / School Gardens

In Colorado, of the approximately 175 public school districts, 75 districts (representing 1075 individual schools and 562,170 children) are participating in farm to school in some way. Most are purchasing vegetables and fruits, while others use their own produce from school gardens and farms.¹¹⁴

**Greeley School District**

The Weld County School District 6 Nutrition Services currently works with six different farms or local food distributors. To expand upon these partnerships even more, nutrition services was recently awarded a grant from the USDA which will be utilized to develop and implement a food hub. The food hub will be focused on aggregating as much local produce as possible during the Colorado harvest months. The produce will then be (1) utilized immediately, or (2) washed, chopped, blanched and frozen for later use throughout the school year. This concept will allow for maximum utilization of Colorado produce throughout the school year. In future years, this food hub will continue to grow and gain the ability to support neighboring school districts and possibly other food service organizations (e.g. food banks, healthcare facilities, etc.).

http://www.greeleyschools.org/Page/2726

**Denver Green School**

Sprout City Farms has managed a farm on the property of the Denver Green School since its inception. Their partnership creates a unique opportunity to co-locate educational programs and food production on school grounds. DGS students benefit both from educational programming and from improved nutrition in the school cafeteria. Farm products are grown and sold at prices to meet the budgetary limitations of the school lunch program. Produce is used for the salad bar as well as in cooked meals for about 7 out of the 9 months of the school year, and the farm is able to meet nearly all the produce needs of the kitchen from August to October.

http://sproutcityfarms.org/programs/community-farms/denver-green-school-community-farm/

**Montezuma School to Farm**

The Montezuma School to Farm Project manages school gardens, farm field trips, and summer camps throughout Montezuma County. The program

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runs three student gardens - one at Mancos Public School, one at Dolores Public School, and one in collaboration with the City of Cortez at the Cortez Recreation Center. It also offers School to Farm Field trips to students K-12 in Cortez, Mancos, and Dolores Public Schools. Summer camps are offered every summer for 5 - 10 year olds in collaboration with the Cortez Recreation Center. The program also works with Cooking Matters and the Cortez Recreation Center to offer two summer camps for middle and high school students interested in becoming Chefs! The project is funded by LiveWell Montezuma and the Colorado State Conservation Board through the Mancos Conservation District as well as individual donors. https://www.facebook.com/MontezumaSchooltoFarm

**Routt County Farm to School programs**

Routt County does not have any formal farm to school programs, however there are a few promising opportunities. In 2010 SOROCO School District received funding to build a school based greenhouse and the High School Voc Ag students have grown a small amount of vegetables for the school lunch program (e.g., peppers, greens, tomatoes). The Chef and Coordinator of the Food Program at Lowell Whiteman High School, a private school, has begun developing a garden/greenhouse project. The Steamboat Springs Middle School plans to begin a gardening project and currently has three tower gardens in an atrium area. The Colorado Mountain College, Alpine Campus, is in the process of conducting a needs assessment to build a greenhouse that will be a part of their Sustainability Program.

**VIII. Factors that Influence Healthy Eating: Availability**

This section will briefly outline some of the evidence around making healthy food available to all residents, and particularly those most vulnerable to food insecurity – to be able to address the question: Is healthy food available to me? Part III of the Assessment will provide more details and a sampling of some of the evidence to validate the factors presented below and just some of the many strategies to improve healthy food availability.
A. Healthy Food Production

Healthy food cannot be available – or affordable, which is discussed more below – if it is not being produced in the first place. Part III of the Routt County Community Food Assessment will review the nation’s and state’s food system in depth and will discuss the federal and local policies that promote or impede the production of healthy foods.

B. Healthy Food Distribution

Part I of this Assessment highlighted the value placed on fresh, healthy, available foods – but stressed that such foods are often seen as lacking in Routt County. Residents value the quality and freshness of their produce very highly, even above price. Even though physical access to retailers may not be a challenge (discussed more below), there are still concerns about the quality and nutritional value of foods available within those retailers. Like many communities located far from major trucking routes and where weather can delay shipments, the freshness and quality of available foods is a significant issue.

The overall take-away is that there are not enough distribution channels bringing in plentiful, healthy foods to the retailers that already exist. These are not problems found only in Rural NW Colorado. These are the results of a globalized food system and we see these issues in communities across the country. The removal of large grocery retailers from certain areas paired with the disappearance of nimble and diverse infrastructure that can bring fresh, local and diverse food options into a region have left too many communities with poor options, particularly for produce. As mentioned above, this is exacerbated by the severe weather, challenging roads, and general inaccessibility of NW Colorado either for growing food or bringing it in.

Having distribution networks in place that can move fresh foods into Routt County is not important just for the quality and taste of produce – but may also be critical for maintaining nutritional value as well. Some research supports that fruits and vegetables left to ripen on the vine longer have more nutritional value and taste better and that harvested food allowed to ripen during transport loses nutritional value. Many factors influence nutrition including production method, type of crop, storage, handling, processing, and packaging. However, foods grown closer to home are more often left to ripen naturally at peak of taste and nutrient density. Local foods face fewer risks that threaten nutrition density like poor handling, inadequate storage, processing, and more.
C. Healthy and Unhealthy Food Retail Environments

Extensive research indicates the importance of where we get our food to how much fresh foods and fruits and vegetables we consume. PolicyLink and The Food Trust recently released a comprehensive literature review titled, “Access to Healthy Foods and Why It Matters: A Review of the Research”\(^\text{115}\). The report identified three broad findings:

1. Accessing healthy food is still a challenge for many families, particularly those living in low-income neighborhoods, communities of color, and rural areas.
2. Living closer to healthy food retail is among the factors associated with better eating habits and decreased risk for obesity and diet-related diseases.
3. Healthy food retail stimulates economic activity.

Here in Colorado, recent research validates the influence of promoting healthy food retail. A study conducted through Denver Environmental Health (DEH)\(^\text{116}\) identified food system policies that address healthy food access and determined which policies have the most potential to impact health. DEH reviewed national and local best practice recommendations, scanned municipal policies across the country, assessed the evidence base of health impacts in through peer-reviewed journals, reports and grey literature, and gathered stakeholder input.

The DEH report summarized numerous studies that examined the role of the food retail environment in health. The report found consistent evidence that retail strategies such as incentivizing healthy food outlets (tax credits, zoning, etc), diversifying healthy food outlets (through corner stores, farmers markets, CSAs, etc), and reducing fast food density, and decreasing relative prices of healthier foods can lead to increased healthy food access, increased fruit and vegetable intake, and lower BMI.

Several studies also highlight the complexity of food access. It seems that increasing access to healthy foods alone does not always lead to positive health outcomes. For example, a report to Congress in 2009 revealed that there is limited evidence that increased access to healthy foods \textit{alone} actually reduces body mass index (BMI), because consumers may not decrease consumption of less healthy food when they increase their consumption of healthy foods.\(^\text{117}\) Further, the report said that availability of


all food, including junk food, could be a significant factor in increased BMI and obesity.

Similarly, while several studies have shown that people who live close to supermarkets are more likely to eat fruits and vegetables, studies have also found that those who eat frequently in restaurants tend to eat fewer fruits and vegetables\textsuperscript{118}, indicating that the role of an abundance of unhealthy food choices must also be examined.

The importance of understanding a community’s balance between healthy and unhealthy retail is underscored by several studies cited in the PolicyLink review of the research. A few of the studies that underscore this complexity include:

- A study of nearly 4,000 adults living in New Orleans found that each additional supermarket in a participant’s neighborhood is associated with reduced risk for obesity, while fast-food and convenience store access are predictive of greater odds of obesity.\textsuperscript{119}
- A 2011 systematic literature review reported that mixed associations were found between greater accessibility to supermarkets or grocery stores and fruit and vegetable consumption, with five out of six studies showing no association between the two measures.\textsuperscript{120}
- A study assessing the density of both healthy and unhealthy food retail in relationship to childhood obesity risk found that low-income neighborhoods of color have greater access to all sources of food retail (both healthy and unhealthy) as measured by the number of outlets of all kinds.\textsuperscript{121}

Local data help illustrate the role of food access and underscore the need to examine the balance of healthy and unhealthy food retail. The collective results of the Routt County Part I assessment suggest that physical access to food outlets is not a significant barrier to making healthy food choices for most of the population, unlike many other rural communities. Clearly, parts of Routt County have a developed food environment, and Routt residents have higher car ownership rates that many national rural counties. However, (generally considered an overabundance of unhealthy retail options in comparison to full service grocers and restaurants).

\textsuperscript{121} Lee, H, 2012. The Role of Local Food Availability in Explaining Obesity Risk among Young School-aged Children. Social Science & Medicine, 74(8).
As described in Part I, in Routt County, “It appears as though for the vast majority of households, food is accessible; there are plenty of outlets in population centers. The bulk of these retail options are centered in Steamboat Springs - the resort community. The national average for unhealthy retail options to healthy food options is 5:1 or 6:1, but in Steamboat Springs, this ratio is approximately 17:1. Although healthy food options are available through the form of grocery stores (though potentially not affordable) these options are faroutpaced by unhealthy options”.

IX. Strategies to Improve Availability

Part III of this Assessment will look more deeply at ways to strengthen community food security to improve healthy food availability for all. Strategies to promote healthy food production, healthy food distribution, and healthy food retail will be included.

X. Factors that Influence Healthy Eating: Economics

The next section summarizes just some of the research on the role of economics and affordability on food choices. The evidence presented here addresses the role of “Can I afford to eat it?” While economics affects many aspects of life – not just food access – here we describe some of the evidence on factors that have a unique effect on choosing and buying certain foods.

A. Socioeconomics

Several studies have documented that with higher income, individuals can afford food high in protein and fat, like meat, and fresh produce. In addition, intake of total sugars decreases as income increases. This suggests that lower-income individuals consume more of the less expensive high-sugar, processed foods, and fewer fruit and vegetables.

122 USDA, ARS 2009.
In addition to income, much research has examined the effect of education on dietary intake as well. Figure 11 below from the USDA displays this relationship. As seen in the graphic, individuals with college degrees and higher levels of income are more likely to eat a healthy diet of balanced meals. Those with minimal education ("less than high school") and low household income are less likely to eat healthy, balanced meals. Note that income and education work together to impact diet; those with high incomes only eat healthier than those with low incomes when combined with a college education.

**Figure 11: Income and Education Impacts on Diet**

As seen in the graphic to the right, individuals with college degrees and higher levels of income are more likely to eat a healthy diet of balanced meals.

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B. Poverty & Food Insecurity

The Food Research & Action Center has explored the seemingly counter-intuitive relationship between obesity and food insecurity. In fact, food insecure and low-income populations are especially vulnerable to chronic diseases, such as obesity and diabetes.

This issue arises because low-income populations are often surrounded by a food environment that provides limited access to healthy, affordable food, poor quality or poor tasting produce, a greater availability of fast food restaurants, and a greater exposure to the marketing of obesity-promoting products. In such environments many people find that making healthy choices is not always easy.

Other recent research suggests that poverty itself reduces cognitive capacity because poverty-related concerns consume mental resources and use the “bandwidth” needed to make preventative health choices. Financial and emotional pressures of food insecurity, low-wage work, lack of access to primary health care, inadequate transportation, poor housing, and other factors commonly consume a low-income family’s mental and emotional bandwidth.

The result of all this is that personal constraints unique to living in a state of poverty paired with an environment full of unhealthy choices lead to negative nutrition and health outcomes for lower-income populations.

C. Cost of Food

We have a national culture that expects and demands cheap food. Understanding the cost of food – and specifically of fruits and vegetables – is critical to understanding people’s food choices. The role of cost in affecting behavior is clear – in Part I of the Routt County Community Food Assessment, the most commonly reported barrier (behind “I have no barriers”) reported by community members to accessing fruits and vegetables (29% of respondents) was food prices, and this was true for all income levels.

**Food Costs**

In order to track the cost of food in the US, the USDA developed an Official USDA Food Plan ([http://www.cnpp.usda.gov/USDAFoodPlansCostofFood.htm](http://www.cnpp.usda.gov/USDAFoodPlansCostofFood.htm)) using the dietary guidelines and food intake recommendations to determine the weekly cost of food at home at four cost levels: Thrifty, Low-cost, Moderate and Liberal plans. In June 2011 the costs for food at the four levels for a family of four (with 2 children in elementary school) were: Thrifty plan: $141.20 (this is used by the USDA as the basis for calculating
SNAP benefits for families); Low cost: $183.70; Moderate cost: $229.70; and Liberal plan: $278.80. The USDA has current cost estimates, but data from June 2011 are used here to compare to local data.

As part of the Assessment, a cost of the Thrifty Food Plan by grocery stores in Routt County was conducted in 2011. The plan costs in Routt County averaged $193.33 a week with a range of $161.22 to $232.26. The results indicated that common food items cost 34.3% more to feed a family of four in Routt County compared to the national average.

Meal Costs
The most recent data from Feeding America - Map the Meal Gap (2012) shows that the average cost of a meal nationally is $2.74. In Colorado the average cost of a meal is $2.84/meal and not surprisingly in Routt County the cost is $3.76/meal (almost 25% higher than a meal in CO). This data mirrors the results of the local Thrifty Food Plan study, demonstrating that common foods are much more expensive to eat in Routt County.

Cost of Fruits and Vegetables
Regarding the costs of fruits and vegetables, according to the USDA, it costs about $0.50/cup for fruits and vegetables. In the US, the least expensive fresh vegetables all cost less than $0.42/cup equivalent and the least expensive fresh fruits all cost less than $0.56/cup equivalent. Nationally the average retail price for fresh vegetables and fruits recommended for a 2000-calorie diet (4.5 cup equivalents) is $2.18 – or $15.26 a week. Lower costs are estimated for frozen or canned fruits and vegetables.

Produce has actually been decreasing in price recently and, at times, consumers simply need education on what to buy at what time of the year for the best “deals”. The Consumer Price Index, which measures the changes in the retail prices of food items, shows that the prices for fresh and processed fruits and vegetables spiked in 2008 and fell again in 2009. Currently fresh fruits and vegetables prices are trending down, while prices of processed fruits and vegetables are trending up (see figure 12 below).

It is, however, important to note that prices of produce in Routt County are higher than national averages, and this is a very real challenge that affects healthy eating. While the national average retail price for purchasing 9 servings (or 4.5 cups) of varied fruits and vegetables a day (the recommended amount) over one week is $15.26, the combined costs of purchasing fresh fruits and vegetables to meet recommendation in Routt County is approximately $20.49 per week (estimated based on data from Map the Meal Gap that the average cost of food is 34.3% higher in Routt County).
Healthy food can be costly, particularly for those with low incomes and who live in rural communities far from food distribution routes. A study conducted by the Harvard School of Public Health finds that consuming healthy foods costs an additional $1.50 per day, $10.50/week or $550 per year per person, when compared to consuming unhealthy food. This is equivalent to a “15-25% increase [in food costs] for the average American.” Yet, compared to the billions of dollars spent on treating diet-related diseases, it is minimal, and much policy work could be done to offset these costs.\(^{124}\)

However, some research also indicates that costs may vary greatly depending on what and how you are measuring – and what you value. In 2012 the USDA issued the report “Are Healthy Foods Really More Expensive? It Depends on How You Measure the Price” to explore this issue further and to document various means for calculating price. The USDA found that the price measure used has a significant effect on which foods are more expensive. Basically, depending on if one is measuring price per calorie, per average portion, or per USDA dietary guidelines, healthier foods tend to appear more or less affordable.

Figure 13 shows these pricing relationships. The ultimate answer is that yes – produce can make up a significant portion of our budget – but primarily because it is supposed to make up a significant portion of our diet.\(^{125}\)


Figure 13:
The prices of healthy versus less healthy foods vary with the measurement method

![Graph showing the prices of healthy versus less healthy foods.](image)

Notes: The dark areas of each bar represent the price range for the cheaper half of the foods in the category, while the lighter areas are the price ranges for the higher cost foods. White space at the bottom of the bars represents the start of the price range.

Less healthy foods are foods that are high in sodium, added sugars, or saturated fat, or that did not contain foods from a food group.

This data taken together demonstrates that prices for fresh produce may not actually be inordinate -- and it is important to note that often the “cost” barrier could be based more in perception, cultural norms, competing household priorities, and habits than in reality. In order to inform local strategies to improve healthy eating, it is important to understand the differences between barriers of cost versus barriers related to perceptions of costs.

D. Actual Food Expenditures

While impacting the cost of food may be a challenging task for a community to address alone, community strategies can affect how money is spent on food. Thus, understanding actual food expenditures – more than just food prices – is critical.

Food in the Household Budget

Overall, as Americans we spend significantly less disposable income on food with every passing year, and we spend less on food as a share of household income than many other nations such as Britain, France, Japan, and most others. This trend is comparable to other wealthy nations - the wealthier the nation the less income spent on food – but this trend is the
starkest in the United States. Households now spend considerable income on housing, clothing, technology, automobiles, travel, and education.

According to a 2012 national Gallup poll, Americans report spending $151 on food per week on average while one in 10 report spending $300 or more per week and 8% spend less than $50. Additionally, “On a relative basis, after adjusting prior years’ data for inflation to 2012 dollars, Americans are spending less on food now than in the past. The average $151 Americans report spending each week on food today is down from the inflation-adjusted $157 to $214 range Gallup found throughout the mid- to late 1980s, the last time it regularly asked the question.”

In the US, since the USDA began tracking share of disposable household income spent on food in 1929, the amount we spend on food at home has dropped from 20.3% of disposable income to just 5.7% in 2011. Additionally, the amount we spend on food away from home has increased from 3.1% to 4.1%, even though food away from home is significantly less expensive than in earlier decades. One study found that in 2007, 49% of all food purchases in the US were for food not prepared at home and these foods tend to have high amounts of added fat, sugar, sodium and calories.126

According to 2011 US Census Data, Colorado households spent, on average, $8,071 annually on food expenditures, $820 of which was spent on fruits and vegetables for at-home consumption. Six of Routt County’s seven census tracts had higher average food expenditures than the state. While one census tract (the SW part of the county) reports much lower average food expenditures – between $7,000 and $7,500 – one census tract (Steamboat Springs) reports average food expenditures of $9,830. Data from the 2011 BLS Consumer Expenditure Survey tells us that the average yearly food expenditure in 2000 in Routt County was $8,471 ($162/wk) which declined to $8,071 ($155/wk) in 2010. Of these total amount spent per year, $4,940 was spent for food eaten at home in 2000 and $4,656 in 2010.127

127 Food expenditure data was pulled from an interactive map on Colorado MarketMaker which includes ESRI US Consumer Spending Database, a combination of the 2010 and 2011 Consumer Expenditure Surveys from the Bureau of Labor Statistics. www.co.foodmarketmaker.com.
**Fruit and Vegetable Expenditures**

Regarding expenditures on fruits and vegetables, the USDA Thrifty Food plan allocates 40% of costs for fresh fruits and vegetables. However, this is simply a suggestion of the USDA to achieve a healthy, balanced diet. In reality, Americans spend far less of their food budget on produce. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics’ 2010 Consumer Expenditure Survey, households earning less than $20,000 a year spend approximately the same amount (between 10% and 12%) as a percentage of their grocery bill on fresh fruits and vegetables as the average household. However, 10-12% of a $2,000 food budget clearly buys significantly less fruits and vegetables than a $5000 food budget. Assuming the national average used to calculate fruit and vegetable expenditures of 10.5% of all food expenditures, then residents in Steamboat Springs spent approximately $1,032 annually on produce, as an example.

According to Colorado Market Maker, the average yearly expenditure for fruits and vegetables in Routt County was $841 in 2000 and $820 in 2010 or 17% and 17.6% of total amount of money spent on food, respectively.  

Americans have, in recent years, spent an increasing amount of their food shopping budgets on fresh fruits and vegetables rather than canned or frozen, however, and the USDA Economic Research Service projects this trend to continue.

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**E. Federal Food & Nutrition Assistance Programs**

There is significant potential for supplemental nutrition programs to dramatically increase fruit and vegetable consumption in communities and at schools. This sections touches on some of those impacts – or potential impacts – of programs including SNAP and school meals (NSLP), though participation in other federal food assistance programs such as WIC, the Fresh Fruit & Vegetable Grant Program, or Older Adult Congregate Meals all also have shown significant positive effects on dietary intake.

Though SNAP participants consume fewer servings of fruits and vegetables per day when compared to other Americans (SNAP participants tend to have fewer resources than non-participants, explaining this difference), the USDA’s Healthy Eating Index found that “the higher level of SNAP benefits [a participant receives], the larger the positive nutrition effect of program participation”. In other words, SNAP participants who receive higher rates

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128 Food expenditure data was pulled from an interactive map on Colorado MarketMaker which includes ESRI US Consumer Spending Database, a combination of the 2010 and 2011 Consumer Expenditure Surveys from the Bureau of Labor Statistics. www.co.foodmarketmaker.com.
of benefit consume more healthy food than those with lower SNAP benefit rates, so an increase in SNAP benefits increased healthy food intake.\textsuperscript{129}

Additionally, participation in SNAP in general has a positive effect on a child’s intake of healthy food. According to a study of more than 350,000 children living in Illinois, “young children enrolled in SNAP and WIC, either or both, have lower rates of nutritional deficiency than low-income non-participants”.\textsuperscript{130}

Recently, the NSLP requirements for fruits and vegetables served for a reimbursable school lunch have been increased by the USDA. “For lunch, schools must offer at least 2½ cups of fruit per week and ½ cup per day for students in K-8. For students in 9-12, schools must offer at least 5 cups of fruit per week and one cup per day. This requirement began SY 2012-2013.”\textsuperscript{131} This requirement also opens up the door to enhanced partnerships with local producers interested in “farm to school” programs and could provide a stable, financially sound market for area producers.

While studies are just now emerging on the effects of the new nutrition standards, participation in NSLP overall has been show to increase fruit and vegetable consumption compared to non-participants, and school policies that promote fruits and vegetables and restrict less healthy options have been show to increase fruit and vegetable intake at home and school\textsuperscript{132}.


Participation in these programs make health and economic sense as well. According to the USDA, every $5 in new SNAP benefits generates as much as $9 of economic activity.\textsuperscript{133} For every $1 in SNAP, $1.84 is circulated in the community.\textsuperscript{134} At the State level for 2010-2011, it was estimated that if participation in free/reduced priced breakfast alone were to increase from 41% to 60%, the state would bring in almost $11 million additional federal dollars.\textsuperscript{135}

Additionally, strategies to connect such programs to fresh, local, and healthy food retail outlets are increasingly popular and impactful. SNAP participants are now often allowed to use their benefits at farmers markets. Nationwide, SNAP sales at farmers markets topped $11.7 million between October 1, 2010 and September 30, 2011.\textsuperscript{136} In 2007, 22 markets in Colorado were equipped with EBT technology through the USDA Farmers Market Promotion Program grant. That number increased to 53 by 2012 when $186,691 in SNAP benefits were redeemed at Colorado farmers markets.

The research conducted by Denver Environmental Health mentioned earlier found that comprehensive efforts to connect SNAP to healthy foods such as increasing program participation, increasing nutrition education, expanding EBT at healthy retail outlets, and establishing incentives (e.g., “double bucks”) can lead to increased access to healthy foods, increased fruit and vegetable consumption, and increase in positive economic outcomes.

The graphic below is taken from the Colorado Food Systems Advisory Council issue brief on SNAP redemption at farmers markets and displays national statistics on SNAP and SNAP incentives at farmers markets.
XI. Strategies to Increase Affordability

Addressing many of the issues discussed above – poverty, educational status – require multi-pronged local, state, and national efforts. They clearly concern all aspects of life, not just healthy food. While realizing the local strategies presented here cannot fully address such entrenched issues, this report does aim to explore how Routt County can help promote community food security through strong local economies and community development. Some ideas are presented below, while Part III of this Assessment will explore food systems as local economic development more deeply.

A. Socioeconomics & Poverty

Much of the evidence here points to strategies such as establishing a local livable wage and promoting diverse and creative economic development strategies that leverage local skills and capacity. These are not necessarily food systems-related strategies, but would go far in enhancing community food security. As said above, Part III will presenting information related to building a resilient local economy through the food system.

B. Food Costs & Expenditures

Healthy Food Distribution
One way to help shift food expenditures to more healthy options and to control the cost of those healthy items is to build efficient distribution systems that ensure profitability for the producer and affordability for the consumer. Since fresh, healthy, affordable foods are not making their way in to Routt County through traditional CSAs, farmers markets, or mainline distribution, creative solutions such as local buying clubs could be considered. See more details in Part III.

Food & Nutrition Education
Building the skills to shop, cook, and eat on a budget are critical. As discussed above, at times the perception of price is more of a barrier than actual cost, or strategies just need to be in place to find the right deals at the right time for produce. Please see strategies under “food and nutrition education” earlier in this report.

Innovative Pricing Strategies
One study found that lowering prices of fruits and vegetables in vending machines and school cafeterias by 50%, increased their sales by 2x the
amount sold before lowering the price. Other pricing strategies could include bulk purchasing discounts and promotion programs.

C. Federal and Community Food Assistance Programs

**Increasing Program Participation**

Your Neighborhood Food Truck

Your Neighborhood Food Truck is a 40-ft RV retrofitted to connect families to needed food resources, such as SNAP and other community options that offer access to affordable, healthy food. The mobile program provides ready access to four computer bays so individuals and families can apply for SNAP, as well as receive one-on-one guidance through the process or to access other community food resources. Hunger Free Colorado also partners with other agencies and organizations that provide additional educational, screening and interactive opportunities under the truck’s awning as well as on the unit. [http://www.hungerfreecolorado.org](http://www.hungerfreecolorado.org)

Haywood County Schools

This 3,400-student school district in Brownsville, Tennessee has a district meal participation rate of 80%. The nutrition director reports that offering new items and using new preparation techniques has contributed to her high participation rate. Having friendly cafeteria staff also helps. Promotions have encouraged students to purchase school meals. This spring a farmers’ market was implemented. Elementary students purchase tickets with which they can buy fruits and vegetables to take home. Other theme days include read a book, a quarterly book review when people dress up as the book’s characters, and field day, when a sack lunch is offered. The district also cut costs by taking advantage of surplus items, like buying equipment from a local community college that was renovating its facility.

**Healthy Food Incentives**

Healthy Incentives Pilot

The Healthy Incentives Pilot administered by the USDA authorized $20 million for pilot projects to evaluate health and nutrition promotion in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) to determine if incentives provided to SNAP recipients at the point-of-sale increase the purchase of fruits, vegetables or other healthful foods. Evaluation of the program indicates that if there was a 30% discount on the cost of fruits and vegetables for SNAP participants, it would increase average daily consumption of fruits and vegetables by an average of between 0.08 to 0.2

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cups and 0.13 to 0.3 cups, respectively. “Annually, a 30% discount on fruits and vegetables could be expected to increase consumption by 1.3 billion to 3.4 billion cups of fruit and 2.2 billion to 5.1 billion cups of vegetables.” Furthermore, they estimate that “a 30% discount in fresh fruits and vegetables purchased with SNAP would cost the government between approximately $270 million and $650 million. The annual per-capita increase in consumption for each additional dollar spent would be 12.97 cups for fruit and 12.87 cups for vegetables”. In summary, adding 15 cents per day per client can increase fruits and vegetable consumption by 25%, or an ounce on average for those who have this option. http://www.fns.usda.gov/hip/healthy-incentives-pilot.

**Connections with Direct Markets**

**Greeley Farmers Market**
The Greeley Farmer’s Market is a bustling center of community activity that is staffed by the city. In order for low-income families to benefit from the fresh produce sold at the market, the market began accepting SNAP benefits in 2007. SNAP transactions doubled in the first three years, so city officials secured a grant to implement a Double Value Coupons (DVC) program – providing a “match” for SNAP clients for up to $20 of fresh produce. In 2012, the DVC program drew 55 new SNAP participants to the market. With this success, the City plans to seek additional funding to expand the program.

**Vermont Farm to Family Program (Senior and WIC Farmers Market Nutrition Programs)**
WIC participants and other low income Vermonters qualify for farmers’ market produce coupons from the Vermont Farm to Family Program, supported primarily with federal Farmers Market Nutrition Program (FMNP) funds. Separate federal WIC and Senior FMNPs support benefits to WIC participants and low income seniors, respectively. All Farm to Family coupons are redeemable only for fresh fruits or vegetables sold at participating farmers’ markets.

According a 2009 Department for Children and Families evaluation, *Farm to Family* coupon redemptions generated $118,992 in produce sales for 297 participating growers selling at 56 farmers’ markets in Vermont. The coupons benefited 4,916 households — 2,411 families that included 2,641 WIC participants, plus 1,518 elderly households and 987 other low-income households that received state-funded coupons.

Also according to the evaluation, 19% of the coupon recipients said they had never visited a farmers’ market before, and 68% said they returned to the market to shop after they ran out of coupons. Because of federal limits on FMNP benefits, recipients get $30 in *Farm to Family* coupons per year. That amount reflects the FMNP intent not to supplement incomes but rather to provide a catalyst to motivate nutritionally at-risk people to “buy
local" at farmers’ markets and increase their consumption of fruits and vegetables. Seventy-nine percent of the coupon recipients surveyed in 2009 reported that the coupons prompted them to eat more fruits and vegetables than usual, and 51% bought a kind of produce they had never tried before.

Additionally, Senior FMNP funds pay for the senior Farm to Family coupons distributed by Community Action Agencies. They also fund a component whereby CSA farms are paired with senior housing sites to allow residents of those sites to receive $50 worth of fresh produce from the farm over a period of up to 10 weeks. The 2009 SFMNP enabled 940 low-income seniors to receive $47,000 worth of fresh produce grown by 28 CSA farmers. See Chapter 4, Section 1: Food Security in Vermont in Vermont’s Farm to Plate Strategic Plan: http://www.vtfoodatlas.com

**Healthy Community Food Assistance**

Healthy community food assistance comprises several different strategies. The most common include: nutritional guidelines for donations; food labeling (e.g., Traffic Light campaigns); food rescue (e.g., distribution of fresh produce from a grocery store to a pantry); grow-a-row (e.g., gardeners set aside certain produce for a local pantry); gleaning (e.g., volunteers harvest remaining crops on a farmer’s land); tax incentives for farmers who sell to food banks; and, food banks farms (e.g., the production from a unique plot of land is set aside solely for a food bank). Here we present a few case studies that touch on a variety of strategies.

**Food Bank For Larimer County**

Each year, the Food Bank for Larimer County provides approximately 8 million pounds of food to those in need throughout the community. As most food banks are inundated with canned and dry foods that lack vital nutrients, Larimer County is working especially hard to increase donation of fresh and nutritious food to its hunger relief programs. In partnership with the Gardens on Spring Creek, “Plant It Forward” was launched in an effort to increase local produce donations from backyard gardeners and local farms. In 2011, over 20,000 pounds of fresh, local produce was donated just by local gardeners. Also, the Food Bank for Larimer County has developed Warehouse Nutrition Standards derived from select recommendations in the 2010 US Dietary Guidelines that pertain to their target populations. The Food Bank also developed corresponding warehouse sorting guidelines that delineates foods as “Frequent”, “Sometimes”, or “Once in a While” Foods. http://www.foodbanklarimer.org
Charitable Crop Donation Act

Colorado House Bill 14-1119 (Tax Credit for Donating Food to Charitable Organizations), known as the Colorado Charitable Crop Donation Act, was signed into law in May 2014. The Act will offer a 25-percent tax credit to local producers for the wholesale value of the food that they produce and donate to Colorado food banks. It not only will boost local, fresh-food donations but also provide struggling Colorado families with additional access to fresh fruit, vegetables, dairy products and meat products. 
http://www.hungerfreecolorado.org

Boulder Food Rescue

Boulder Food Rescue facilitates the sustainable redistribution (often on bikes or on foot) of food “waste” to agencies that feed hungry, homeless, and low-income populations while educating communities about food justice. To date, they have saved nearly 450,000 lbs. of good food from ending up in landfills and instead redirected it across the community. BFR works with area businesses to identify food that would otherwise be thrown away, which can be diverted from the dumpster (or compost bin). Often this is fresh produce, which may be damaged or blemished, prepared food such as steamer trays of catered leftovers, or day-old baked goods. This sort of very-soon-to-expire produce cannot be rescued by larger food banks that use warehouses.  http://www.boulderfoodrescue.org

Produce for Pantries

Produce for Pantries is an effort to address hunger in the Denver metro area by connecting food pantries with nearby school gardens, community gardens, and home gardens to provide locally grown, healthy food to those who are food insecure. Gardeners throughout Denver are donating excess fruits, vegetables, and herbs to decrease hunger in their community. For example, several individuals living in the Berkeley neighborhood donate produce from their home gardens to the pantry at Berkeley Baptist Church, which relies on food donations. http://produceforpantries.com

Food Pantry Networks

In April 2014, with support from the Denver Foundation, Hunger Free Colorado launched the Full Pantries, Full Lives Leadership Institute, a first-of-its-kind endeavor in Colorado with a goal to ensure that those seeking food assistance not only are aware of available resources but have reasonable access to adequate, nutritious food in a client-centered experience. It is a two-year project to support a cohort of food pantry leaders.  http://www.hungerfreecolorado.org
Healthy Policies

Food Bank of Central New York created a policy to eliminate soda and candy and expanded this policy to address nutritional value of all foods. They reported “a substantial decreased in the amount of soda and a decrease in the pounds of candy accepted at the FBCNY two years after the implementation of the “no Soda and No candy” policy. It appears that the policy was successful in reducing donations of soda, and to a lesser extent, candy, by the second year after its implementation”. 138

Healthy Food Donation Campaigns

In an effort to improve the quality of food and client needs for food that is donated by community members, Lift-Up of Routt County has developed a “Please give nutritiously” campaign. As yet, data has not been collected on the impact of this campaign.

See Appendix H for Policy and practice recommendations from the CA Food Advocacy Report.

XII. Summary and Key Findings

A. Summary

This report provided strong context of the Routt County population by providing the latest data pertaining to obesity, food security, and fruit and vegetable consumption. The report then focused heavily on presenting the evidence-based factors that influence fruit and vegetable consumption and potential strategies for how to increase consumption.

Understanding What Affects Healthy Eating

Many complex, inter-woven factors influence the consumption of fruits and vegetable and healthy foods overall. Here we have highlighted the following factors and attempted to validate each one with at least some of the recent evidence about when and how they influence dietary intake:

- **Food Literacy**
  - Family & Social Environments
  - Food Messaging & Marketing
  - Food & Nutrition Education
  - Food System Knowledge

Inspiring Strategies

The strategies to increase fruit and vegetable consumption are just as complex and complicated as the factors that influence consumption. Through the form of case studies and examples, this reported provided just a menu of potential local strategies to choose from – or even just to be inspired by. Strategies presented ranged from gardening networks to food labeling, healthy shopping skills courses, public land for food production, community buying clubs, community kitchens, healthy retail store incentives, SNAP at farmers markets, and to farmer business training programs, and much more.

Building Towards Community Food Security

Amidst all of this complexity, what is clear (and will be explored in more depth in Part III) is the need to promote true community food security. The USDA Economic Research Service describes community food security as thus:

“There is no universally accepted definition of community food security. In the broadest terms, community food security can be described as a prevention-oriented concept that supports the development and enhancement of sustainable, community-based strategies:

- To improve access of low-income households to healthful nutritious food supplies.
- To increase the self-reliance of communities in providing for their own food needs.
- To promote comprehensive responses to local food, farm, and nutrition issues.”

Federal and community food assistance programs are critical bridges to health for many people and can be used in many unique ways to connect to fresh, local, and healthy foods. However, longer-term solutions must also be simultaneously pursued. The broader food environment must shift to where an abundance of fresh, healthy options in all neighborhoods is the norm, and the broader economic environment must provide opportunities for all so that food insecurity is utterly abnormal. Such accomplishments require strong federal policy leadership.

Healthy foods should be abundant and easy to find and to cook, and people should have the means to do so. Food system changes, particularly local ones, can only achieve some of this, but this report and Part III begin to explore the contributions that local food system strategies have to building community food security for all.

See Appendix I for summary of strategies to increase consumption of fruits and vegetables.

B. Key Findings

The following key findings were identified by the Northwest CO Food Coalition based on this report:

1. Routt County has a rich history of community partners working together and over the last 2 years developed significant momentum to successfully achieve the mission of the Northwest CO Food Coalition.

2. Routt County youth and adult consumption of healthy food fall significantly short of USDA recommendations.

3. The average body mass index (BMI) in children is increasing and there is a visible trend of increasingly higher % of overweight adults in Routt County and this has an economic impact on the community.

4. There is a need to empower parents to purchase, serve and eat healthy foods with their families.

5. A larger than expected % of residents (including children) are food insecure, and given that meal and food costs are generally high in Routt County, it is a concern that a significant number of these residents either are not eligible for income-based food assistance programs OR are eligible and are not enrolled in these programs.

6. While there is a cost barrier to accessing fruits and vegetables for many Routt County residents, a significant portion of the barrier may be a disconnect between resident’s perceptions about the cost to eat healthy and to buy local and the “real” costs.
XIII. Next Steps

In an effort to more effectively address the issues identified in Part II and Part III, the Northwest CO Food Coalition has divided into 3 Task Forces: Healthy Eating Education; Food Security and Local Food. The Food Security Task Force will develop a strategic plan to address the findings from Part II of the Routt County Community Food Assessment.

XIV. Appendices

A. Overweight and obesity summary data
B. Federal Poverty Level
C. Map the Meal Gap 2012- CO and Routt County
D. Summary of Federal Supplemental Nutrition Programs
E. Participation rates for Federal Supplemental Nutrition Programs: CO and Routt County
F. Go, Slow, Whoa program at Lift-UP
G. Consumption of Fruits and Vegetables
H. Policy and Practice Recommendations from the CA Food Policy Advocates report.
I. Summary of strategies to address Food Literacy, Availability and Costs.
J. References