

Kentucky Farmers' Markets Improve Access to Fresh Produce in Poor Neighborhoods

by: Elaine Russell, MS, RD

SUMMARY

Kentucky residents in low-income communities now have increased access to fresh fruits and vegetables at farmers' markets. The Kentucky Department of Public Health (KDPH) partnered with a coalition of community organizations across the state to improve healthier food access in communities. Through a collaborative effort with the Community Farm Alliance (CFA), more farmers' markets are now accepting federal nutrition benefits and offering incentive programs, allowing residents to access and buy produce at farmers' markets close to home.



CHALLENGE

In Kentucky, 27% of children aged 2 to 4 years who participate in WIC are overweight or obese, and 67% of adults are overweight or obese. Also, 46% of Kentucky adults reported eating fruit and 25% reported eating vegetables less than once a day in 2013. Often, residents in low-income or rural communities do not have access to full-service grocery stores that carry fresh produce. Convenience stores and fast food restaurants are more common and sell mostly cheap,

high-fat, and high-sugar processed foods. Furthermore, 25% of Kentucky's population participates in federally funded Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), Women, Infants and Children (WIC), and Senior Farmers' Market Nutrition Programs (SFMNP). Yet, only a small number of farmers' markets accept these nutrition assistance benefits.

YOUR INVOLVEMENT IS KEY

Learn more about farmers' market programs. <http://cfaky.org/>. This project is supported by the State Public Health Actions to Prevent and Control Diabetes, Heart Disease, Obesity, and Associated Risk Factors and Promote School Health cooperative agreement (DP13-1305).

"Farmers' markets are an important public face for agriculture and a critical part of our nation's food system. They provide benefits not only to the farmers, but they also help fill a growing consumer demand for fresh, healthy foods."

- Tom Vilsack

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SOLUTION

KDPH joined forces with CFA to promote their Farmers' Market Support Program (FMSP). The program equips Kentucky farmers' markets with the tools, resources, and community networks to increase profits and improve access to fresh foods. The Kentucky Department of Agriculture provides farmers' markets resources to obtain electronic benefit transfer equipment. FMSP also helps farmers' markets build infrastructure by developing business plans and offering a cost-share programs to hire market managers. Each market participates in Double Dollars—an incentive program that doubles the value of SNAP, WIC, or SFMNP benefits when used to purchase fresh produce.

RESULTS

In 2014, six Kentucky markets joined the FMSP pilot project. The markets represented 97 farmers from 22 counties. These included farmers from six of eight rural and underserved communities. Those six markets grew their total sales 125% from \$180,255 in 2013 to \$223,762 in 2014. Of that total, 16% of sales were attributed to SNAP, WIC, and SFMNP benefits. In 2015, 11 more markets joined FMSP and in 2016, 31 additional markets are expected to benefit from CFA's farmers' market program by year end. In customer surveys, 64% of customers reported that Double Dollar incentives were extremely or very important to shopping at the farmers' market; 68% said that they eat more fruits and vegetables; and 71% felt more educated about nutrition and healthy eating.

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<http://www.cdc.gov/cdc-info/requestform.html>

Web site

<http://nccd.cdc.gov/nccdsuccessstories/>

The findings and conclusions in this success story are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily represent the official position of the funding agencies or the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).

SUSTAINING SUCCESS

KDPH will continue to build statewide partnerships to improve community access to healthy foods. The health department has begun using social media and will soon produce a blog to help attract new partners. Kentucky farmers' markets are testing other incentive programs with local partners such as a fruit and vegetable (F&V) prescription program with a local medical facility. F&V prescription programs allow health care providers to give families prescriptions that can be spent on fruits and vegetables at grocery stores, farmers' markets, and other healthy food retailers. The program aims to increase consumption of fruit and vegetables in residents at risk for chronic diseases.

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