



Healthy Eating at Farmers Markets: Findings from Reflection and Listening Sessions

Social Determinants of Health

Access to Healthy Food. People who live in communities that offer a variety of healthy food environments like farmers markets, community gardens, healthy corner stores, and supermarkets are more likely to consume diets rich in fruits and vegetables and experience better health outcomes. Unfortunately, not all communities have healthy food environments, making healthy choices less available. Research shows that communities of color and people of low socio-economic status have less access to fruits and vegetables are less likely to meet the recommended daily intake of fruits and vegetablesⁱ. For example, one study found that respondents with incomes less than \$25,000 a year, without a high school diploma, and those identifying themselves as Hispanic or Black/non-Hispanic had the lowest levels of fruits and vegetable consumptionⁱⁱ. These and other social determinants of health play a crucial role in affecting access to healthy foods among low-income families and communities of color.

Social Connectivity. Social connectivity has a major impact on health, particularly on those who may experience social exclusion due to discrimination, un- and under-employment, and stigmatization. Communities that are often socially isolated are less likely to possess organizational networks or gain access to services and citizenship activitiesⁱⁱⁱ. Communities that have opportunities for engagement (i.e. public spaces for socializing events) tend to have a greater level of mutual trust and social efficacy, helping to protect people and their health. For example, a 2008 Project for Public Spaces study showed that average social interactions in a grocery store were 1 to 2 per visit, whereas a farmers market provided approximately 15-20 social interactions per visit^{iv}. Farmers markets can play a pivotal role in becoming social, vibrant public places that enhance the cultural values of a community.

Introduction

Farmers markets are one of many viable ways to improve access to healthy food and social connectivity. Many farmers markets in the Portland metro area uphold a dual mission to provide direct marketing opportunities for emerging producers and vendors while offering fresh, healthy food to all communities. These goals, at times, can be challenging to achieve, particularly when reaching low income or culturally diverse individuals. Research has documented that some communities view farmers markets as too expensive,



offer limited culturally preferred foods, and at times, lack clear and consistent price information^v.

Despite these barriers, many communities are eager to learn about healthy food environments in their neighborhoods and participate in the local food economy. In 2010, with funding from the Kaiser Permanente Community Fund at the Northwest Health Foundation, Oregon Public Health Institute (OPHI) and Portland metro farmers markets came together to discuss common barriers and potential solutions to reaching low-income families, seniors, and immigrants. This initiative, *Healthy Eating at Farmers Markets*, provided shared learning opportunities for farmers market leaders, public health practitioners, community-based organizations serving culturally diverse residents, and representatives from government agencies.

Healthy Eating at Farmers Market Partners	
Elders in Action	Moreland Farmers Market
Forest Grove Farmers Market	Multnomah County Aging and Disability Services
Hillsboro Farmers Market	Oregon Health & Sciences University Farmers Market
Hollywood Farmers Market	Portland Farmers Market
Immigrant and Refugee Community Organization	Ride Connection
Lents International Farmers Market	

Farmers markets are becoming regionally recognized as one of many promising ways to improve access to healthy food, bolster direct marketing opportunities for regional producers, and reach broader social goals. The Multnomah County Food Action Plan^{vi} lays out a framework to strengthen the local and regional food system by offering a comprehensive set of goals and actions for food system stakeholders. As listed below, the *Healthy Eating at Farmers Markets* Initiative meets many of the goals and actions identified in the Multnomah County Food Action Plan.



Multnomah Food Action Plan

- Goal 5: Create environments that support health and quality of life
- Goal 6: Increase equitable access to healthy, affordable, safe, and culturally appropriate food in underserved areas.
- Goal 7: Promote individual and community health by encouraging healthy food choices
- Goal 8: Increase awareness of food and nutrition assistance programs
- Goal 9: Address the causes of hunger, food insecurity, and injustice
- Goal 11: Facilitate equitable community participation and decision-making

To enhance partners' understanding of the factors that motivate communities to visit farmers markets, the *Healthy Eating at Farmers Markets* Partnership organized a series of farmers market tours and reflection and listening sessions during the 2010 season. This report summarizes findings from the sessions and sets forth recommendations that farmers markets, public health leaders, community-based organizations, and other stakeholders may utilize to improve access to farmers markets for all communities.

Farmers Market Tour Design

Four tours were conducted at different markets during September 2010. Participants were recruited by bilingual organizers and each received a free \$5 token to spend at the market that day. Some tour participants arrived to the farmers market via public transit, while others utilized Ride Connection's Riders Club program. Ride Ambassadors from the Riders Club program provide a guided introduction to using public transit to help people gain independence in public transportation. Each of the four tours offered a three-hour tour and activities included:

- an introduction to each farmers market by the market manager;
- an orientation to using food assistance programs at the market such as Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits at an Electronic Benefit Transfer (EBT) station, Women, Infant and Children (WIC) and Senior Farm Direct Nutrition Program (FDNP) coupons;
- a group tour and shopping experience; and
- and a reflection and listening session at the conclusion of the tour.

To guide the sessions, participants were given worksheets (see Appendix A) in their native language prior to attending the farmers market tour. Organizers and facilitators from the Immigrant and Refugee Community Organization (IRCO) led the tours and provided



translation and interpretation services. The purpose of the *Healthy Eating at Farmers Markets* tours was to offer Portlanders who are unaccustomed to shopping at a farmers market an opportunity to:

- Visit a farmers market near their neighborhood;
- Learn what seasonal fresh fruits and vegetables are available;
- Utilize SNAP (food stamp) benefits, WIC and Senior FDNP coupons, and/or farmers market nutrition incentive programs; and
- Participate in a reflection and listening session at the end of the tour.

Impact

More than 50 Portland residents from intergenerational families and immigrant communities participated in the *Healthy Eating at Farmers Markets* tours. Nepalese, Somali, Russian, and Burmese families attended the tours, many of whom had limited knowledge of farmers markets in this country. All tour participants spoke English as a second language and some relied on family members for interpretation. Many were SNAP participants and a few were enrolled in the WIC and Senior FDNP.

Many participants were not previously aware that farmers markets accepted SNAP benefits and were excited by the opportunity to utilize this resource. In addition, many residents appreciated the nutrition incentive programs offered at each market (typically a dollar-to-dollar match on SNAP dollars spent at the market up to a specified amount). Overall, participants were impressed with the freshness and quality of products available and found markets to be socially inviting for their friends and families.

Findings from the listening sessions were organized into six themes:

- Food Variety & Quality
- Understanding Food Assistance Benefits
- Price Considerations
- Cultural Factors
- Market Image & Access
- Small-scale Business Opportunities



Food Variety & Quality

Participants were generally impressed to find a number of fresh, familiar, and quality products in the markets. They noted that “fresh, organic, and natural” produce are very important qualities that they sought in their purchases. Many commented that the selections were comparable to foods found at public markets in their native countries such as:

shell beans, squash leaves, peas, shitake mushrooms, bok choy, collard and mustard greens, tomatoes, spinach, green tea, cantaloupe, eggs, plant starts, and meat.

Participants also purchased plant starts for their hand-scale garden space at home. Many participants were surprised to find high quality selections and had wished they had brought more money to spend.



Participants said they would come to the market specifically for the variety of vegetables offered.

Understanding Food Assistance Benefits

Many tour participants brought their Oregon Trail/SNAP cards and other food assistance coupons on the day of the tours. Despite the effort to provide an orientation to using SNAP, WIC and Senior FDNP coupons before the tours, participants expressed confusion in understanding how to optimally use their food assistance benefits. Guidelines for token use and whether or not change would be given for EBT tokens was confusing for many participants. Likewise, many participants were unsure whether they could use their nutrition incentive tokens at other markets and whether they expired.

Price Considerations

Perceptions of price were mixed among tour participants. Produce was noted as being expensive; however, when participants were asked whether higher price was a barrier, many commented that they were willing to pay a higher price for fresh, quality produce because they could not find satisfactory produce in grocery stores. Some responded that prices were less expensive relative to retail stores near their homes. Many participants compared the quality and price of produce between vendors before they made their final purchases and some successfully bartered with vendors. Some tour participants also noted that price signage was confusing and difficult to understand.



Participants noted higher prices, but were willing to pay a little more for fresh, quality produce.

Cultural Factors

This was the first visit to a farmers market in the United States for many tour participants. Market organizers and interpreters had difficulty in translating the definition of a farmers market. It was unclear what the root of the confusion was in describing the function and purpose of a farmers market. Many tour participants were accustomed to shopping at public markets in their native countries for large food staples, such as meat and grains, but most had grown their own produce. In some of the tour groups, women reported doing the majority of the food shopping for their families. Some



Many of the women participants do the food shopping for the household.



tour participants reported going to farms in the Portland region and Willamette Valley to buy produce in large volumes at a lower price, while some visit food retailers on a daily basis. Language was a barrier for many tour participants who often spoke rudimentary or no English. Children, however, were able to provide interpretation during transactions with vendors.

Market Image & Access

Many participants felt that the market provided a social and welcoming atmosphere and were pleasantly surprised by the cleanliness of the markets. They also expressed interest in returning to the market with their families. Some found it difficult to locate vendors of their choice and thought it inconvenient to navigate the entire market for desired products. Many participants recommended that the markets be organized by category of vendor to help direct customers.

Transportation was one of the most important factors influencing participants' ability or choice to shop at a market over price, location, and preferred foods. One tour group learned a new public transit route and responded that they would like to return now that they know a direct route to the market. This is a direct impact of Ride Connection's Riders Club program. However, many tour participants were not satisfied with the public transit options available to them. Many participants responded that they would return to the market as a special event or family outing because returning to the market on a regular basis would be a challenge, as they do not have vehicles and must make several bus/max transfers to reach the market most proximate to their homes. However, some tour participants returned to the Hollywood Farmers Market many times after the tour and as observed by the market manager, seemed quite comfortable shopping and visiting the market.



Small-scale Business Opportunities

Most tour participants are accustomed to growing their own food and have relied on this method for generations in their native countries. Unfortunately, many of the tour participants now live in rental housing in east Portland and do not have access to space for produce gardens. Those participants who do have access to garden space typically share the majority of the food they grow with other families in accordance with their native traditions. This is a valuable activity because it gives families an opportunity to socialize and prepare traditional meals together.



Tour participants would like to be able to sell the produce they grow at markets and would welcome business development resources and trainings.



Summary and Recommendations

The findings from the reflection and listening sessions offer important insights into food purchasing attitudes and behaviors of immigrant communities who attended the market tours. While many of the challenges uncovered during the listening sessions need to be explored more thoroughly, *Healthy Eating at Farmers Markets* partners determined that many short-term solutions could help remove barriers that currently hinder participants from shopping at farmers markets more regularly. Many of these solutions are based on suggestions from tour participants. With the help of a prioritization tool (Appendix B) markets developed many solutions to improve access among low-income families, seniors, and immigrants. A partnership of farmers market leaders, public health practitioners, and government agencies would be well suited to consider the feasibility of the following implementation strategies:

High Priority

- Recruit organizations representing communities of color and underserved segments of the population for farmers market board membership
- Require SNAP/Oregon Trail signage at each SNAP/EBT station
- Adopt market policies that require all eligible vendors be authorized to accept WIC and Senior FNDP Coupons
- Provide incentives to vendors who offer WIC and/or Senior FDNP Coupon produce packages as demonstration projects
- Collaborate with partners to streamline terminology and education materials for SNAP, WIC and Senior FDNP, and the new WIC Cash Value Voucher Programs

Medium Priority

- Partner with organizations representing immigrant communities to integrate farmers market orientation activities
- Create a public-private organization to coordinate a regional token system
- Organize a Community Advisory Council to bring issues to markets' Board of Directors

Low Priority

- Organize vendors into sections according to products on market day



Copies of this document can be downloaded from OPHI's website at www.orphi.org. Hard copies will be mailed out on request by contacting Amy Gilroy at amy@orphi.org or (503)-227-5502.

ⁱ The Grocery Gap. Who Has Access to Healthy Food and Why it Matters. PolicyLink, 2010.

ⁱⁱ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report, Mar 16, 2007/56(10); 213-217, available at <http://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/preview/mmwrhtml/mm5610a2.htm>

ⁱⁱⁱ Social Determinants of Health: The Solid Facts. 2nd ed. World Health Organization; 2003.

^{iv} Diversifying Farmers Markets. Project for Public Spaces; 2008.

^v Grace C, Grace T, Becker N, Lyden J. Barriers to Using Urban Farmers' Markets: An Investigation of Food Stamp Client's Perceptions. Journal of Hunger and Environmental Nutrition. 2007. Vol 2(1):55-75.

^{vi} Multnomah Food Action Plan. Grow and Thrive 2025 Community Action Plan. Portland, Oregon. December 2010. Available at http://www.multnomahfood.org/action_plan



Appendix A



Welcome to the market!

This tour worksheet is meant to guide you through the experience of shopping at a farmers market and help you participate in a reflection & listening session. The feedback you offer will provide tips to market partners on how markets can be more accessible to all communities in Portland.

This tour is sponsored by the Healthy Eating at Farmers Market partnership.

Experience at the market

Why did you come on this tour?

What did you enjoy most about the market tour?

What didn't you like about the market tour?

Were there foods you found here that you typically cook with at home, if so what were they? What additional foods would you like to see?

What's your experience with public markets in your native country?

What would it take for you to come back to this market?

Market Access

Was the entrance you used clearly marked and accessible?

Is there an information table or booth at the market that you can easily find?

Are the aisle widths adequate to accommodate your personal needs?

Do you know about the Women, Infant, and Children (WIC) and Senior Farm Direct Nutrition Program (SFDNP)?

If yes, is it clear to you how to use the coupons?

Is it clear to you that markets accept Oregon Trail cards/food stamps (now called SNAP)?

Comfort and Image

Does the market appear clean and well-cared for to you?

Are there a variety of places for you to sit down?

Does the market offer a variety of produce and products that are easy to find and that you would like to buy?

Are prices for produce clearly marked?

Sociability

Is there a mix of age and gender, and ethnic groups present?

Are vendors friendly and approachable?

Is market staff easy to find?

.....
Space for interpreter to write notes:



Appendix B

Prioritizing HEFM Initiative Strategies Worksheet

Name of Market: _____

For each strategy (recommendation) consider the following screens and rate the degree (high, medium, or low) to which the strategy satisfies each principle in the screening category. Please use the instruction form to guide you through the worksheet.

Strategy: _____

Food Equity	Community Impact	Feasibility
Ranking Low Med High	Ranking Low Med High	Ranking Low Med High
Closes the gap in access <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>	Likelihood to have desired effect <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>	Priority of strategy relative to competing issues/priorities <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
Gives priority to disadvantaged communities <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>	Most efficient strategy to achieve outcome <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>	Leadership and capacity (resources, expertise) exists to achieve strategy <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
	Level of management and oversight needed for strategy to succeed <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>	Key players are engaged <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
		Political will exists and timing is right <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
		FM organizations have necessary relationships and can influence implementers <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>