

## **Rhode Island**

### **Fresh Initiative**

#### **Public Health Problem**

Increasing fruit and vegetable consumption for adults and children is a priority targeted health behavior change in Rhode Island identified by the Governor's Wellness Initiative, Get Fit RI, Healthy RI 2010, the Initiative for a Healthy Weight, and the Minority Health Promotion Program. Seventy-three percent of RI adults and 72 percent of RI high school students eat less than five servings of fruits and vegetables per day.

#### **Intervention Example**

The Fresh Initiative is an innovative public-private partnership with one of Rhode Island's largest fresh fruit and vegetable distributors that delivered high-quality fresh fruits and vegetables directly to the worksite and sold them to employees at significant discounts. The focus of this intervention was to implement a pilot program at two worksites, one private (Hasbro Toys) and one public (the University of Rhode Island (URI)) to see whether addressing the three main reported barriers to eating more fruits and vegetables (convenience, cost and quality) would result in increased consumption. Based on a previous survey of RI state employees, the major barriers to increasing fruit and vegetables consumption were lack of time to shop, cost and poor produce quality. At the pilot worksites, a produce market was set up where employees could come and purchase fresh fruits and vegetables on their way home from work (Hasbro) or at lunchtime (URI). After a few weeks, they also added a preorder model, through which employees placed their orders in advance and picked them up pre-packaged on market day. The private distributor delivered, set-up, sold, broke-down and removed the excess produce for the market. On the first day of the market, 120 of 350 employees participated and there was an enthusiastic response to the intervention. Online surveys were conducted during the course of the market and showed that there were substantial increases in fruit and vegetable consumption by employees (73%) and their families (68%) during the weeks that the market was held.

It was determined that the cost to the fruit and vegetable distributor in terms of staff time and decreased income from opened cases was too high to continue to offer the produce at the initial discounted prices if the full market were held; but that the preorder program alone would work for everyone. Rhode Island is in the process of implementing the preorder program alone at another pilot private worksite and will expand this preorder model to 26 state employee worksites this fall. They are also exploring ways of partnering with community agencies to purchase the leftover open cases so that, perhaps, markets could still be held at certain worksites. The market model will also be implemented at a low-income community center this fall. In this setting, the distributor will be selling the produce directly to the community center at wholesale price and the center will run the market and mark the produce up a small amount to cover the cost.

#### **Implications and Impact**

The implications and potential impact of increasing fruit and vegetable consumption in Rhode Island are substantial as this program expands statewide to other worksites and low-income community centers. The top three responses to what people liked about the program, in order, were convenience, quality and cost. RI is also in the process of partnering with Johnson & Wales University's Feinstein Community Service Center to provide cooking and taste-testing events and with Brown University to implement educational interventions to see if this multi-component approach is more effective than the market alone.