

AN ASSESSMENT OF THE **RETAIL FOOD ENVIRONMENT** IN A FUNCTIONAL REGION OF NORTHERN BRITISH COLUMBIA

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COMMUNITY FOOD ENVIRONMENT

Location and *type* of retail outlet's, and accessibility to where people live (work and play)

CONSUMER FOOD ENVIRONMENT

What consumers encounter *in-store*, such as the *price*, *promotion* and *placement* of items

... external factors that shape those environments?

ASSESSMENT PLAN FOR A SMALL, RURAL AND REMOTE REGION

01

Dialogic workshops with public health practitioners using case vignettes to design a locally-relevant assessment plan

02

GIS mapping of all restaurants and food stores in the Northern Heath region

03

Assessment of availability, quality and price in a sub-sample of grocery and convenience stores in 'functional region' of the Northern Health Authority

04

In-depth, semi-structured interviews with storeowners and store managers, and other key food system stakeholders

METHODS: SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEWS

- Purposeful sampling of small- and medium-sized and independent retailers who participated in Phase III (in-store assessment), and food environment stakeholders
- N=6 storeowners and managers
 - n= 4 small, independently-owned 'general stores'
 - n= 1 independently-owned, medium-sized grocery store
 - n = 1 chain distributor/large grocery store (formerly independent)
- N=3 public sector practitioners and community-based organization representatives

A photograph of a grocery store produce section. In the foreground, there are several wooden crates filled with lemons. To the left, there are crates of limes. The background shows more produce and store shelving. A semi-transparent grey box is overlaid on the image, containing the text:

*External factors influence how store owners
in small, rural, and remote manage their
stores*

WHAT WE HEARD: Contextualizing the Food Environment

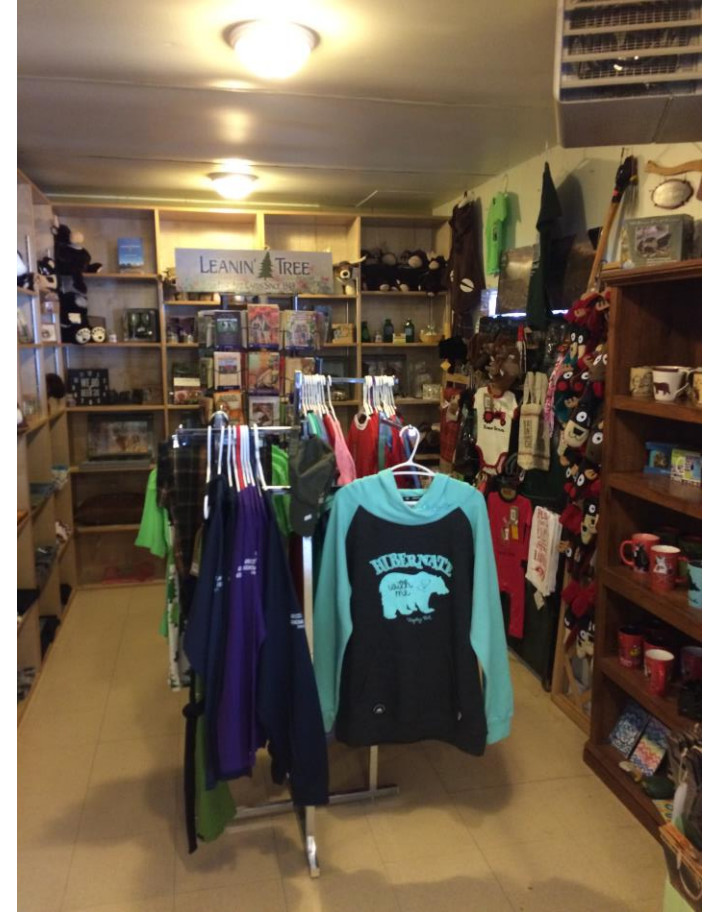


Retailers in rural and small towns **manage the expectations** and demands of a 'mobile' customer base

“Right now, it’s dead, spring break. There’s nothing to do in this town, and so spring break, town empties out. People that can afford it are taking their kids, even if they just go to [hub town] to spend a few nights at the hotel where they got a pool and you can do some shopping. So you gotta know that, ‘okay, don’t’ order so much this week because, [basketball tournament is on this week, if there is sea fest on this week’. And knowing your culture. Our local first nations support each other so when it’s [event] in [first nation community], you know you’re going to lose a bunch of people, but then again if the sockeye are running and fishing is happening, people are too busy to go to town and you know you’re going to sell more.”

Storeowner | Village of 500

Good customer service is a priority for retailers and means **meeting customer demand**, however small- (and medium-sized) retailers also seek to 'stand out' or differentiate their stores with unique products



“So I’m constantly having to keep that one step ahead, because I want things to be in our store, I want things to be unique. We don’t carry a huge volume of of specific items, like smaller quantities so when it’s in hopefully the consumer takes advantage, buys it.”

Independent store owner | Village of 80

“But I do think that there is a growing want to -- and that’s what I’m trying to build here, ‘oh let’s go to the market because it’s cute and I’m going to see some people I know and I might have a coffee, you know, and then I’m trying to find those niche products that people want, but I haven’t had any time to source out, because they are not at the wholesaler, right, so I’ve been trying to find products that people go ‘oh the only place you can get it is in this town”

Independent store owner | Village of 1,300



Retailers are **constantly adapting** to a changing food retail sector

“When our chain store closed about a year and a half ago, then I was in here, pretty well from opening to closing, like it was hectic, we were so busy. But now since these guys opened up, I’m sort of resting a little bit trying to figure out where to take the store. It seems like whether it’s a new store, or new competition or just general changes round the area you are always doing something or another, well if you don’t you probably can’t survive ... we’ve done so many changes, you know, just to keep the business going.”

Independent store owner | District of 3,000

Local economic factors such as boom and bust economies and seasonal work pose **staffing challenges** that take time away from business development



“By the time you add up all those wages, you really have to think, can you survive.”

Independent store owner | Village of 80

“I: Are there a lot of other opportunities in the community? R: Camps, you know the camps, the mining camps. We’ve lost a lot of people to mining camps. You know, their, they pay \$300/day, or whatever they pay a day. It’s tough. We can’t compete with that obviously. So we lost a lot of people to the mines. And I understand it, it’s economics. You know you can work two weeks and make \$3000, \$4000 dollars. And we can’t compete with that salary, even if you’re the top level of employee.”

Store manager | Village of 270

PRELIMINARY CONCLUSIONS



Understanding the business model, motivations and practices of retailers is an important component of conducting a food retail environment assessment



Storeowners bring a unique perspective on external economic, geographic, and social factors that shape the in-store environment, and the broader community



Small, independent retailers may be flexible and willing to make changes if they can see a benefit to customer service

Look for alignments between what retailers already do, and nutrition promotion goals



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