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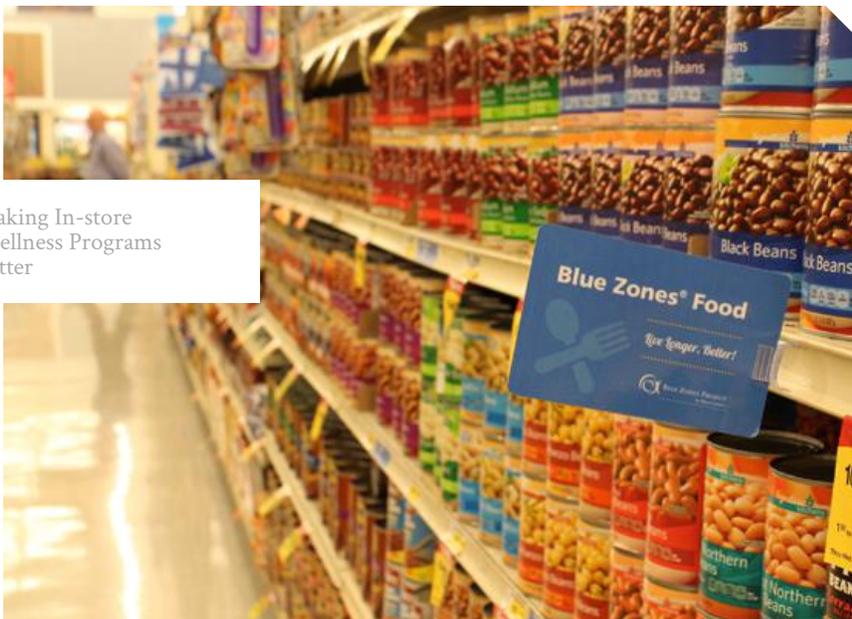
### Innovative project engages consumers on a community level

January 8, 2017, 07:56 pm

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Making In-store Wellness Programs Better



An Albertsons in Lake Worth, Texas, displays Blue Zones signage

Naturally enough, supermarkets' health-and-wellness programs interact with the community, forging partnerships with local schools, gyms, health care facilities, assisted-living centers, banks, insurance companies, and more. Blue

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Zones Project, however, takes this community involvement to a whole other level.

The effort “is a community-by-community well-being improvement initiative designed to help people lead longer, better lives by making healthy choices easier,” explains Blue Zones Project VP Michael Acker. “The initiative promotes simple environmental changes and behaviors based on lifestyles in Blue Zones areas — pockets of the world where people are most likely to reach age 100 and beyond.”

Continues Acker: “People tend to spend 80 percent of their time within 10 miles of their homes, so Blue Zones Project focuses on the everyday places that impact well-being. When stakeholders from across the community — grocery stores, restaurants, schools, worksites, faith-based organizations, and city and county leaders — take steps to make healthy choices easier, the results are significant.”

As part of this undertaking 64 grocery stores across the country, including Whole Foods, Albertsons and Natural Grocers locations, have become “Blue Zones Project Approved” by implementing practices that make healthy choices easier and persuading shoppers to make those choices. “The model is successful in supermarkets and other areas of the community because it helps people achieve a big impact on their well-being by making small changes,” observes Acker.

The project has identified 35 evidence-based practices – referred to as “nudges” – that can consumer change behavior in the supermarket. “Stores may, for instance, implement Blue Zones Project checkout lanes where shoppers can find healthier impulse items such as nuts, fruit and water,” suggests Acker. “Other options include designated Blue Zones Project parking spaces farther away from the entrance of the store to encourage walking; healthy recipes and a Blue Zones food list around the store; offering salads as a healthier grab-and-go meal option; adding signage to highlight locally grown produce; featuring healthy options on end caps; and positioning produce displays at the front of the store.”

As a result of such “nudges,” Acker says, “Customers are responding favorably, with stores reporting higher customer counts and more revenue from healthy items.” In one outstanding example, Naples, Fla.-based Wynn’s Market rearranged its cold beverage cases, adding green tea and flavored water and making bottled water more visible than sugary drinks, boosting bottled water sales by almost 15 percent; overall, since joining the project, the grocer has seen a 5 percent rise in produce sales, as well as increases to overall sales and customer counts. Meanwhile, KTA Super Stores’ first two Blue Zones Project locations more than doubled its sales of fresh fruit, nuts and dried fruit; tripled fruit leather sales; and instituted half-sandwich offerings that sell two to three times faster than whole sandwiches. The Hawaii Island retailer has since expanded the project to all six of its stores.



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Currently, 31 communities in eight states are participating in Blue Zones Project, affecting more than 2 million Americans.



“We know that shoppers, especially Millennials, are increasingly interested in healthy choices,” notes Acker. “As preferences continue to move toward natural, wholesome foods, in-store health-and-wellness programs must expand. To have a lasting, meaningful impact on well-being, though, the changes shoppers make must be subtle and natural. That’s the advantage of the Blue Zones Project approach. It’s about quietly encouraging better choices by making the healthier option the one to which shoppers gravitate.”

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