

CDC FUNDING IN ACTION

MADERA COUNTY FARMERS' MARKET MAKES HEALTHY FOOD ACCESSIBLE

Customers Can Buy Produce Using WIC Vouchers, SNAP Benefits



Challenge

Despite being a top producer of many food crops, Madera County, California, has food deserts. Eleven percent of its largely Latino and Hispanic population report food insecurity, defined as a chronic lack of access to adequate food. At the same time, 71% of adults who are eligible for the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) have obesity or are overweight. Food deserts and food insecurity are related, and people with chronic food insecurity have higher rates of diabetes, obesity, and heart disease. Farmers' markets that accept SNAP electronic benefits transfer (EBT) cards can increase access to healthy foods, but reestablishing a closed farmers' market in a new place, getting EBT certification, and allowing for social distancing during the COVID-19 pandemic were challenging.



Approach

In the summer of 2019, agency partners and community health workers reestablished the Madera Neighborhood Farmers' Market. The Madera Community Hospital, which served as the Market Manager, worked with nontraditional partners (the Farm Bureau and the City of Madera) to get EBT designation for the farmers' market, which would allow its vendors to become certified to accept EBT as payment. A survey of farmers' market customers with EBT cards showed that 85% of them would be willing to use their EBT card at the market, and 83% would be willing to buy more fruits and vegetables. The 2019 summer market was open for 1 day a week and attracted close to 2,000 customers over an 8-week season.



Results

While the market did not receive EBT designation until the end of the 2019 season, lessons learned contributed to the success of the 2020 season and acceptance of EBT by vendors. Despite restrictions on public gatherings related to COVID-19, in 2020, the Madera Neighborhood Farmers' Market provided low-income residents with access to affordable, healthy food by accepting EBT and WIC Farmers' Market Nutrition Program coupons. During the 8-week market season, about 700 WIC participants averaged \$205 in EBT purchases per market day. During the season, the number of vendors certified to accept EBT and WIC vouchers increased from four to six, which increased the variety of produce available to low-income customers.



At A Glance

One in 10 residents of Madera County, California, reports food insecurity. To give residents access to affordable healthy foods, in 2019 community health workers and partners reestablished the Madera Neighborhood Farmers' Market, which had been closed for years because of high operating costs. In 2020, the farmers' market was approved to accept electronic benefits transfer (EBT) from customers receiving Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program benefits. During the 8-week market season, about 700 WIC participants spent an average of \$205 per day on produce using EBT.

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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).

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