

# SOLUTIONS TO IMPROVE ACCESS TO NUTRITIOUS FOODS IN THE STORES OF EYYOU ISTCHEE

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## CONTEXT AND OBJECTIVES

In recent decades the Crees of Eeyou Istchee (James Bay Cree Territory) have experienced a nutritional transition characterized by a decrease in the frequency and amount of traditional food consumed in favor of commercial foods. The Cree population of James Bay is currently experiencing rates of chronic diseases and obesity significantly higher than the general Quebec population. Moreover, a great proportion of families live with food insecurity. Availability of nutritious foods is limited in the region and their high costs represent a large proportion of the family income. Therefore, it is essential to identify solutions to improve access to nutritious foods.

Since grocery store managers of remote communities have a significant impact on the food supply and the potential to influence the quality of the diet in their community, a collaborative and participative project was undertaken with the grocery store managers of Eeyou Istchee to explore their perceptions of nutritious food access and identify appropriate solutions.

## METHOD

Twelve qualitative semi-directed interviews were conducted with the store managers of Eeyou Istchee, transcribed, and then analyzed by themes using the NVivo software.

## RESULTS: PERCEPTIONS OF THE ISSUE

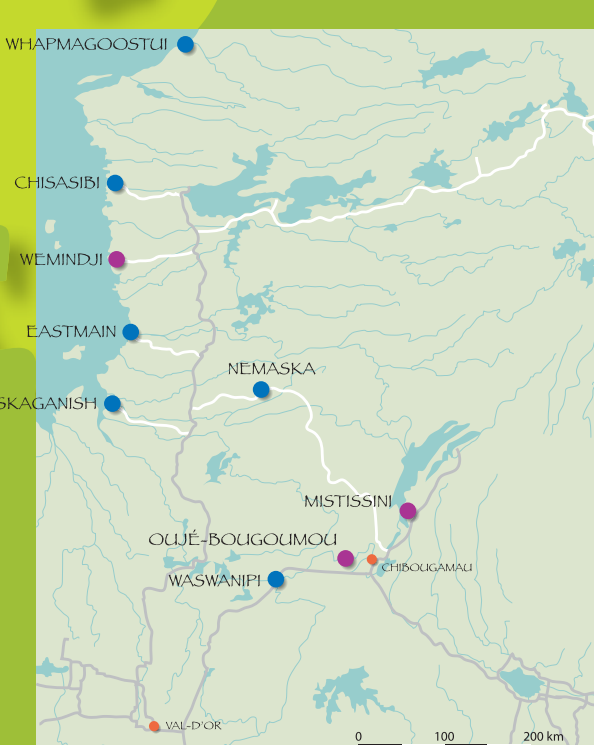
The grocery store managers are aware that access to nutritious foods is an issue and that it affects the health of the population (obesity, diabetes and dental problems). They are open to help improve access to nutritious foods, as long as they can continue to make profits.

According to them, the **limited availability** of nutritious foods is mainly linked to:

- consumers' **demand**
- **store size** and actual **settings**
- certain **management** practices

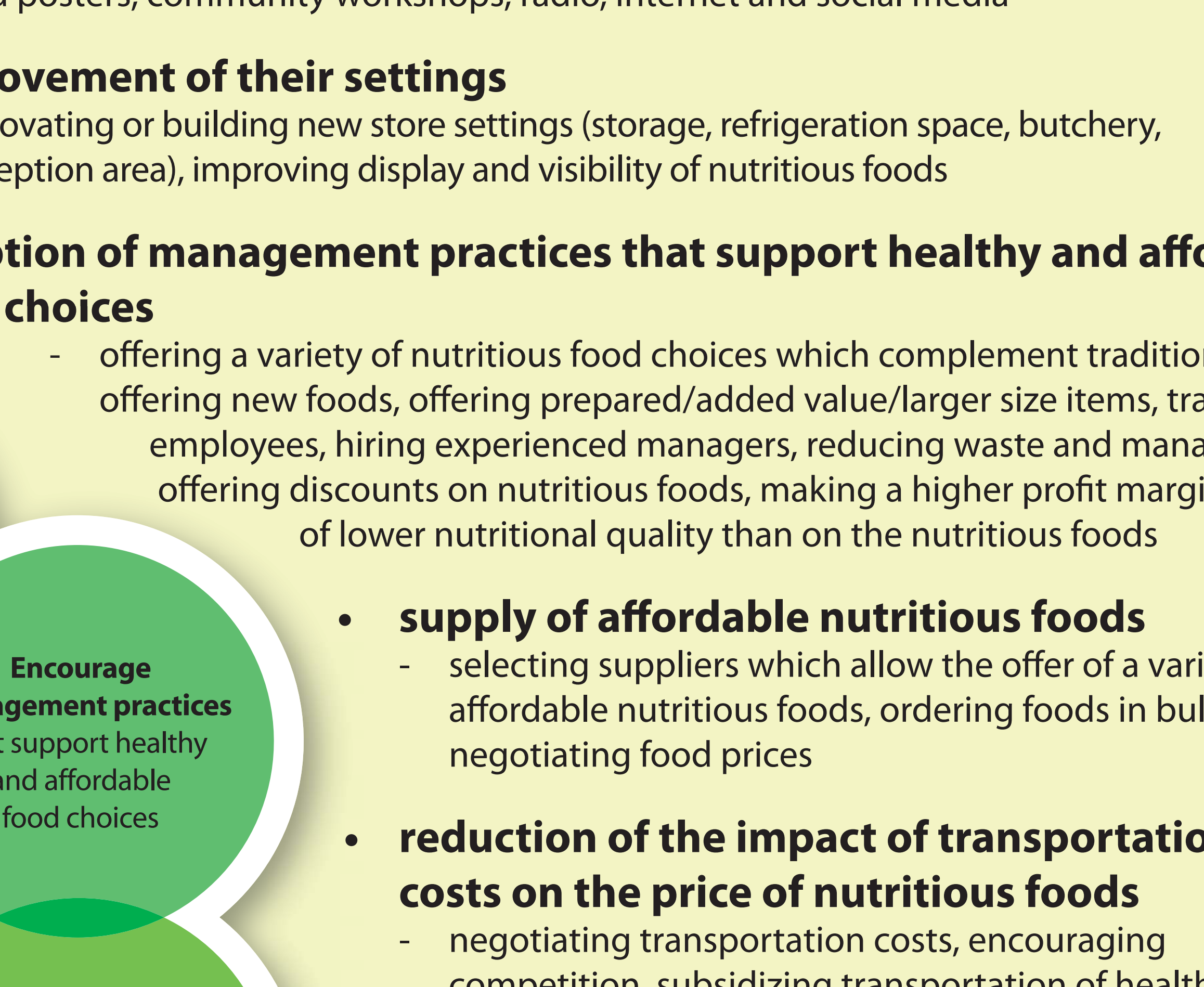
The **higher cost** of foods would be related to:

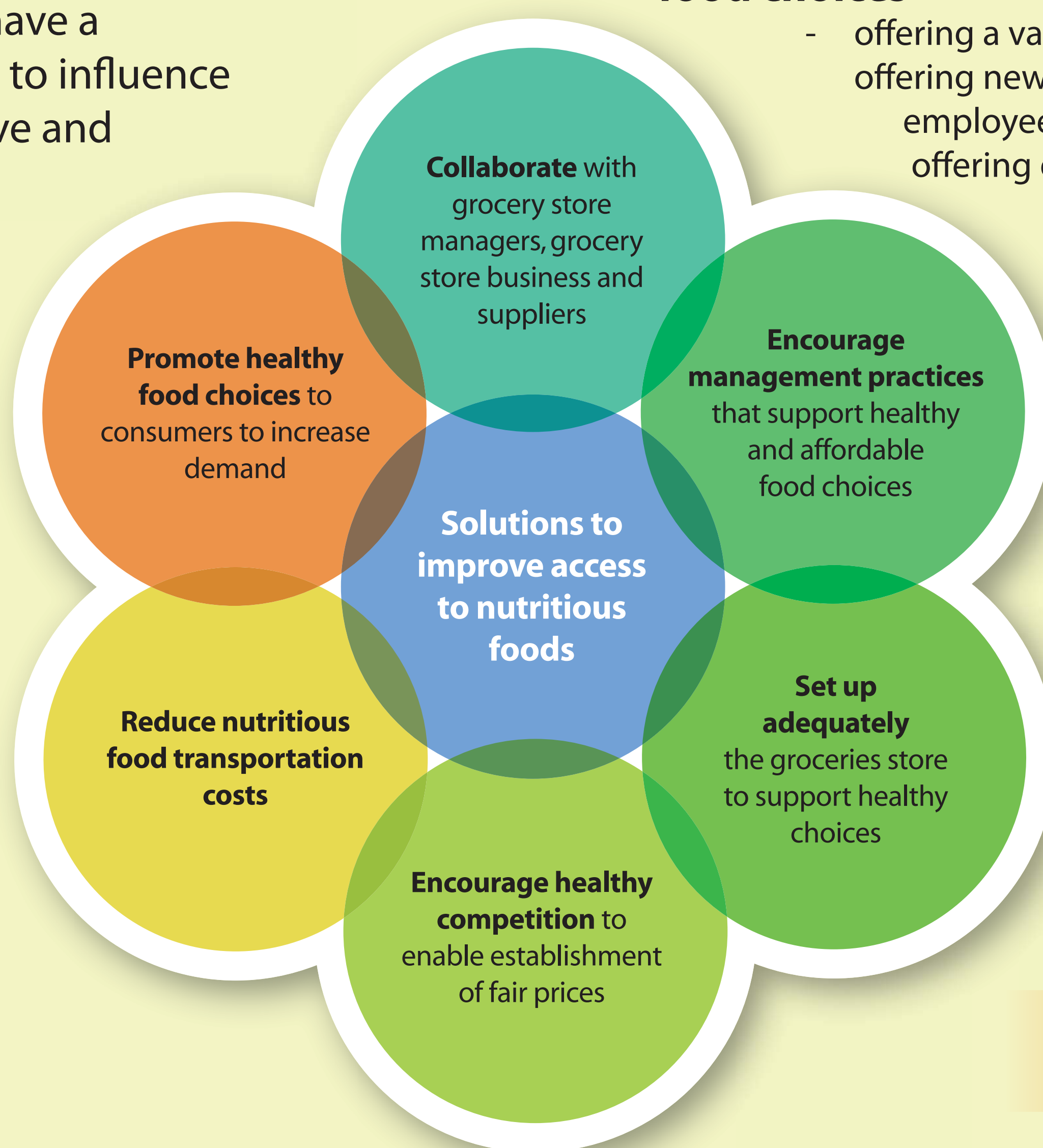
- **transportation** costs
- **limited competition** (grocery stores, suppliers, transportation companies)
- certain **management** practices
- food **supply**



## RESULTS: PROPOSED SOLUTIONS

The solutions proposed by the store managers include:

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- **increase demand by promoting healthy food choices to their customers**
    - tastings, cooking demonstrations, grocery tours, information booths, recipes, labels and posters, community workshops, radio, internet and social media
  - **improvement of their settings**
    - renovating or building new store settings (storage, refrigeration space, butchery, reception area), improving display and visibility of nutritious foods
  - **adoption of management practices that support healthy and affordable food choices**
    - offering a variety of nutritious food choices which complement traditional foods, offering new foods, offering prepared/added value/larger size items, training employees, hiring experienced managers, reducing waste and managing costs, offering discounts on nutritious foods, making a higher profit margin on items of lower nutritional quality than on the nutritious foods
- Encourage management practices that support healthy and affordable food choices**
- Set up adequately the groceries store to support healthy food choices**
- **supply of affordable nutritious foods**
    - selecting suppliers which allow the offer of a variety of affordable nutritious foods, ordering foods in bulk, negotiating food prices
  - **reduction of the impact of transportation costs on the price of nutritious foods**
    - negotiating transportation costs, encouraging competition, subsidizing transportation of healthy foods, redistributing transportation costs on foods of lower nutritional quality rather than on essential nutritious foods



## CONCLUSION

Overall, the store managers of Eeyou Istchee are aware of the changes required to improve access to nutritious foods. They are valuable partners who can help achieve the goals of health promotion and chronic disease prevention. Therefore, it seems essential to **collaborate** with them to promote healthy food choices to their customers, improve their store settings, reduce impact of transportation costs and adopt management and supply practices that support healthy and affordable food choices.

These interviews allowed for a better understanding of the issue of access to nutritious foods and highlighted solutions adapted to the region. The presence of grocery store managers that have the well-being of the community at heart can be an important asset for the communities they serve. Hopefully this new collaboration will help ensure availability of affordable nutritious foods for all families of the region.

## Acknowledgements

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## References