

## **Background**

The Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) is seeking innovative ways to promote the consumption of healthy foods, especially fresh fruits and vegetables, among Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) clients. One of these initiatives involves increasing client access to farmers markets. Over the past few years, the number of farmers markets that are SNAP-authorized has risen along with the amount of benefits redeemed at farmers markets.

## **Methods**

This exploratory descriptive study examined the characteristics of nine farmers markets to better understand the relationship between market operations and participation in SNAP and other FNS nutrition assistance programs. Interviews were conducted with the market managers of the nine farmers markets. Follow up site visits were conducted with five of the markets (see Table 1).

**Market Structure.** Except for one market opened in 1891, the markets ranged from 3 to 13 years old. Most farmers markets operated in partnership with at least one other organization. The markets varied widely in the number of vendors, but in general had only one or two paid employees. Though two market managers had been in their positions for over 7 years, the others had managed their markets for less than 5 years. Most market managers were responsible for vendor organization, staffing, and outreach, but fewer were responsible for budgeting or fundraising,

**Market Revenue.** Only three markets reported their yearly sales. For those markets, sales varied from \$20,000 to over \$666,000. The markets received funding from a variety of sources. The most common source of funding was vendor

fees, while the least common was funding from area businesses.

**Products for Sale.** All markets sold produce and baked goods. Most sold meat, eggs, and prepared food. Fewer sold butter, cheese, milk, seafood, and nuts. Prices of items varied both within the same market and between markets.

**FNS Program Participation.** Eight of the nine markets participated in at least one FNS nutrition assistance program: (SNAP, Special Supplemental Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC), WIC Farmers Market Nutrition Program (WIC FMNP), or Senior Farmers Market Nutrition Program (SFMNP)). Five markets were authorized to accept SNAP, with 40 to 100 percent of vendors participating. Increasing sales, diversifying their customer base, helping the local economy, and promoting healthy eating were given as reasons for SNAP participation. Challenges to participation included negotiating the application process and the lack of phone lines for electronic benefit transfer (EBT) machines. One manager of a market that did not participate in SNAP was not aware the market could participate. Managers suggested that streamlining the application process, providing grants to support EBT operations and incentive programs, raising awareness among farmers, and promoting farmers markets to SNAP clients were ways that FNS could enhance the role of farmers markets in nutrition assistance programs.

**Incentive Programs.** All SNAP-authorized markets had some form of financial incentive program for SNAP clients. These incentives were funded by city governments, foundations, and other organizations, such as Wholesome Wave and The Food Trust, and ranged from a one-time \$5 coupon to doubling the value of a client's purchases up to \$35 each week.

**Nutrition Education.** All markets reported some form of nutrition education, including cooking demonstrations and supporting offsite nutrition education programs.

**Physical Environment.** Of the five markets selected for site visits, four were near public transportation. All advertised their SNAP participation using signs. The markets were evenly divided between residential and commercial areas. All markets had some form of positive built environment feature, the most common being trees and trash bins. Two had negative features nearby, the most common being broken or boarded up windows.

### Summary

The nine farmers markets were selected to represent different geographic areas, variations in market size and vendor participation, and

variations in FNS program participation. SNAP-authorized markets were selected in part because they operate incentive programs for SNAP clients. The information about market operations and participation in FNS programs was used to develop a questionnaire for use in a national survey of farmers market managers (see [www.fns.usda.gov/farmersmarketstudy](http://www.fns.usda.gov/farmersmarketstudy)).

### For More Information

U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service, Office of Research and Analysis, *Nutrition Assistance in Farmers Markets: Understanding Current Operations—Formative Research Findings* by Suzanne McNutt, Simani Price, and Sujata Dixit-Joshi, Westat, Inc. FNS Project Officer: Kelly Kinnison, Alexandria, VA: 2011 (available online at [www.fns.usda.gov/ora](http://www.fns.usda.gov/ora)).

**Table 1. Farmers Markets, Location and FNS Program Participation**

Name/Location	Data Collection Approach	Census Region/Urbanicity	SNAP*	WIC	WIC FMNP	Senior FMNP	Average Number of Vendors
Eastern Market Detroit, MI	Interview & Site Visit	East North Central Urban	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	130
Peachtree Road Atlanta, GA	Interview & Site Visit	South Atlantic Urban	Yes	No	No	No	65
South Boston Boston, MA	Interview & Site Visit	New England Urban	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	4
Clark Park Philadelphia, PA	Interview & Site Visit	Middle Atlantic Urban	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	15
Market on the Square Mobile, AL	Interview & Site Visit	East South Central Urban	No	Yes	No	Yes	45
Fort Pierce Fort Pierce, FL	Interview Only	South Atlantic Urban	No	No	No	No	50
Wytheville Wytheville, VA	Interview Only	South Atlantic Non-Urbanized	Yes	No	No	No	15
Sitka Sitka, AK	Interview Only	Pacific Non-Urbanized	No	Yes	Yes	No	20
Overland Park Overland Park, KS	Interview Only	West North Central Urban	No	No	No	Yes	65

\*Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP); Special Supplemental Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC); WIC Farmers Market Nutrition Program (WIC FMNP); Senior Farmers Market Nutrition Program (SFMNP)

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