Steps to Healthier Mexican Food:
Organizational Change in Salinas Taquerias

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ABSTRACT

Introduction: Salinas, California, has 43 taquerías (fast-food style Mexican restaurants), and many residents eat regularly at them. Migrant workers often depend on taquerías for much of their daily nutrition. Steps to a Healthier Salinas conducted a baseline survey of Salinas 35 taquerías in 2004, which determined taquería owners had concerns about proposed approaches to interventions. This led Steps to develop a taqueria-specific approach to enabling owners to introduce healthier menu options and clientele education materials.

Methods: Steps staff developed one-on-one relationships with taquería owners encouraging them to provide healthier food options and health education materials to their clientele. Taquerías were provided with incentives, health education materials, links to healthy food resources, and support, while customers were provided with information about how to make healthier choices. These efforts were aligned with the Salinas Steps "Value It" social marketing campaign. A year 3 survey of taquerías assessed organizational change from pre-intervention.

Results: Ten (25%) taquerías instituted organizational changes, by offering healthier food substitutions, creating new nutritious food items, or promoting healthy menu items. Twenty-two (65%) of taquerías distributed educational materials about diabetes, obesity, asthma, and related risk factors. Positive change has occurred in community level outcomes, including improvements in prevalence of adult weight (34% of adults having normal weight at pre-intervention versus 36% in year three).

Conclusions: Taquerías will be surveyed in year five to determine if menu changes and promotions, and the distribution of health education materials have been sustained over time.

City of Salinas Characteristics, 2005

- 157,000 residents
- 70% are Latino
- Large agricultural worker population

Health Indicators, 2006

- 56% of non-Latino residents are overweight or obese
- 70% of Latino residents are overweight or obese
- 7.8% of Salinas residents have diabetes
- 10.3% of Salinas residents have asthma

Salinas Taquerías

- Over 40 in Salinas
- Individually owned, mom and pop Mexican restaurants
- Order at the counter, similar to fast food
- Fresh ingredients, homemade, flexible menu
- No standardized recipes

2004 Taquería Baseline Survey Results

- No taquerías had entrees labeled healthy/low-fat
- No taquerías had smoke-free entryways
- 26% did not have three or more fruit/vegetable offerings
- 29% did not have two or more healthy drink offerings
- 46% did not have three or more healthy food offerings
- 57% did not have one or more low-fat choices

Foot in the Door

- Implement Smoke-Free Entryways
- Distribute Educational Materials

Consumer Outreach

- Tip sheet on ordering healthier Mexican food
- Customized table tents
- Healthy lifestyle tips brochure
- Promote already existing healthier options
- Promote healthier traditional foods
- List of participating taquerías with healthier options

Menu Changes

- New healthier dish
- Whole beans
- Whole wheat tortillas
- Healthier dietary fats
- Fresh fruit

Incentives

- Community pride
- Consumer loyalty
- Signage
- Customer giveaways
- Aprons
- Customized table tents
- Social marketing
- Media coverage

Taquería Locations

Changes at Participating Taquerías (n=24)

- 100% implemented smoke-free entryways
- 92% distributed health education materials
- 42% introduced new healthier dish
- 33% added whole beans option
- 29% began promoting already existing healthier dishes
- 21% added whole wheat tortillas option
- 13% added fresh fruit option

Qualitative Results

- Some taquerías report increased business
- Some taquerías are very enthusiastic and report feeling they are doing something good for customers
- One taquería supplier began offering whole wheat tortillas for the first time due to increased demand
- One taquería owner will incorporate healthier practices and options in new restaurant opening in the fall
- Some taquerías report increased customer satisfaction