



Creating a Healthy Concession Stand

Princeton Recreation Department offers lower-calorie and healthy food at its new community pool complex

SUMMARY

Cities and towns around the country have begun to examine the quality of foods and beverages sold in their public parks, pools, and recreation centers as one strategy for addressing childhood obesity.

Beginning in January of 2012, the Princeton Recreation Department in New Jersey worked with The Food Trust of Philadelphia and R&K's Poolside Concessions of Hopewell, N.J., to redesign the concession menu when Princeton replaced its community pool complex. The project team's goal was to make incremental, rather than sweeping, changes to increase the overall nutritional value of the food, while decreasing calorie consumption. The concessionaire introduced the new menu when the complex opened on Memorial Day weekend, 2012.

Menu modifications included changes in portion size, changes from higher-calorie to lower-calorie ingredients, and the addition of healthy items. These changes were integrated into the overall menu to avoid making distinctions between "healthy" foods and regular concession stand fare. Attention was also paid to ensure that menu options would be profitable and sustainable for the concessionaire. Sales were tracked electronically in order to document calorie savings.

The Food Trust, a nonprofit organization founded in 1992, works with cities, schools, neighborhoods, grocers, farmers, and policy-makers to help increase access to affordable, healthy food. Stephanie Weiss, MPH, of The Food Trust coordinated the project in conjunction with Ben Stentz and Evan Moorhead, executive director and assistant director of recreation services, respectively, of the Princeton Recreation Department. The owner and operator of R&K's Poolside Concessions is Raymond vanArsdale, Jr.

Results

Project staff described these results in reports to RWJF, and an interview for this Program Results Report:

- **The new menu at the pool concession offered healthier foods and reduced some portion sizes.** Changes included:
 - Reducing the size of hamburger patties from 6 ounces to 4 ounces and the fat content of the beef from 20 percent fat to 10 percent fat.
 - Reducing the portion sizes of French fries, nachos, chicken nuggets, onion rings, mozzarella sticks, funnel cake, and other products.
 - Reducing the size of a large fountain soda from 20 ounces to 16 ounces and reducing the size of a small fountain soda from 16 ounces to 12 ounces.
 - Making sandwiches with lean turkey and bacon, low-fat cheese, and low-fat mayonnaise.
 - Adding menu items such as salmon and turkey burgers, grilled chicken breast, fruit and fruit salad, frozen fruit bars, a hummus and roasted vegetable wrap, and a spinach salad.
- **The menu changes had a significant impact on total calories sold during the 2012 pool season.**
 - Changes in the product mix and portion sizes of 15 top-selling items resulted in 1.2 million fewer calories being sold during the season (reducing total calories sold from 7,951,641 to 6,759,377).
 - Changes in the portion size of fountain sodas resulted in almost 142,000 fewer calories being sold (reducing total calories in sodas sold from 592,491 to 450,671).
- **Customers were satisfied with the menu options offered.** "We've received nothing but high praise for the quality of the food, and we didn't get any complaints about portion sizes or taste," said recreation services' Moorhead. "So it was a win-win for us."
- **The concessionaire experienced no discernible decline in profits.** Because the new pool complex attracted higher attendance than the previous one had, vanArsdale is unable to make direct comparisons with previous seasons. Nonetheless, he reports that despite lower profit margins on some items due to the use of more expensive ingredients, "the new menu was a success all the way around."

- **The concession ran taste tests events during the summer to promote new menu items and to gauge their popularity.**

- Turkey burgers won the burger taste test.
- Gatorade G2, the reduced-calorie version of Gatorade, won the beverage taste test.

Lessons Learned

1. **Find cooperative partners.** The concessionaire, Ray vanArsdale, and his partner, Kathleen Raymond, were willing to try new products and did not panic over the possibility that offering healthy foods might reduce profits. They also cooperated in tracking sales in order to gauge the impact of menu changes. “The concessionaire being on board and willing to cooperate was huge,” Food Trust’s Weiss said.
2. **Trust your customers.** “Give the public some credit for wanting to try something more than just hamburgers and French fries, too,” Moorhead said. It would be easy to assume that the relatively sophisticated population of a university town like Princeton might be more receptive to healthier food choices than other communities, but Moorhead isn’t ready to make that assumption.

“Princeton is a diverse community,” he says, “and the community that uses the pool is socially and economically and ethnically very diverse. Our patrons were certainly very receptive to this. Whether that’s different than it would be in other communities is hard to say. We were very pleased with the reception.”

Funding

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Afterward

The Princeton Recreation Department has a no-cost grant extension to continue promoting healthy foods at the pool concession through the 2013 season. Plans call for strategies to price healthier foods more favorably than less healthy foods, to increase water consumption, and to analyze point-of-sales data from the 2013 season. The Food Trust plans to incorporate what it learned during the Princeton project into a similar project for the Fairmount Park Conservancy in Philadelphia.

Prepared by: Doug Hill

Reviewed by: Karyn Feiden and Molly McKaughan

Program Officers: Katherine Hatton and Tracy Orleans

Program Areas: Enterprise Level and Childhood Obesity

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Project Director: Evan Moorhead (609) 921-9480; emoorhead@princetonnj.gov

Project Director: Stephanie Weiss (215) 575-0444; sweiss@thefoodtrust.org

BIBLIOGRAPHY

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Report

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