

PROJECT HIGHLIGHTS & IMPACTS

13,063

South Union residents, of whom more than 70% are low/moderate-income, have improved and expanded access to healthy food

25+

Jobs created by new supermarket scheduled to open in 2015

\$1.7 million

Community Development Block Grant Loans for the City of Houston's first healthy food financing project

\$3.7 million

Total project costs generated from the \$1.7 million investment

Profile: Healthy Food Financing and Pyburn's Farm Fresh Foods Houston, Texas



Houston, home to over two million, is the fourth-largest city in the country, boasts a diverse industrial base and profitable health-care sector, and is one of the wealthiest cities in Texas. Despite the abundance of resources, 30 percent of adults are obese¹ and many Houstonians struggle to access fresh, affordable food in their lower-income neighborhoods. For a majority of residents, a healthy lifestyle is out of reach. Government leaders, community-based organizations, and business owners are, however, working toward a healthier city and a brighter future with the launch of a citywide healthy food financing initiative to spur affordable, fresh food retail development and the groundbreaking of Pyburn's Farm Fresh Foods.

In 2011, stakeholders across the city gathered to discuss ways to improve healthy food access for residents. Convened by the City of Houston, [Children at Risk](#), a local nonprofit children's advocacy organization, and [The Food Trust](#), a national food access organization, the Houston Grocery Access Task Force met with the goal of generating policy recommendations to support healthy food retail development in underserved neighborhoods throughout the city. Together, the group, which included government officials, grocery industry leaders, financial sector representatives, health advocates, and community leaders, issued, [Roadmap for Encouraging Grocery Development in Houston and Texas: A Report of the Houston Grocery Access Task Force](#). The report identified communities of need across the city and offered policy recommendations, including developing a

financing program to “support the development, expansion, and renovation of supermarkets and grocery stores offering a full selection of healthy foods” in underserved areas.

In response to the Task Force recommendations, the City of Houston dedicated federal Community Development Block Grant funding, in addition to municipal dollars, to support the development and renovation of healthy food retail in areas of greatest need. The citywide healthy food financing initiative, currently administered by the Houston Redevelopment Authority, will continue to identify potential partners and eligible projects on a case-by-case basis to revitalize or build grocery stores in underserved areas.

Three years after the Task Force first convened, stakeholders, community members, and city officials, including Mayor Annise Parker, Council Members Stephen Costello and Dwight Boykins, and U.S. Congresswoman Sheila Jackson Lee, stood together at the groundbreaking ceremony for Pyburn’s Farm Fresh Foods. Thanks to the Houston healthy food financing initiative, Pyburn’s, a local, immigrant-owned chain of grocery stores will open its newest location in an area classified as a Houston “food desert.” Mayor Parker highlighted the significance of the groundbreaking:

“An estimated two-thirds of Houstonians are overweight or obese and a high percentage of them live in food deserts with no access to fresh food. This forces families in these areas to rely on unhealthy processed or fatty foods from convenience stores and fast-food restaurants. I am excited that we are able to take the first step to address this problem that impacts the overall health of our residents and am confident there will be additional opportunities or grocery stores in other food desert areas in Houston.”

Mayor Annise Parker

Pyburn’s owner, John Vuong, is bringing a first-class supermarket to the South Union neighborhood of Houston. To support Pyburn’s Farm Fresh Foods, the city provided Vuong with a performance-based loan of \$1.7 million, which is being used for predevelopment, land acquisition, construction, and equipment costs. The total project cost is approximately \$3.7 million. Vuong and his family currently own and operate 11 grocery stores in the metropolitan area, including markets that serve low- to moderate-income shoppers. The new grocery store, scheduled to open in early 2015, will serve as a community anchor, create at least 25 new local jobs, and attract additional retail and new investments.

“Everyone should have access to fresh food, no matter the zip code. I am grateful to the Vuongs for recognizing the need and reconfirming their commitment to serving the community. Pyburn’s will not only provide fresh meat and produce to South Union, but will also create jobs for our city’s youth and spur economic development in an area ripe for more industry.”

City Council Member Stephen Costello

Local leaders look forward to supporting similar projects in Houston neighborhoods with the city’s healthy food financing program. By creating this opportunity for investment, the City of Houston is encouraging the health and economic vitality of neighborhoods for generations to come.

For more information about the Healthy Food Access Portal, contact us at info@healthyfoodaccess.org.

ⁱ University of Wisconsin Population Health Institute. *County Health Rankings 2014*.