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## **Healthier Together Calhoun Annual Evaluation Report**

Catherine Sanders, Tatevik Markosyan, Saher Dossani, Dr. Alexa Lamm, & Dr. Alison Berg

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## About the Authors

**Catherine Sanders, M.S.** – Doctoral Research Assistant in the Department of Agricultural Leadership, Education, and Communication in the College of Agricultural and Environmental Sciences.

**Tatevik Markosyan** – Doctoral Student and Evaluation Research Assistant in the Department of Agricultural Leadership, Education, and Communication in the College of Agricultural and Environmental Sciences.

**Saher J. Dossani** – Undergraduate Research Assistant, Department of Health Promotion in the College of Public Health.

**Alexa Lamm, Ph.D.** – Associate Professor in the Department of Agricultural Leadership, Education, and Communication in the College of Agricultural and Environmental Sciences.

**Alison Berg, Ph.D.** – Associate Professor, Extension Nutrition and Health Specialist in the Department of Foods and Nutrition, College of Family and Consumer Sciences.

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**Hannah Southall, MPH** – Project Manager, College of Public Health.

**Heather Padilla, Ph.D.** - Assistant Professor & Director, Workplace Health Group in the College of Public Health.

**Hannah Southall, MPH** – Project Manager, College of Public Health

**Heather Padilla, Ph.D.** – Principle Investigator; Assistant Professor & Director, College of Public Health

**Andera Scarrow** – Southwest District Director, University of Georgia Extension

**Rachel Hubbard** – Program Development Coordinator, FACS, University of Georgia Extension Southwest District

**Shanda Ashley** – 4-H County Extension Coordinator, University of Georgia Calhoun County Extension

**Stacey Williams**- 4-H County Extension Program Assistant, University of Georgia Calhoun County Extension

**Luke Crosson** – ANR County Extension Agent, University of Georgia Calhoun County Extension

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## Background

Healthier Together Calhoun (HTC) is a project funded through a cooperative agreement with the Centers for Disease Control (CDC)’s High Obesity Program, managed by the University of Georgia’s College of Public Health and implemented by University of Georgia Cooperative Extension. The goals of the cooperative agreement include increasing access to healthy foods and physical activity in communities with adult obesity rates over 40%. The grant was awarded in September 2018 and continues through September 2023. This evaluation of the program’s progress will cover activities completed in Year43, from September 2021 through September 2022, in Calhoun County, Georgia.

In order to gain local expertise and input, a HTC Coalition was formed with county leaders and stakeholders in Calhoun County. Project staff and coalition members worked together to establish impactful projects that were appropriate for Calhoun County communities. These projects included a Grab-n-Go Cooler, community gardens, partnerships with local food pantries and Faithful Families, walking trails, and walking signage.

An evaluation of the HTC project was initiated in May 2022 to assess how the project was working, to determine whether HTC was achieving its intended goals, and to identify successes and opportunities for growth through an appreciative evaluation lens.

## Methods

One of the evaluation goals was to gain an understanding of the direct and indirect community impacts of the HTC coalition work. To achieve this goal, the evaluation team conducted a survey with community members and a focus group with coalition members in Calhoun County.

## Community Survey

Questions for the community survey asked participants where they purchased or consumed food, which HTC resources they used (including Grab-n-Go Coolers and walking trails), eating habits for themselves and their families, transportation habits, physical activity habits, and various demographic questions. The community survey was disseminated in Calhoun County by project staff members in everyday locations such as the Calhoun County Courthouse, Calhoun County Library, and West IGA. A total of 33 paper surveys were collected. Participating community members were asked to self-identify their demographic characteristics, presented in Table 1.

Table 1  
*Demographics of Community Member Survey Respondents (N = 33)*

Demographic	F	%	
Gender	Female	24	72.7
	Male	8	24.2
	Prefer not to say	0	0.0
	Other	0	0.0
	No response	1	3.0
Ethnicity/Race	White, Non-Hispanic	20	60.6
	Black/African American	12	36.3
	Hispanic/Latino	0	0.0
	Asian/Pacific Islander	0	0.0
	American Indian/ Alaskan Native	0	0.0

Age	65 or older	8	24.2
	46-55	8	24.2
	56-64	5	15.2
	26-35	4	12.1
	36-45	2	6.1
	18-25	2	6.1
Marital Status	Married	16	48.5
	Single	9	27.3
	Living with a partner/ Not married	3	9.1
	Widowed	2	6.1
	Separated	1	3.0
	No response	1	3.0
Number of Children under 18 in Home	0	23	69.7
	2	4	12.1
	1	3	9.1
	4	1	3.0
	3	0	0.0
	5 or more	0	0.0
Level of Education	No response	2	6.1
	Some college	10	30.3
	Bachelor's Degree	8	24.2
	Associate's Degree	6	18.2
	High school or GED	4	12.1
	Less than high school	2	6.1
	Graduate Degree (Masters, Doctorate)	2	6.1
	Student	0	0.0
	No response	0	0.0
SNAP Benefits in Home	No	28	84.8
	Yes	4	12.1
	No response	1	3.0
WIC Benefits in Home	No	29	87.9
	Yes	2	6.1
	No response	2	6.1
Employment Status	Full-time	13	39.4
	Retired	11	33.3
	Unemployed, looking for work	4	12.1
	Part-time	3	9.1
	Self-employed	1	3.0
	Unemployed, not looking for work	0	0.0
	Student	0	0.0
No response	1	3.0	

## Focus Group

A focus group was conducted with members of the HTC coalition in May of 2022. The evaluation team developed a moderator guide designed to explore coalition members’ personal role in the coalition, physical activity, nutrition policy, and healthy food changes within the community, community acceptance, and future visioning and support. The focus group was audio recorded and transcribed. Two members of the evaluation team then analyzed the transcripts for patterns in the interview transcript data, or dominant themes, looking for common ideas in the responses. To ensure the trustworthiness of the results, themes and direct quotations were used to develop a codebook as part of an audit trail and analyzed by an evaluation team member who had not conducted the focus group. This report describes the major themes emerging from the focus group data obtained in partnership with HTC coalition members in 2022.

## Results

### Survey Results

During 2022, the Healthier Together staff distributed community surveys throughout Calhoun County. Results from the surveys are presented below.

#### Food Access and Nutrition

Community members were asked to describe how they accessed food in the community and their perceptions of their eating habits over the past year. Table 2 depicts where community members in Calhoun County get food.

Table 2  
*Locations where Respondents’ Get Food in Calhoun County (N = 33)*

<b>Food Access Location</b>	<b>F</b>	<b>%</b>
Grocery Store (inside county)	27	81.8
Grocery Store (outside county)	20	60.6
Dollar stores	16	48.5
Home Garden	7	21.2
Sit down/Full-service Restaurant	7	21.2
Online stores	5	15.2
Community Garden	5	15.2
Farmers Market	3	9.1
Gas Stations/Convenience Stores	2	6.1
Food Bank/Pantry	2	6.1
Senior Meal Site	1	3.0
Church/Community Organization	1	3.0
Other	1	3.0
CSA Program	0	0.0

Respondents were asked to indicate how often they used HTC project food resources over the past year. Table 3 presents the frequencies and percentages of respondents’ use.

Table 3  
*Respondents’ Use of HTC Food Resources in Calhoun County (N = 33)*

<b>Project Food Resource</b>	<b>F</b>	<b>%</b>
Calhoun Extension Office	4	12.1
Commissioner’s Office Community Garden	3	9.1

Mr. Floyd’s Garden	1	3.0
Leary Community Garden	1	3.0
Busy Bee Day Care Garden	1	3.0
Busy Bee Day Care Garden	0	0.0
GGC – West IGA	20	60.6
GGC – Jerry’s Meat Market	7	21.2
GGC – Sweet GA Brown’s	1	3.0
GGC – Calhoun Co. Extension Office	1	3.0
GGC – Red’s BBQ	1	3.0
Edison Refugee Food Pantry	3	9.1
Leary Temple Refugee Food Pantry	1	3.0
Little Free Pantry	0	0.0
Bethel Food Pantry	0	0.0

Respondents were also asked to describe their eating habits over the past year. A total of 20 (60.6%) said they eat healthier food than they did last year, nine (27.3%) said they eat the same kind of food as they did last year, and two respondents (6.1%) said they eat less healthy food than they did last year. Two respondents (6.1%) did not provide a response.

When asked the same question about their family’s eating habits over the past year, 18 (54.5%) said their family ate healthier food than they did last year, 11 (33.3%) said their family eats the same kind of food as they did last year, and six respondents (5.5%) said their family eats less healthy food than they did last year. Three respondents (9.1%) did not provide a response. Table 4 presents the frequencies of self-reported and family eating habits over the last year.

Table 4  
*Respondents’ Self-Reported and Family Eating Habits over the Last Year (N =33)*

Eating Habits	Self-Report		Family	
	F	%	F	%
Eats healthier food than last year	20	60.6	18	54.5
Eats the same	9	27.3	11	33.3
Eats less healthy	2	6.1	1	3.0
No response	2	6.1	3	9.1

**Physical Activity**

There are several physical activity interventions in Calhoun County. Four walking trails were implemented in the county: Arlington Walking Trail, Morgan Walking Trail, Edison Walking Trail, and Leary Walking Trail. There are also signs in Arlington, Morgan, Edison, and Leary that tell residents how long it takes to walk between specified destinations. Respondents were asked which physical activity intervention they used. Responses are presented in Table 5.

Table 5  
*Physical Activity Resource Use in Calhoun County (N = 33)*

Physical Activity Resource	F	%
Morgan Walking Trail	6	18.2
Edison Walking Trail	4	12.1
Leary Walking Trail	3	9.1
Arlington Walking Trail	1	3.0

Signs in Morgan	6	18.2
Signs in Edison	5	15.2
Signs in Leary	2	6.1
Signs in Arlington	1	3.0
Morgan Music Equipment	2	6.1
Edison Music Equipment	0	0.0

Respondents were asked to describe their physical activity habits over the past year. Activities could include walking, riding bicycles, gardening, or going to the gym, among others. A total of 15 respondents (45.5%) said they were more physically active than they were last year, 14 (42.4%) said they did the same amount of physical activity they did last year, and four respondents (12.1%) said they were less physically active than they were last year.

When asked the same question about their family, 12 respondents (36.4%) said their family was more physically active than they were last year, 16 (48.5%) said their family did the same amount of physical activity as they did last year, and two respondents (6.1%) said their family was less physically active than they were last year. Three respondents (9.1%) did not provide a response. Table 6 presents the frequencies of self-reported and family physical activity habits over the last year.

Table 6  
*Respondents’ Self-Reported and Family Physical Activity Habits over the Last Year (N = 33)*

Physical Activity Habits	Self-Report		Family	
	F	%	F	%
More physically active than last year	15	45.5	12	36.4
Same amount of physical activity	14	42.4	16	48.5
Less physical activity	4	12.1	2	6.1
No response	0	0.0	3	9.1

Community members were asked to describe their transportation and physical activity habits over the past year. Table 7 depicts how community members in Calhoun County use transportation.

Table 7  
*Forms of Transportation for Respondents in Calhoun County (N = 33)*

Form of Transportation	F	%
Drive Self	32	96.9
Walk	8	24.2
Driven by Someone Else	3	9.1
Bicycle	1	3.0
Taxi/Uber/Lyft	0	0.0
Other	0	0.0

### HT Participation

Community members were asked whether they had heard of the Healthier Together program. 23 respondents (69.7%) said they had heard of HT before. Eight respondents (24.2%) said they had not heard of HT before. Two respondents (6.1%) were unsure. Table 8 presents how those who responded yes had heard of Healthier Together. Other responses were the library, community club, and flyers.

Table 8  
*Awareness of Healthier Together Calhoun (N = 33)*



<b>Methods</b>	<b>F</b>	<b>%</b>
Word of mouth	10	30.3
Flyer in my community	9	27.3
Social Media	7	21.2
Healthier Together Website	6	18.2
Newspaper	3	9.1
Other	3	9.1
Food Bank/Pantry	2	6.1
Community Center Garden	2	6.1
This survey	1	3.0
Richland Community Garden	0	0.0
Lumpkin Teaching Garden	0	0.0

Community members were also asked whether they consider themselves a member of the Healthier Together Calhoun Coalition. 15 respondents (45.5%) said they do consider themselves a part of the coalition. Eight respondents (24.2%) said they do not consider themselves part of the coalition. Nine respondents (27.3%) were unsure, and one person did not respond (3.0%).

### HT Interventions

Community members were asked if any of the HTC project food resources helped them eat healthier over the past year. Responses are presented in Table 9.

Table 9  
*Respondents' Healthier Eating Habits from HT Interventions (N = 33)*

<b>Food Resource</b>	<b>F</b>	<b>%</b>
Calhoun Extension Office	4	12.1
Commissioner's Office Community Garden	3	9.1
Mr. Floyd's Garden	1	3.0
Leary Community Garden	1	3.0
Busy Bee Daycare Garden	1	3.0
Head Start Community Garden	0	0.0
GGC - West IGA	19	57.6
GGC - Jerry's Meat Market	6	21.2
GGC - Calhoun Co. Extension Office	2	6.1
GGC - Sweet GA Brown's	1	3.0
GGC - Red's BBQ	0	3.0
Edison Refugee Food Pantry	3	9.1
Bethel Food Pantry	2	6.1
Leary Temple Refugee Food Pantry	1	3.0
Little Free Pantry	0	0.0

Community members were also asked if any of the HTC physical activity interventions helped them increase their physical activity over the past year. Responses are presented in Table 10.

Table 10  
*Respondents' Increase in Physical Activity from HT Interventions (N = 33)*

<b>Physical Activity Resource</b>	<b>F</b>	<b>%</b>
Morgan Walking Trail	6	18.2
Edison Walking Trail	4	12.1

Leary Walking Trail	2	6.1
Arlington Walking Trail	1	3.0
Signs in Morgan	6	18.2
Signs in Edison	3	9.1
Signs in Leary	1	3.0
Signs in Arlington	1	3.0
Morgan Music Equipment	1	3.0
Edison Music Equipment	0	0.0

## Focus Group Results

A summary of the major themes that emerged from the focus group data is presented below.

### Food Access

HTC has increased food access in the community through the implementation and maintenance of community gardens. HTC has partnered with several food banks/pantries as well as Faithful Families to increase the distribution of healthier food options to the community.

### Community Gardens

There are currently six community gardens established in Calhoun County: **Mr. Floyd’s Garden**, the **Leary Community Garden**, the **Calhoun County Extension Garden** in Morgan, the **Commissioners’ Office Community Garden** in Morgan, the **Head Start Garden**, and the **Busy Bee Daycare Garden**. The community gardens were well-received by community members. Participating coalition members explained the high use of the gardens and how they have increased access to fresh produce in the community. One coalition member described the gardens as a major asset to the community: “What the churches give away basically, and the food banks and then the community gardens, is really [the community’s] only access to fresh vegetables.”

Four food pantry partnerships were maintained in Year 4, with the **Edison Refugee Food Pantry**, the **Leary Temple Refugee Pantry**, the **Little Free Pantry**, and the **Bethel Food Pantry**.

### Grab-n-Go Coolers

Another food access initiative by HTC was the establishment of a Grab-n-Go Cooler (GGC) in every city in Calhoun County. The coolers contained ready-to-eat healthy meals. There are five GGCs in Calhoun County, located at **Jerry’s Meat Market**, **Sweet Georgia Brown’s**, **West IGA**, **Calhoun Extension Office**, and **Red’s BBQ**.

### Physical Activity

To encourage community members to engage in physical activity, the HTC coalition on provided many exercise resources across the county. These projects included **walking signage** and **walking trails** in the community. Participating coalition members described increased physical activity in the community due to HTC resources: “You can go there any time of day, in the evening late, you see somebody walking around. Early in the morning, you see cars going over there. Especially in the summertime.” Another coalition member said, “We have people who walk every day and they use the signs and the walking trail.” HTC also provided **playground equipment** and **workout stations** at local parks. The College of Environment and Design at UGA also provided plants for path connections and community activity revitalization.

## Overall Impact

Coalition members were asked questions to determine the overall impact of the HTC project within their community. Coalition members described various positive impacts of HTC on the community in Calhoun County. Overall impacts of HTC included:

- Expanded and new collaborations across the community

- Increased sense of unified community across all cities in the county
- Increased engagement and interest among both younger and older community members in HTC
- Increased access to and availability of fresh and local food
- Increased physical activity in the community
- Expanded cultural changes around healthier lifestyles

## Future Impact and Visioning

Coalition members were asked what their ideal vision was for what the coalition has accomplished in three years, and what needed to be done to achieve that vision. Participating coalition members wanted **increased personnel for HTC**. This included more community engagement and volunteer participation with HTC. One of the ways they envisioned project sustainability was through **bringing in new people to continue the work**. Another coalition member expressed a **desire for better community health**. They stated, “[I hope that we are] eating healthier, exercising more, just longevity.” Finally, coalition members wanted to see **more behavior changes** such as installing home gardens, raised beds, and increased physical activity. Overall, participating coalition members overwhelmingly expressed positive community impacts from HTC. Most visioning revolved around building upon the positive momentum already occurring. In the following section are a few recommendations on how to achieve these visions and continue this momentum.

## Recommendations

Based on survey and focus group results, along with specific suggestions from HTC coalition members regarding next steps for the project, the evaluation team has provided several recommendations for the HTC project.

1. Expand community outreach to include personal ways to increase healthy living behaviors, such as starting a raised bed.
2. Expand beyond the current communication efforts to bring new community leaders and younger community members to the coalition, aligning with the vision for sustaining the project.
  - a. Expand beyond the county newspaper for advertising and promotion of HTC.
  - b. Create advertising for proper harvesting techniques at the community gardens, as well as what is available.
  - c. Place advertisements in church bulletins.
  - d. Consider doing giveaways through Facebook to increase followership and engagement by community members on social media.
  - e. Create communication strategies to enhance word-of-mouth/interpersonal communication within the community.
3. Gather community feedback from CED plans and connect with community and regional partners.
4. Increase connections between community gardens and local food distribution centers.
  - a. Increase availability of community garden produce in GGCs.
  - b. Build on momentum with food pantry partnerships.
5. Increase youth involvement through a “Youth Ambassador” who works with HTC, 4-H, the school, and local community centers to engage younger community members.

6. Recruitment efforts should focus on building partnerships and relationships with other leaders from non-involved communities within the county. Emphasizing recruitment could encourage involvement from groups within the community that have not yet engaged in HTC and contribute to the sustainability of the project.
  - a. Representation on the HTC is key to non-involved community members' buy-in. To increase non-involved membership, especially with younger community members, it is important to determine who the influential leaders are within these groups and reach out to them directly. Build on current youth involvement in HTC to increase engagement.
  - b. Consider conducting a visioning session where the HTC can explore a few questions:
    - i. Who are the leaders with influence within this community?
    - ii. Not all influential people within the community are traditional or typical leaders. Who are the leaders we aren't thinking of and how do we find them?
7. Though HTC has many positive impacts, coalition members did say a lack of infrastructure was a serious barrier for the development of their community. Finding partnerships and funding that can target infrastructural developments may complement the positive work being done by HTC.

Overall, HTC has had a positive impact on the community but there is room to grow and emphasize the amazing changes occurring as a result of the hard work. Recommendations included capitalizing on the current progress made by the coalition to expand the reach and activities being done in the communities. Building on the momentum established in Y4 is the key to the long-term sustainability and success of HTC beyond the end of the project timeline.