



Assessment of Feasibility for Korean Grocery Stores to Sell Healthy Options

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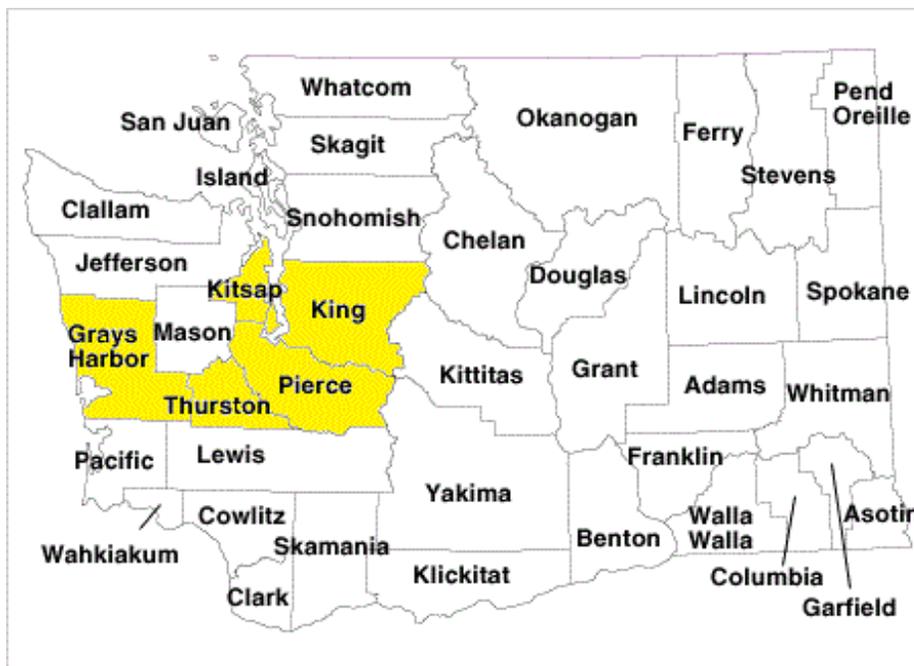
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Assessment of Feasibility for Korean Grocery Stores to Sell Healthy Options

Korean American-owned businesses make up a big part of Washington State’s economy. Many business owners are members of the Korean American Grocers Association of Washington State (KAGRO), with approximately 850 members (KAGRO of Washington n.d.). Many of these businesses are small stores with gas stations, convenience stores, and local neighborhood mom-and-pop grocery stores (APICAT DOH Grant 2015).

The Asian Pacific Islander Coalition Advocating Together (APICAT) for Healthy Communities conducted an assessment of feasibility to identify Korean American Grocers that sell healthy options. Initial survey intakes were conducted followed by follow-up interviews.

This assessment was conducted with eleven Korean American store owned businesses in the following Washington State Counties: King, Pierce, Kitsap, Thurston, and Grays Harbor. The goal was to assess Korean grocers who sell healthy options. In an effort to increase access to healthy food options in our communities, we can learn how Korean grocers can help through initial survey intakes followed by key informant interviews.



Participant Profiles and Recruitment

David Chung has been an active APICAT member for close to 10 years and is a founding member of the Korean American Grocers Association of Washington (KAGRO). KAGRO is a non-profit mutual benefit association founded in 1985 to serve the interests of Korean-American grocery business owners, and the communities they serve in Washington State.

Mr. Chung agreed to arrange an introductory meeting with Mr. Kenneth Ko, KAGRO Board President and Elaine Ishihara, APICAT Director to discuss the possibility of conducting a healthy

options feasibility study with its members. During the initial meeting Mr. Ko was open to the request but did not want to commit to on behalf of the KAGRO members. He invited Mr. Chung and Elaine Ishihara to attend a KAGRO board meeting to share information about the “healthy options” survey. It was decided that Mr. Chung would represent APICAT and agreed to attend KAGRO board meetings on a regular basis. Mr. Chung attended KAGRO board meetings and introduced APICAT’s project to its members and acted as the primary contact.

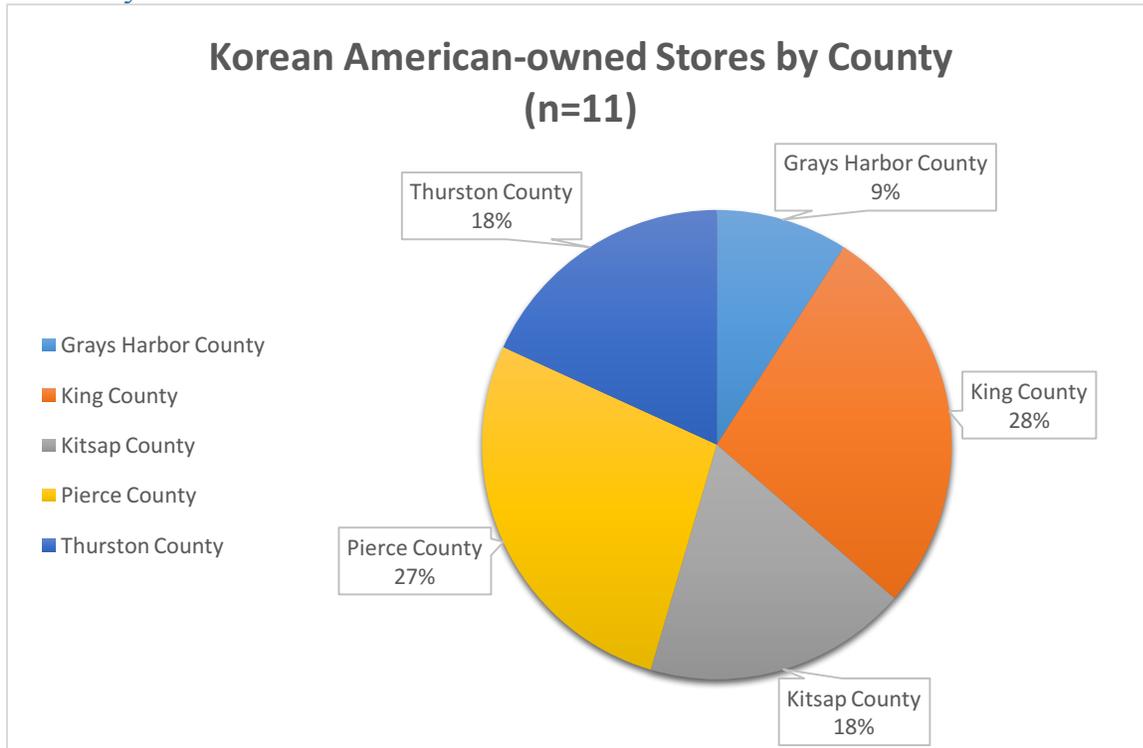
While attending various KAGRO meetings, Mr. Chung noted that KAGRO members received training from the Washington State Liquor and Cannabis Board. Mr. Chung involvement was instrumental in having KAGRO members agree to participate in the healthy options survey. Participants for the assessment were identified by David Chung, APICAT Community Liaison. Each participant owned a small grocery store, convenience store, or gas station store. Many of the participants could speak English proficiently. When needed, David provided interpretation and translated written questions and answers from Korean to English.

Interview Analysis

Korean American Grocery Store Owner Intake Survey					
IDENTIFICATION	COUNTY	TYPE OF BUSINESS	YEARS IN BUSINESS	GENDER	TITLE
Owner 1	Grays Harbor	Gas Station	2 years	Male	Manager
Owner 2	King	Grocery and Gas Station	10 years	Male	Owner
Owner 3	King	Grocery and Deli	11 years	Male	Owner
Owner 4	King	Grocery Deli	10 years	Male	Owner
Owner 5	Kitsap	Food Center	10 years	Female	Owner
Owner 6	Kitsap	Gas Station and Food	9 years	Male	Owner
Owner 7	Pierce	Convenience	9 years	Male	Owner
Owner 8	Pierce	Gas and Convenience	17 years	Male	Owner
Owner 9	Pierce	Grocery	7 years	Male	Owner
Owner 10	Thurston	Gas and Convenience	20 years	Male	Owner
Owner 11	Thurston	Grocery and Gas Station	13 years	Female	Owner

The initial survey intake and follow-up interviews were facilitated by Heidi Park and David Chung using questions developed by APICAT in conjunction with the Washington State Department of Health. Specific comments and paraphrased comments were transcribed from notes and audio recordings from the follow-up informant interviews. A summary of themes identified in the interviews, with supporting quotes, is included in the report.

Summary of Korean American Grocers



A total of 11 Korean American Grocers were engaged in the initial survey intake and subsequent informant interviews. Of the 11 Korean American Grocers that were interviewed, two identified as female (18.2 percent). Three owners (27.3 percent) were from Pierce County and from King County (27.3 percent), followed by two owners from Kitsap County (18.2 percent) and Thurston County (18.2 percent). One owner from Grays Harbor County (9 percent).

Participant Intake Surveys

This section describes issues that emerged from participant intake surveys. Participants were asked to take an intake survey before the follow up one-on-one informant interview. Volunteers that took part in the intake surveys signed a consent form that protects any of their identifying information. For the purposes of this assessment, no names or addresses will be used. However for full discretion, the intake asked the following:

- Owners' names
- Store names
- Store addresses
- Types of stores
- Years in business
- Gender
- Role they play in the store

The initial intake survey also asked about:

- Number of store employees
- Types of customers shop at their stores most often
- Number of suppliers/vendors where they get their inventory
- Where the majority of your inventory comes from

Participant Follow-up Interviews

Following the initial intake survey, KAGRO members volunteered to do a follow-up interview. Volunteers were asked to answer the following questions:

- 1) What year did you open your store?
- 2) When did you start selling healthy food items?
 - a) Why did you decide to sell them?
 - b) What are the healthy food items you sell?
 - c) Overall, what are the most popular items you sell in the store?
 - d) As a small business owner, what is your biggest concern?
- 3) Do you accept SNAP/EBT?
 - a) If yes, what percentage of your customers use SNAP/EBT?
- 4) Do you accept WIC?
 - a) If yes, what percentage of your customers use WIC coupons?

Participant Characteristics Survey

Characteristics of participants in initial survey intake and follow-up interviews. Responses to questions should be considered both as potentially reflective of different community factors and cultural values. Also these answers are reflective of different characteristics of the store owners who participated. The following table on the next page shows the owners responses to the follow-up questions:

Korean American Grocery Store Owner Follow Up Interview Responses

Owner	Q1	Q2	Q2a	Q2b	Q2c	Q2d	Q3	Q3a	Q4	Q4a
Owner 1	2006	2006	Can't sell all junk food	Bread, fruit, apple, pear, banana, and prepared food like deli and hot dogs	Beverages: water 50%	Managing to have a real mom-and-pop store that has good food and is clean	1	< 5%	0	0
Owner 2	2005	2005	Try to sell healthy foods because most of the customers are buying junk food	Milk, bread, cheese, butter, bananas, eggs, onions	Cigarettes, beer, and pop	Financial problems	1	About 3%	0	0
Owner 3	2004	2004	The store location is on a corner and is a deli store as well. Supermarket is really far away so they offer healthy foods	Onion, potato, wheat bread, tomato, banana, apple, grape, watermelon, pineapple, cucumber (in the summer)	Water, milk, beer, pop, and chips	Shoplifting	1	30%-40%	0	0
Owner 4	2005	2005	When I opened in 2005	Banana, lemon, lime, apple, carrot, lettuce, potato, cheese, milk, bread	Beer, wine, cigarettes, pop	Worried about business's finances	1	> 10%	0	0
Owner 5	2005	2005	Former owner sold healthy food items and when he took over, he continued to sell them	Banana, lemon, lime, apple, carrot, lettuce, potato, cheese, milk, bread	Beer, wine, cigarettes, pop	Worries about store's finances	1	> 10%	0	0
Owner 6	2006	2006	Good for business	Bread, water, milk, bananas, berries in season, apple,	Cigarettes, pop, beer and wine, grocery items like cereal,	I worry about gas not selling enough to make profits	1	Very little because they the store is in a	0	0

				orange, lemon, lime, potato onion	canned foods, candy			retired community		
Owner 7	2006	2006	Customers asked for them	Milk, cheese, bread, onions, banana	Cigarettes, wine/beer, frozen food, pizza	All items should sell but cigarettes and alcohol are not profitable	1	80% food and 15% cash only	0	0
Owner 8	1998	1998	People wanted store to carry health food items	Banana, fruit, dairy food, cheese, milk, bread, yogurt	Milk, banana, yogurt	I want my business to be bigger	1	20%	0	0
Owner 9	2008	2008	Some customers wanted only smaller portions of vegetables or fruits	Apple, cheese, onion, potato, eggs	Onion, eggs, candy, pop, cigarettes	Worried about safety and people stealing from store	1	20-30 people average a day	0	0
Owner 10	1995	1995	Everyday needs for customer	Water, nutrition drink, cheese, lunchables, bananas	Candy	Business is operating and doing well	1	< 5%	0	0
Owner 11	2005	2005	My store is a minimart, a lot of houses and they are closer to my store	Milk, juice, ham, cheese, eggs, sour cream, banana, onion, lime, lemon	Ice cream, donuts, hot dog, frozen pizza, frozen chicken, waffles, sausage, tater tots, hash browns	Tax on cigarettes	1	2% - 3%	0	0

Challenges for Korean American Grocers

Korean grocers have little time to participate in studies. These answers reflect the importance of customer input to the Korean American small business owners. Many owners expressed their biggest concerns as they relate to staying in business, such as shoplifting, making enough profits, and financial problems. Many of these store have a limited amount of employees, which averages at about 3.2 employees for the eleven business owners. As noted earlier, these owners run this as a family owned business. It is not uncommon to see the owner helping around the store. In addition to overseeing store operations and finances, some owners stock merchandise, pick up and drop off goods from other wholesale retailers and other stores.

Site Visits

Site visits were conducted at different KAGRO member stores. The stores were primarily family-owned and ran businesses. One of the stores in Pierce County, mainly sold canned goods, pasta, rice, bread, and milk. Another store, located in King County, was a deli that served mainly the lunch crowd. A store located in a business district in King County served bananas, oranges, apples, salad, sandwiches and microwavable food. This store was mainly open Mondays through Fridays. Five of the eleven stores (45.5 percent) were located near Interstate 5 between the cities of Seattle and Olympia. Other stores were located throughout the counties of Pierce, Kitsap, and Grays Harbor.





Results from Assessment

Overall, eleven KAGRO members volunteered to be a part of the assessment. On average, the store owners in this assessment have been in business for about 10.7 years. The oldest store has been in business for 20 years and the youngest store has been in business for seven years. The eleven stores ranged from small grocery-like convenience stores to gas stations. All of the stores accepted EBT/SNAP but no WIC.

Electronic Benefits Transfer (EBT) is an electronic system that allows a recipient to authorize transfer of their government benefits from a Federal account to a retailer account to pay for products received (USDA 2015). Whereas, The Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) provides Federal grants to States for supplemental foods, health care referrals, and nutrition education for low-income pregnant, breastfeeding, and non-breastfeeding postpartum women, and to infants and children up to age five who are found to be at nutritional risk (USDA 2015).

Five store owners responded that less than 10 percent of their customers used EBT/SNAP at their stores; while two stores responded that about 20 percent to 40 percent of customers used EBT/SNAP at their stores. One store, in particular, noted a high percentage of about 80 percent of his customers use EBT/SNAP.

These stores are mostly located in urban areas that serve low-income communities with a sizeable community that uses SNAP/EBT. Though many owners listed cigarettes, candy, pop, beer and wine as their most popular items they sell overall.

Recommendations

Based on the intake surveys and follow up interviews, all of the eleven KAGRO owners expressed great support for an effort like a future healthy retail initiative. Many commented on how they would like to increase the amount of healthy food items they sell; however, there is not much incentive to expand due to limited shelf space or due to the limited size of their stores. As mentioned earlier in this report, the KAGRO stores are family-owned and operated. Most of the store employees are relatives of the owner with very few extra employees, if any.

Due to the limited amount of time of KAGRO store owners, an education campaign would be necessary. Currently store owners already receive training from the Washington State Liquor and Cannabis Board. An education training on KAGRO's role in the healthy retail initiative should be held on the same dates that the Liquor and Cannabis Board holds their trainings. These training should be culturally competent and in-language since most Korean store owners speak Korean either as their first language or preferred language.

For example, Korean grocery store owners already receive compliance training from the Washington State Liquor and Cannabis Board called "Responsible Alcohol and Tobacco Sales," which focuses on the prevention of sales to minors. This training and an education training on the healthy retail initiative could be conducted together. This allows government agencies to be creative and provide some ease to Korean grocers who go to many trainings as small business owner but have limited time.

Additionally, the education campaign would need to clearly determine what is considered healthy food. Many definitions of healthy foods does not include what some communities, like the Korean American community, consider to be healthy foods. However not all Korean-owned stores serve the Korean American community. Some do but most small business owners are located in racially and economically diverse geographic areas.

Due to the high percentage of customers who use EBT/SNAP at the stores owned by KAGRO members, this could lead to another opportunity for storeowners to see if they can qualify to accept WIC checks. This would also provide customers another alternative to purchase health food items, which include foods that are high in protein, calcium, iron, or vitamins A & C such as:

- Baby food
- Milk
- Peanut butter
- 100% fruit juice with vitamin C
- Cheeses
- Dried peas and beans
- Cereals fortified with iron
- Eggs
- Fresh fruit and vegetables
- Infant cereal
- Iron fortified baby formula (for babies who are not breastfed)
- Tuna and carrots for women fully breastfeeding with babies
- Whole grains

This opportunity would need assistance from the appropriate federal and state government agencies such as the U.S. Department of Agriculture's WIC Program and the Washington State Department of Health Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) to work with KAGRO members on how they could qualify to accept WIC checks (Public Health -- Seattle & King County 2014).

Conclusion

Overall, a deeper analysis of KAGRO members and the communities they serve because the majority are not located in the Korean community. In fact, many are non-Korean and often the demographic of the consumer changes depending on the store's geographic location. This feasibility assessment highlighted the anecdotal barriers Korean-owned grocery owners face. However some of these barriers can be addressed through strategic outreach and education in partnership with KAGRO and APICAT

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