

# BASIC NEEDS FOR HEALTH AND SAFETY: Nutritious Food



## WIN WITH BUSINESS

WIN with Business helps business support thriving people, places, and a just and thriving society. To achieve this, we explore how business can help create the “vital conditions” everyone needs to thrive:

- Belonging and civic muscle (including racial equity)
- Thriving natural world
- Reliable transportation
- Humane housing
- Meaningful work and wealth
- Lifelong learning
- Basic needs for health and safety (food, health, and safety)

**Connections:** While this brief focuses on our basic need for nutritious food it is closely related to other vital conditions such as meaningful work and wealth, reliable transportation, and basic needs for health and safety. We also apply a racial justice and equity lens across all the vital conditions.



## BASIC NEEDS FOR HEALTH AND SAFETY: NUTRITIOUS FOOD

Basic Needs for Health and Safety are the most practical requirements for our physical and mental well-being. They are about having enough of the things we cannot live without. Our need for healthy food and clean water is one of several core needs that fall

into this vital condition. Please see Basic Needs for Health, and Basic Needs for Safety for more information.

Access to healthy, affordable food and clean water is core to reducing food insecurity for people with low incomes. Ideally, everyone would have reliable access to nutritious food that helps us withstand adversity, fight infection, maintain a healthy weight, and nurture a healthy pregnancy. Among the forces that keep us from meeting these basic needs are poverty, racism, and other forms of discrimination or isolation.

## WHY SHOULD BUSINESS CARE ABOUT NUTRITIOUS FOOD?

America is arguably the world’s greatest food producing nation. However, poverty and hunger are common for adults and children across the country. Food insecurity and hunger lead to reduced quality of life. Children who experience hunger have a higher risk of obesity in adulthood.<sup>1</sup>

- More than 37 million people struggle with hunger in the United States. This includes more than 11 million children.
- The coronavirus pandemic has left millions of families without stable employment. More than 54 million people, including 18 million children, may be food insecure in 2020.
- A household that is food insecure has limited or uncertain access to enough food to support a healthy life.

The economic burden of food insecurity is estimated at more than \$167.5 billion annually. This is due to lower worker productivity, higher public education costs, increased health care costs, and expenses associated with emergency food distribution.<sup>2</sup>

## Twin Nutrition Crises in America

While hunger is far too prevalent, there is another face to malnutrition in the United States (US). In 2016, 71.6% of adults and more than 40% of children were overweight, obese or severely obese. While a big part of the American population is going hungry (insufficient calories), a large percentage is overweight or obese (too many calories, not enough nutrition). This dual burden can happen within a single individual or family. More than half (53%) of households in the US with an underweight person also include an overweight or obese person.<sup>3</sup>

Content for this brief draws heavily from *Thriving Together: A Springboard for Equitable Recovery and Resilience in Communities Across America*



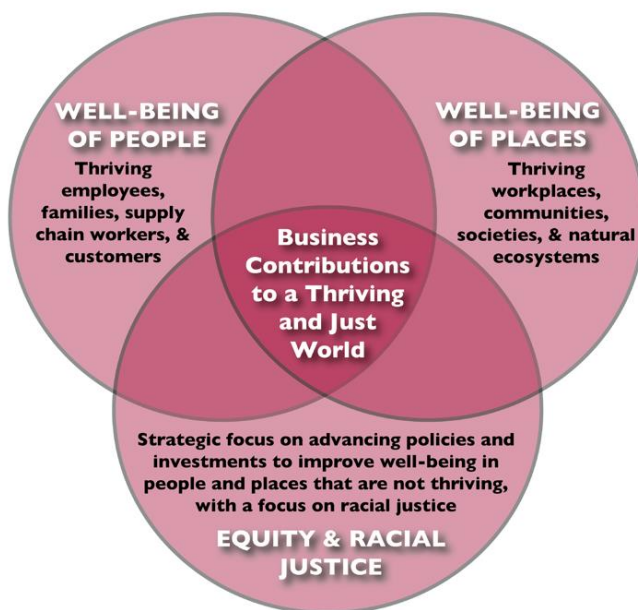
Inactive lifestyles and poor diet made up of food and drink that is high in fat and sugar but low in essential vitamins and minerals contribute to overweight and obesity.<sup>1</sup>

Obesity impacts conditions such as diabetes, high blood pressure, heart disease, strokes, and some forms of cancer. It also increases the risk of severe illness from COVID-19. Obesity has been linked to lower productivity, increased work absences and turnover, and higher healthcare costs for employers and society.

Both hunger and obesity are distributed unevenly across racial groups in the United States.<sup>4,5</sup> This is partly because they are concentrated in low income neighborhoods with limited or no access to safe areas to play and exercise and limited access to affordable healthy foods. People in these communities often rely on cheap, high-calorie, low-nutrient, processed foods.

## WIN WITH BUSINESS FRAMEWORK

WIN with Business helps businesses contribute to thriving people, places, and a just society. As outlined in the WIN with Business Framework, this contribution can happen in three areas: 1) the well-being of people; 2) the well-being of places; and 3) equity and racial justice.



1. **Well-being of people** – Businesses can align their cultures and environments to support the well-being of the people they directly or indirectly reach. This can include employees, families, supply chain workers, and customers. Employee benefits, workplace policies, practices, programs, and for some businesses, even products, can all be aligned to help employees access healthy and affordable food.
2. **Well-being of places** – Businesses can become community stewards to enhance the well-being of places. They can partner with local governments and community partners to improve housing conditions in places where their employees live, work, and play.
3. **Equity and racial justice** – Businesses can apply a strategic focus on equity, diversity, and inclusion. They can help improve the essential conditions for racial and economic justice. This means creating equitable products, programs, policies, and

systems to advance the well-being of people and places that have inequitable outcomes.

Strategic action in these areas can provide new opportunities, open new markets, and deepen relationships and create a **just and thriving business**. Businesses can also embrace a wider ecosystem role. Being in a thriving world means that while some actions might not immediately lead to business' well-being, everyone benefits in the long run from a thriving, just, and stable society.

## WHAT ARE INNOVATORS CURRENTLY DOING?

Businesses can make important contributions to ensure reliable access to nutritious and affordable food for their employees, and in the communities in which they operate. They can also increase resilience in the food chain to improve access to nutritious food, even in times of emergency.

### Well-being of People

*(Employees, families, supply chain workers, customers, and consumers)*

Employers can make a big difference in the well-being of employees by helping them access healthy food while they are at work.

#### Actions

- Subsidize healthy food in vending machines and on-site cafeterias.
- Offer programs and develop policies that support nutrition education and promotion of healthy foods.
- Provide free water and offer healthy food options during meetings and other company-sponsored gatherings.
- Provide an employee kitchen with refrigerator and microwave.
- Offer healthy options in the cafeteria.
- Sponsor a community garden or onsite community supported agriculture (CSA).
- Sponsor a farmers' market at the workplace.

Several factors impact food access and availability including types and locations of food retail outlets and restaurants. Also, nutrition policies and standards in settings where food is provided, including public schools and childcare centers. Other factors include nutrition education, commercial advertising, and food and beverage prices.<sup>6</sup>

Paying at least a living wage will help employees afford nutritious food for themselves and their families without having to choose between paying for rent and/or medicine. For more information see Meaningful Work and Wealth.

Additional resources:

- Fitwel [Food and Beverage Standards](#)
- Wellness Councils of America [Nutrition Resources](#)
- Centers for Disease Control – [Healthy Eating for a Healthy Weight](#)
- Nutrition resources available from [Health Enhancement Research Organization](#)
- Nutrition resources available from [National Alliance for Healthcare Purchaser Coalitions](#)



Image Credit: Markus Spiske (Unsplash)

## Well-being of Places

(Workplaces, communities, and societies)

The actions described above help employees access healthy food while at work. But many neighborhoods and communities have limited or no access to grocery stores that carry healthy food. People often must rely on drug stores, bodegas, and other small stores for food. These stores are less likely to carry fresh fruit and vegetables and other healthy food options. Better food environments can help all Americans achieve better health and reduce the burden of diet-related diseases. This is especially true for people with low incomes.

There are many ways businesses can improve food landscapes that offer nutritious food, support healthier eating, and help people eat a high-quality diet.

### Actions

- ❑ Support local groups that have policies that improve access to healthy food.
- ❑ Fund nutrition programs with healthy food options in schools.
- ❑ Work with community members and local small businesses to offer healthy food in areas where healthy food is scarce. See “Campbell’s Healthy Communities” initiative described below.
- ❑ Fund healthy food initiatives at local food stores and provide coupons/vouchers for healthy food options.
- ❑ Gather funders jointly support initiatives for a specific health outcome.
- ❑ Commit to cross-sector partnerships and funding models that help improve the food system. This could include public, private, and nonprofit groups. Always include “local voice.”
- ❑ Highlight connections between the health of employees, communities, populations, and the economy.

## System-Level Change with “Campbell’s Healthy Communities”

In 2011, Campbell launched [Campbell’s Healthy Communities](#) to improve the health of young people in Camden, N.J. When the program began, Camden – the site of Campbell’s World Headquarters since 1869 – was the

poorest city in the country, and one of its most dangerous. More than 40% of the city’s children were obese, and most were food insecure and hungry.

Camden has only one full-service grocery store and limited public transport. The food system in Camden consists mostly of corner stores and bodegas.

[Campbell’s Healthy Communities](#) made a 10-year, \$10 million commitment to measurably impact four focus areas:

- Food access
- Physical activity and access
- Nutrition education
- Public will

To expand access to healthy food, Campbell created its [Healthy Corner Store Initiative](#) in along with [The Food Trust](#). They worked with the community to improve food options in existing corner stores or bodegas.

To maximize the impact of system change, policy and infrastructure work, and process improvement, the initiative followed a collective impact methodology with...

1. ...a common agenda
2. ...a shared measurement system
3. ...mutually reinforcing activities
4. ...continuous communication
5. ...backbone support

In addition to offering fresh foods, many of the corner stores provide nutrition education, coupons, and other incentives to encourage residents to eat nutritious foods. With 44 healthy corner stores in 13 Camden neighborhoods, Campbell’s Healthy Communities has created the state’s largest citywide network of its type.

The initiative helped introduce or expand refrigeration, and source more fruits and vegetables. It also partnered with the county health department to conduct health screenings and nutrition education classes. Participants were offered a \$4 coupon for heart-healthy products (99% redemption rate).

To increase the sustainability of this program, Campbell set up a fund with [Fair Food Network](#) to provide money for food entrepreneurs who would otherwise not have access to capital.

For more information on [Campbell’s Healthy Communities](#) and its outcomes, see:

- [The Private-Sector Role in Building Healthy Communities: A Collective Impact Approach](#), National Academy of Medicine Discussion Paper, December 2, 2015.
- [Campbell’s Healthy Communities: Year 8 Update](#).

Businesses in the food supply chain can help improve the food landscape in the short and long term:

- ❑ Donate fresh produce and healthy staples to local food banks. Steer clear of unhealthy foods that lead to obesity.
- ❑ Sell fresh produce when supply lines are cut off or strained (e.g., restaurants in rural communities during COVID-19).

- ❑ Review your product line and ensure that products and processes are as healthy as possible, and ingredients are ethically sourced.
- ❑ Ensure sustainable growing, processing, and distribution practices that don't contribute to pollution and soil degradation.
- ❑ Provide safe working conditions for food system workers, who are 1/6 of the nation's workforce and highly vulnerable to contracting COVID-19.

## Brown's Super Stores

Brown's Superstores is an example of how doing the right thing in support of racial equity can be profitable for business. [FSG Consulting](#) highlights Brown's Superstores in its recent publication on the [Competitive Advantage of Racial Equity](#):

"Most grocery stores fled low-income communities because they deemed them to be unprofitable ... But I saw a window of opportunity as an entrepreneur... I also noticed that while grocery stores in richer neighborhoods prioritize customer experience, in low-income areas, that are predominantly markets of color, grocery stores are often overly policed with locks on expensive merchandise. Nobody wants to be treated that way."

– Jeffrey Brown, CEO Brown's Superstores, Inc.

Brown's Superstores increased their market by locating in Philadelphia-area neighborhoods where healthy food was scarce. They offered custom food items and much needed services, like health clinics to the mostly low-income people of color in the area. The company's seven stores generate \$250 million in revenues and serves 250,000 people."

### Additional resources:

- As part of its response to COVID-19, [United Health Group](#) partnered with [Compass Group](#) and [Second Harvest Heartland](#) to repurpose its cafeterias and kept its cafeteria workers employed making thousands of meals for community organizations.
- [Walmart is addressing food insecurity](#), in general, and specific to needs that have arisen due to COVID-19.
- An example of a grassroots effort is a pop-up market in a Chicago neighborhood. For more information, see "[Austin Teens Are Turning A Liquor Store into A Pop-Up Food Market.](#)"
- Communities can better understand their assets and barriers to a healthy food environment using the [Environments for Supporting Healthy Eating Index \(ESHE\)](#). For case studies of this tool in use see <https://eshe.engagementnetwork.org/using-the-eshe-index-for-case-making/>.

- [Peaches and Greens](#) is a program in Central Detroit that offers fresh fruits and vegetables to local residents. It also teaches youth to grow produce in community gardens.



Image Credit: Brown's Super Stores, Inc.

## Equity and Racial Justice

*(Strategic focus on advancing policies and practices to improve well-being in people and places that are not thriving with a focus on racial justice)*

The mid-20th century saw large decline in farm populations. This was a turning point in the American food system. With the shift toward industrial agriculture came a rise in obesity, a loss of agricultural biodiversity, and a rise in nitrate pollution. More concentrated methods of farming and animal rearing also resulted in higher greenhouse gas emissions.

COVID-19 has shown that farmers and small businesses have unstable livelihoods that can be threatened by even a short-term loss of revenue. The shutdown of food service pipelines left many farmers and food processors without income. But while the farmers and food processors were anxious to find markets for their supply, food banks struggled to meet the sudden increase in demand.

More than half (56%) of food-insecure households take part in at least one of the major federal food assistance programs. This includes the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program ([SNAP](#), formerly Food Stamps), the National School Lunch Program, and the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children (often called [WIC](#)).

### Actions

- ❑ Lobby for a government playbook to help guide delivery of food in the supply chain to those in most need.
- ❑ Advocate for improving programs such as free or affordable school lunches, WIC, and SNAP. This can help families and individuals afford nutritious food and reliable meals.
- ❑ Subsidize the work of community kitchens and food banks to feed current and laid-off employees.
- ❑ Re-examine the distribution model of food banks. Help create new approaches based on learnings from the pandemic. Leverage expertise from the food and transportation sectors.
- ❑ Create a coalition of private sector partners, especially food manufacturers, to address the systemic failures of the current food system. Use the pandemic as an opportunity to look at what's not working and help with redesign.

These efforts can create policy and program strategies that promote equity in food access and health by addressing the legacy of racial, ethnic, and class inequality



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## WHERE WILL YOU GO FROM HERE?

Core to the approaches described here is that the role of business is not just to increase profits. According to the 2020 World Economic Forum in Davos, it is also to do good – to support well-being of people, ensure the well-being of places, and lobby for equitable policies and systems.

There are as many ways to make a difference as there are companies and communities. Your approach should reflect your context, and the strengths of your people, products, and business model.

Ideal solutions reflect a strategic and systemic response driven by a deep understanding of the connections among the many issues that influence access to affordable and nutritious food.

How will you start to make a difference?

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6. This content draws heavily from "[Thriving Together: A Springboard for Equitable Recovery and Resilience in Communities Across America](#)." Please refer to the "Springboard" as a rich and evolving resource on promising solutions, and bold ideas that can help us achieve our deepest aspirations as a society.

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## WELL BEING IN THE NATION AND WIN WITH BUSINESS

The Well Being In the Nation (WIN) Network is a strategic network of more than 100 communities, national organizations, and federal agencies that work together to advance intergenerational wellbeing and equity.

WIN with Business is a collaborative within the WIN Network designed to help extend the positive impact of business on the wellbeing of people and places, and equity. This effort is achieved through cross-sector community impact and broader community system change.



**WIN NETWORK**

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### WIN with Business Founding Partners

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