



Licking County Produce Perks Helps Licking County Families Buy More Local Fruits and Vegetables

Summary

Thanks to the collaboration between Licking County Creating Healthy Communities (CHC) program, the Canal Market District (CMD) and Produce Perks, residents in downtown and South End areas of Newark now have access to affordable fresh produce. The Produce Perks incentive program provides a dollar-for-dollar match, up to \$10, to Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) recipients to spend on additional produce at participating farmers' markets. During the 2017 market season, SNAP customers redeemed over \$3,000 in incentives for additional fruits and vegetables for their families.

Challenge

Low income residents in the downtown and South End areas of Newark lack adequate access to affordable fresh produce. Adequate transportation is also an issue for many households as there is no fixed-route transit in the area, and a significant number of residents are more than a mile from the nearest grocery store. In January 2017, the only grocery store in downtown Newark closed, leaving residents at an even greater disadvantage to accessing affordable fresh produce. Residents are left to rely on gas stations and dollar stores as their primary opportunities to buy food. According to the American Community Survey (2010-2014), 38.7 percent of residents living in this area receive benefits through SNAP.

According to the 2015 Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System (BRFSS), Licking County residents fall short of the daily recommendations for fruits and vegetables. Only 3.6 percent indicated they consume the recommended daily servings of two servings of fruits and three servings of vegetables. According to the survey, 74.2 percent are not eating the recommended servings of fruit and 94 percent do not eat the recommended servings of vegetables. There is also the issue of food insecurity in Licking County, where one out of every eight residents (12.9 percent) worries about having enough money to buy nutritious meals. The lack of healthy foods puts them more at risk for obesity and chronic diseases such as cancer, type 2 diabetes and heart disease.



Solution

With the closing of the only grocery store in the downtown area, CMD implemented the Produce Perks program in 2017 to further increase access to affordable fresh produce for low income residents. The addition of Produce Perks gives low income residents more buying power at their local farmers' market. Customers who use SNAP simply swipe their EBT cards at the market, like they would at any grocery store and specify the amount they want to spend that day at the market. The Produce Perks program matches dollar for dollar up to \$10 additional for customers to spend on fresh fruits and vegetables. With 100% of qualifying market vendors participating in the program, there are many healthy buying options. To ensure SNAP customers were aware of the program, CMD and CHC partnered with the local Department of Job and Family Services (JFS) to reach SNAP families in the area with a flyer and informational mailing. CHC assisted with promoting the program through paid social media and local radio ads. Community partners were educated on the programs through trainings and at the market.

Results

The addition of the Produce Perks program has helped provide access to affordable, fresh produce for low income residents in the downtown and South End areas of Newark. Produce Perks helps residents get

more with their SNAP dollars by doubling the purchasing power on more fruits and vegetables. During the 2017 market season, over \$3,000 of fresh fruits and vegetables were brought into the homes of these residents providing more nutritious foods for their families. According to survey responses from SNAP customers, 57 percent indicated the Produce Perks program helped them increase the amounts of fruits and vegetables they are eating.

Sustaining Success

A Produce Perks sustainability plan is being developed. CMD is looking into ways to expand healthy food access in the neighborhood outside of the farmers' market using Produce Perks, including a low income, local food subscription service that delivers a weekly pod of fresh food right to where it is needed. CMD will continue to rely on strong partnerships with key stakeholders and secure funding to build on the success of the farmers' market.

Your Involvement is Key

Help increase access to affordable, fresh, local foods. Find out if your community farmers' market accepts SNAP or is eligible for the Produce Perks program. Visit your local farmers' market and help spread the word about markets in your community. Join the Licking County Wellness Coalition to support access to healthy foods for all residents.



Loretta is an occasional visitor to the farmers' market. The last time she visited, the Produce Perks program wasn't in effect, but she was excited to have her purchase doubled through the program this year. The majority of what she buys will be used to feed her 2-year-old granddaughter, who loves all the fresh fruits and veggies. Thanks to the Produce Perks program, her SNAP will go twice as far at the farmers' market!



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