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# SNAP at the Market: focus group findings



Prepared for: Friends of the Public Market, Foodlink Curbside, West Side and South Wedge Farmers Markets

Prepared by: Collaborative Health Research, January 29, 2016

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## Objectives of focus group

1. To better understand the current perceptions and behaviors of SNAP participants related to using SNAP at the targeted farmer's markets.
2. To identify salient messages and mediums for an effective campaign to increase SNAP use at the markets.

## Methods

One hour-long focus group with participants recruited by market staff. All participants were consistent SNAP users at one or more of the markets. A semi-structured interview guide was used to better understand what people like about using their SNAP benefits at the market and to identify strategies for an effective campaign to increase SNAP use at the markets.

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## DESCRIPTION OF INTERVIEWEES

### Sampling

Representatives of each market were asked to recruit individuals that use SNAP at their markets.

### Demographics

**Gender:** 9 participants were female, 1 was male



**Age:** 3 participants were in their 30s, 2 were in their 40s, and 6 were in their 60s



**Education:** 3 participants were high school grads, 3 had some college, 3 were college graduates, 1 left it blank



**Race:** 5 participants were white and 5 participants were Black/African-American



**Hispanic:** 2 participants were Hispanic

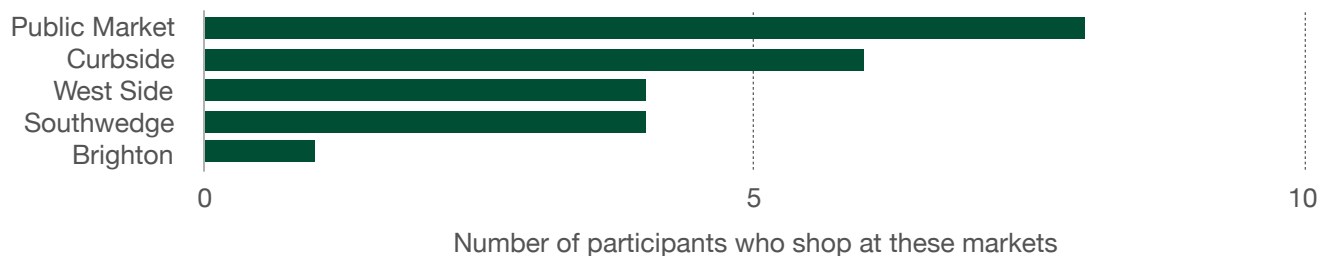


### Household composition

6 participants lived in households where they were the only adult.

Half the participants had children in their household.

### Shopping habits



**Frequency of shopping:** 2 participants shop 3 times a week, 6 shop once a week, and 2 shop once a month



## REASONS TO USE SNAP BENEFITS AT THE MARKET

Participants were unanimous in their praise for SNAP benefits at the market.

**Fresh foods** - *“Fresh produce. First coming out of the garden, you can’t beat that.”*

Participants frequently mentioned the quality and variety of fresh foods being better than supermarkets. In subsequent conversations however, people discussed the limitations of food going bad, having to transport food from the market, and seasonality of certain foods (e.g. watermelons, lettuce, etc).

**Affordability** - *“Can’t beat the prices.” “More for your money.” “You get more than at the supermarket.”*

A few participants discussed that the farmer’s markets could be a better deal compared to supermarkets because they would mix and match what they purchased and that at certain times farmers were offloading more produce and they would get more produce than they were paying for. Others discussed the Fresh Connect benefit specifically as being extra money that made it possible for them to get additional produce.

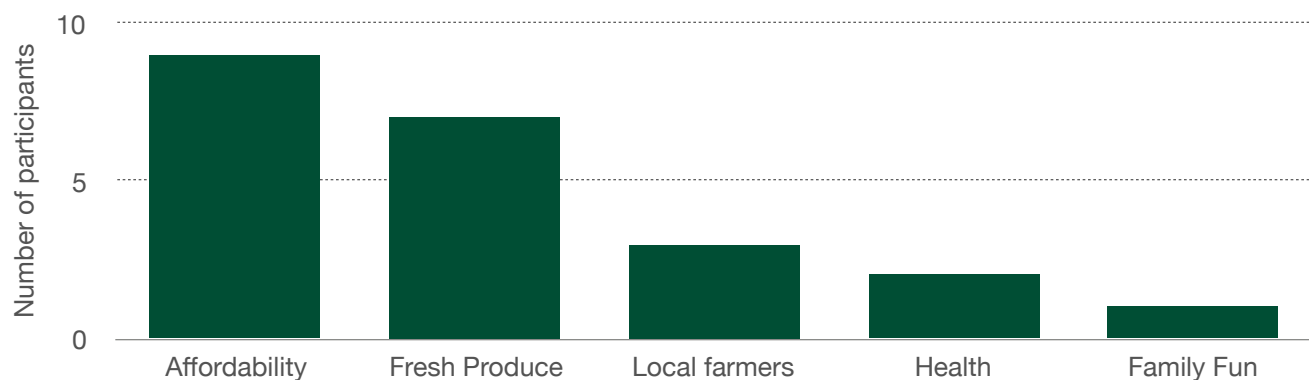
**Supporting local farmers** - *“Vendors are nice.” “Like supporting local farmers.”*

Some participants liked that they were supporting local farmers. Others liked the interactions they had with vendors and could ask about the produce that they sell.

**Health benefits** - *“I can get the things that can keep my blood sugar under control. Cause I got free stuff off my SNAP card.”*

A few individuals mentioned how eating there kept them healthy or would make other people healthier.

**From the worksheets:** When asked what are the 3 best reasons people should use their SNAP benefits at the market affordability and fresh produce were most frequently cited.



## RECOMMENDED MESSAGES

### Getting existing customers to spend more

**Availability of markets** — *“If they could extend the hours that would be great.”*

Participants discussed the challenges of having the markets only around on one day and the limited hours. In the case of the Curbside Market they wanted it to come daily. One participant mentioned that her work hours had changed so she is not able to go to the market anymore. Another issue was the consistency of products being available. That some products are in high demand and run out quickly and that depending on the market and the weather the number of vendors can vary by a lot.

### Transportation

For participants without a car, they faced the dual barriers of getting to the market and carrying more produce home. Some suggested a shuttle to make it easier or to work with Regional Transit Service (RTS) to allow produce carts during certain hours or on certain buses. For those with cars, parking at the Public Market was a real barrier. Curbside was mentioned as a real asset for community members who have challenges with transportation.

*“Always good for people who can’t get around.”*

**SNAP benefit logistics** — *“Wish tokens were interchangeable.”*

This was not a major concern for people. However, participants mentioned that they wished the tokens were interchangeable between markets and that due to the timing of when benefits are released that some people use SNAP up before they have the chance to go to the market.

### Getting new people to come

**Increase awareness of Fresh Connect** — *“Tell ‘em about Connects!” “More bang for your buck.”*

Most people felt that SNAP recipients that don’t use their benefits at the market aren’t aware of the Fresh Connect incentive or what is available at the market.

**Promote Fruit** — *“The cherries, watermelons, and grapes. They good.”*

**Fun for all** — *“My kids love the market. They like picking out their fruits and vegetables. It is a good experience for them too.”*

People felt that kids could encourage their parents to go to the market and that kids enjoy going to the markets more than going to the supermarket.

### Transportation

Participants suggested that there should be materials that share the bus routes that take people to markets.

## DELIVERY OF MESSAGES

### Who should deliver the message

**Mayor Lovely Warren** — *“I’d like to see our Mayor participate.”*

This received a lot of agreement from the group though it may be coupled with a desire from participants for the mayor to “participate in something”. Later in the discussion others talked about preferring someone they could relate to, such as other SNAP users or farmers, though it seemed people were open to someone more noticeable being the spokesperson to introduce the program, but have the messages come from people they could relate to.

**Other SNAP users** — *“People we can relate to.” “See someone who is using the SNAP.”*

Participants were very receptive to messages coming from people who were actual SNAP users, stating that they could relate to them and wouldn’t feel like someone was talking down to them or being condescending.

**Foodlink Nutrition Educators** — *“I’d like to see them at the schools talking to parents.”*

**Vendors** — *“Give them a voice to talk about the benefits of shopping local.” “We aren’t just helping ourselves but helping them as well.”*

**Important partners** - Health care providers and Social service Agencies

Where	How
<b>Doctors’ and Dentists’ offices</b>	<b>TV</b> - Could include ads or cooking demos.
<b>Social service agencies</b> — <i>“Where the benefits come from, Senior Centers, WIC, and DSS.”</i>	<b>Radio</b>
<b>Buses</b> , City bus interior rail & school busses	<b>Flyers and Brochures</b> — including bus routes
<b>Downtown Library</b>	<b>Point of sale flyers</b> — showing pictures of produce
<b>Schools</b> — <i>“Where all the kids at.”</i>	<b>Flyers at the market</b> — directions towards Tokens
	<b>Referral programs</b> — bring a friend and get a benefit

### Limitations of the focus group

This group included frequent users of market; about half of whom wrote that there was little that could be done to get them to spend more. *“No reason, I spend what I can.”* It would be beneficial to talk to individuals who don’t use their SNAP benefits at the markets to confirm or improve the messages this group suggested.

