

Assessing Low-Income Community Members' Views on Food Access and Farmers' Markets in New Haven

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Background

In 2004, CitySeed Inc. was formed to oversee and operate farmers' markets (FMs) in New Haven. Since then, they have grown through a series of programs and incentives aimed at increasing availability of fresh fruits and vegetables (F&V) to all residents of New Haven. CitySeed has implemented the SNAP Double Value incentive program, which allows SNAP recipients to double the value of their purchases (i.e. \$1 buys \$2 worth of F&V) at FMs for up to \$20. CitySeed has also implemented a SNAP customer Loyalty Program, Farmers Market Nutrition Coupon redemption, and F&V prescription program.

Objectives:

With information from CitySeed and past studies in major cities that employed similar double-value programs, we focused on three primary objectives:

- ✧ Evaluate availability and accessibility of healthy food choices for low-income residents in New Haven
- ✧ Assess perspectives on barriers to CitySeed's farmers' markets among low-income community members
- ✧ Recommend steps for CitySeed to tailor markets and programming to community needs and interests

Methods

We conducted two focus groups to gather thoughts and opinions on the farmers' markets in New Haven and ways to make improvements. Participants were recruited from the local chapter of Witnesses to Hunger and sorted into focus groups (n=3 and n=3) based on their level of past engagement with FMs. A short demographic survey was given at the end of each focus group session. Focus groups were audio recorded, transcribed, and coded for major themes.

Results and Discussion

- ✧ *Participants looked for ways to stretch their benefits and get the best value for their dollar when purchasing foods*
- ✧ *Participants noted that clear information on how to navigate farmers' markets and what food choices are currently available is important for individuals to make fully informed food purchase choices for themselves and their families*

- ✧ *Participants gave examples of how food can bring people together, how women serve as gatekeepers for their family's food choices empowering them to make healthy choices, and help them develop stronger relationships with community members of diverse backgrounds.*

Recommendations

- ✧ **Marketing and Transportation Strategies**
 - Target marketing strategies to constituencies such as children, families, and senior citizens
 - Provide bus routes, maps, and parking information on CitySeed flyers for community members to easily access farmers' markets
 - Offer a monthly or bi-weekly text message service for providing market information such as seasonal produce offerings, prices and/or parking information ahead of scheduled FMs
- ✧ **Experiential Learning at Farmer's Markets**
 - Offer more cooking demonstrations and taste-testings to show customers how to prepare foods found at the farmers' markets
 - Collaborate with community organizations to create informational handouts with recipes and nutritional values to increase stakeholder buy-in at FMs
- ✧ **Fostering A Community Atmosphere at Farmer's Markets**
 - Explore ways to connect low-income community members with FM vendors
 - CitySeed could partner with local YMCAs, Connecticut Department of Social Services, Witnesses to Hunger, and End Hunger CT! to increase weekly programming at New Haven FMs
 - Improve navigation within FMs by providing a map with information on vendor locations, food information, and food prices at each farmers' market

Limitations

- ✧ Due to limited size and participant crossover, focus groups results may not be representative
- ✧ Due to time constraints, analysis did not include full re-coding of focus group transcripts

Conclusions

Low-income individuals in the New Haven community recognize that farmers' markets offer high quality produce. However, concerns exist surrounding cultural inaccessibility, high prices, and lack of information available at each market.

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CitySeed (n.d.). "Who We Are." Retrieved from <http://cityseed.org/who-we-are-2/>

Resources

[CitySeed](#)

[DSS](#)

[USDA](#)

[Witnesses to Hunger](#)