

Partnering to increase access to healthy, local food - CalFresh at Farmers' Markets

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Reporting Periods	SNAP-Ed 2020 (October 1, 2019 - September 30, 2020)
Site	Paso Robles Farmers Market
Associated Program Activity	<i>Not Specified</i>
Keywords	PSE
Related Framework Indicators	<p>Healthy Eating Behaviors (MT1)</p> <p>Food Resource Management Behaviors (MT2)</p> <p>Readiness and Need (ST5)</p> <p>Organizational Partnerships (ST7)</p> <p>Nutrition Supports (MT5)</p>
Socio-Ecological Framework	<p>Individual/Family</p> <p>Environmental Setting</p> <p>Sectors of Influence</p> <p>Social and Cultural Norms and Values</p>
Approaches	Comprehensive multi-level interventions (a combination of direct education, PSE's, and social marketing)
Favorite Quote	<p>“When I go to the store to buy produce, I tend to purchase cookies, sodas, etc. and I spend more money. When I go to the farmer's market, I leave with my basket full of fruits and vegetables and I spend 20 to 30 dollars at the most, everything is healthy.”</p> <p>– Focus group participant</p>

Background

Staff from the CalFresh Healthy Living, UC program in San Luis Obispo county chair the EBT at Farmers' Markets work group for the SLO County Food System Coalition. The work group includes partner from the Public Health Department, Department of Social Services, local food bank, and farmers and market managers. The mission of the group is to increase the use of CalFresh Food benefits at Farmers' Markets in SLO County in order to increase 1) equitable access to healthy foods and 2) support for local farms.

In FFY 2019, the work group hosted focus groups with likely eligible community members in Spanish and met with market and market managers to conduct key informant interviews. From these data, the work group developed action plans for increasing the utilization of EBT/CalFresh at local markets.

Story Narrative**The issue**

Lack of access to fruits and vegetables has been cited as a contributing factor to the obesity epidemic, particularly in low-income communities. Farmers' markets have the potential for increasing equitable access to local fruits and vegetables. Further, markets that accept CalFresh benefits and offer incentives, such as Market Match, can increase the purchasing power and food security for low-income community members while supporting local farmers and reducing food miles traveled.

In San Luis Obispo (SLO) County, there are 13 year-round weekly farmers markets. Of those, eight accept CalFresh Food benefits and six offer additional incentives, like Market Match. However, these programs are under-utilized, and many consumers are unaware that they are available.

The work



In January 2019, the Electronic Benefit Transfer (EBT) working group for SLO County Farmers' Markets, led by UC Cooperative Extension, began collecting assessment data in order to prioritize efforts for increasing utilization. Work group members conducted focus groups with likely eligible CalFresh Food users, and conducted key informant interviews with farmers' market associations and market managers. From this information, the work group identified short-term and long-term goals for reducing barriers to participation and increasing sustainability of the program locally.

To improve participation, the work group identified two barriers to address: 1) lack of awareness among clients and client-serving organizations, and 2) promotional materials that did not communicate clearly to clients. Communication and marketing materials were modified or developed, and printed using funds leveraged from multiple community sources. A robust outreach campaign involving more than 40 client serving organizations was launched. The campaign included bus wraps; radio, television and print ads; and signage and information

in English and Spanish at the markets. Much of the communication and outreach work culminated in the promotion of National Farmers' Market week in August 2019.

The impact

Comparing the months of January through September, participating farmers' markets saw a 30% increase in new EBT/CalFresh customers from 2018 to 2019. This is particularly impressive considering the increase in customers from 2017 to 2018 was only 4%. Overall dollar amount redemption of CalFresh benefits and Market Match also increased by 17% and 14% respectively. Utilizing EBT/CalFresh and incentives like Market Match, enables low-income families to have more money to spend on healthy fruits and vegetables. In this way, UCCE improves health for all, contributing to the public value of promoting healthy people and communities.

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