

Low Income Access at Your Market

Panelists: Tina Bernier (WIC Nutrition Program), Colleen Fuller (Access Health), Jaime Berhanu (Lalibela Farm), and Jean Bingham (DHHS).

Moderator: Kate Sheridan (Food AND Medicine.)

Colleen Fuller – Access Health (Bath Farmers' Market)

Started off with a 2 year grant to implement EBT in farmers markets. Made custom fliers, and used outreach avenues that were more expensive, which requires more money. The more you advertise the market in general, the more the word spreads, and will bring EBT customers.

In Bath they posted paper fliers all over: City Hall, Rec Department, Cafes, WIC office, YCMA, Library, Senior Centers, Teen Centers, Housing Authority, Head Start, Summer Food Service Programs. They still have only seen 1-3% of SNAP pop in Bath come to the market.

Challenges: we wanted a flier on every door in subsidized housing, but were not allowed to do so. With a lot of organization that should have been allies, they got stonewalled. Once leadership changed within organization, they were able to distribute fliers and door hangers. Always continue to develop these relationships.

There are a dozen outreach opportunities. They won't all work. Patience is needed. Give yourself plenty of time.

Hand out fliers: get face to face time (time consuming, but effective). In this scenario you can most clearly get your message across. You can also find out reasons why people aren't attending, many people might not even know of the existence of the farmers market. Some other barriers include: people not feeling comfortable there/unfamiliarity, food prices, another stop for people.

Go to the mobile food truck. Set up a table and talk to people as they stream by. Offer some incentive: gift certificate for farmers market to raffle off. Get them to put their email address down, then they get emails for the Farmers Market. Give fliers to your local food pantry. Try to get fliers in local WIC office and DHHS. These relationships are highly valuable.

Advertise the prices at the market. Make a grocery list showing what you can get at the farmers market. This will help to show people what they can expect to find at the farmers market, and allow them to price compare to where they usually shop.

Connect with local health advocacy or non-profits: this is another face to face advertising. Connect with your local Healthy Maine Partnership (HMP), they can spread the word and include the market in their event calendars. They can also connect you to other health orgs. HMP does SNAP-Ed, nutrition and cooking education for SNAP recipients. They will teach

recipes what they can make with produce found at the farmers market, and can distribute promotional materials at these classes. They also offer a single session nutrition education classes, that can take place at say a farmers markets: shopping in season, and container gardens. This will bring people to market, and then encourages them to purchase items they just learned about.

Market Events: having events at the market, more than just a band. People love free stuff! Norway did a kids day event, games, music, arts and crafts, scavenger hunt, they had to go around and find different veggies. This event drew over 60 kids and parents. While they were there they were educated about the EBT system. Do this once a season to bring people in and make them feel welcome and comfortable at your market.

Promote in your local newspaper: Connect with local journalist. Write press releases. Get the word out! Connect with local cable access. While this might not reach SNAP customers, the more people who know about it, the more people will hear about it.

Facebook: Start a facebook page! This is a great way to share info. Get your partner organizations to can share your information. If you have the money, consider purchasing a sponsored ad. This will increase your views tremendously.

Public transportation: Put an ad on the Bath city bus. Maybe put it on the inside where people will read it while on the bus, rather than on the back of the bus. This is fairly costly.

Operation Market Quest Toolkit by Sarah Joy Chaples. Most of the strategies talked about above can be found in there, and they also give you templates. Any manual you can find online for EBT will offer outreach suggestions.

Other existing programs: Get fliers put in the childrens backpacks who are a part of the backpack program. There is a good chance that kids in this program have parents that are using SNAP benefits.

Try to capture how people are learning about the market, to see if what you are doing is working. Contact Colleen if you would like some of the adobe and design templates that she has used.

Tina Bernier – WIC

WIC is designed and funded by USDA, and is intended to provide supplemental food during development (pregnant women, and infancy to age five). They offer a “focused food prescription” and a Farmers’ Market Nutrition Program. Participants receive benefits through both programs.

Participants receive benefits at the local level. Each area has a WIC clinic on a three month basis. They can spend those dollars at places that are authorized. They need to make sure that

what the stores have fit within the program guidelines and that there are an adequate number of farmers and markets authorized to ensure program allotment.

Farmers can accept both kinds of checks. The cash value voucher, is the veggies/fruit dollar, which is distributed all year round. The farmer nutrition incentive come in checks of 5 dollar increments at the beginning of May, and need to be redeemed by the end of October. Make sure to deposit these checks before they expire! They hope to have adapted the cash value voucher system onto a card system by 2016, but Market dollars will remain as paper checks.

Farmers make a three year agreement, and need to be trained once before each 3 year term. Then they will receive annual newsletter which will inform them of any changes in the program. Right now farmers are being authorized individually, but there is hope of authorizing farmers' markets as a whole in the future.

Each agency does things differently. There are eight different agencies. In Augusta they distribute checks at the market, which leads to quick redemption. Some clinics will invite farmers to their clinics while they are having workshops. You need to build a strong connection with the WIC clinic in your area. They are the ones who are going to sell it or not sell it, and will help you to develop strong connections with their clients.

They currently have \$62,000 for the program, and although they give \$100,000 worth of checks, only \$50,000 typically gets redeemed. If there is more need (i.e., higher redemption rate), there will be more money available for the program. The more people who engage in the program, the stronger it becomes.

Jaime Berhanu – Lalibela Farm

At first the Portland market offered licenses to accept SNAP as individuals, and only 5 of 35 vendors were accepting. They decided they needed to put a system in place. They looked at how other markets were doing it in other parts of the country. In 2010 they got in touch with Cultivating Community and the Healthy Maine Partnership in Portland, and spent about 6 months planning what it would take to bring a program to Portland, and what it should look like, and making sure that it would work for the farmers. They found the wooden tokens could be treated mostly like cash.

Since starting the program in 2011, they have processed \$160,000 in SNAP and \$35,000 in incentives! The EBT processing equipment can also process credit cards, which helps to neutralize the stigma. There will be days where they get 100 swipes and there will be days when they get 1 swipe.

Work on developing collaborative partnerships with other local organizations. This can help with the funding aspects of such a program. Make the program inclusive with the market. Offer volunteer sign ups, merchandise, and market info, along with the SNAP processing at that specific market booth.

They have been working with the Federation and Wholesome Wave to phase out their three year grant money. Customers really come to depend on this program at the market, so the worst thing to do is to get people to come, and then lose the program.

They are paying an employee to manage this program, which is paid for mostly through the market membership fees. You can also ask credit/debit users if they'd like to donate to the program each time they swipe. Their future goal is to find an annual sponsor for the program.

Outreach has not been a top priority, as they have a good number of SNAP recipients coming. To reach those who haven't yet come to the market they have put up posters at DHHS and public health office. They also do outreach through their facebook page and website, word of mouth, market brochures, and newspaper articles. In particular you should promote stories on the incentive money offered with the program. This seems to trigger lots of conversation, lots of sharing and other people seeing comments, and thus more spread of the information. They are looking to get WIC checks distributed at the market in the future.

All promotion for SNAP program is also promotion for your market, include it in on all your signs!

When starting this sort of program, develop a team and understand that it will take time. If you can hire an employee, make sure to have a system to ensure that the goals for the program are being met. Make sure that person has knowledge of the market, the farmers, the products, so they can direct customers where they need to go. They should ask for help with small tasks that can be easily done by market membership.

Welcoming more of the community to have the market experience is very valuable and promotes, health, happiness, and connection in the community. The tokens are fun and families are buying more maine grown foods. The SNAP program has presented a unifying place, we're doing something together that is good for the community.

Questions:

Have you reached out to grandparents? Not specifically, but our HMP did some SNAP – ed classes at a senior center, and got fliers put in their newsletter. Try to piggyback your advertisement off of other programs that are offering a service, like SNAP Ed. Also, check out local AARP offices, and the local Extension office.

What about child care centers or doctors' offices? We got our fliers into the Head Start office. In terms of doctors' offices, some primary care physicians want to participate, one physician assistant in particular is very much a proponent, and had three patients call who were referred by him.

Many churches have food programs. If you can get into an organization that provides meals, go eat with them, and start that conversation. I understand that farmers are very busy, connect with the Healthy Maine Partnership or Parent Teacher Association or representative from a church to find someone to do this outreach.

Among certain people, there is a stigma to SNAP, how can we overcome that stigma in terms of people interacting in farmers markets? Treat them like everybody else. For us how our system is works, you don't know who is paying with SNAP or Credit, except that the tokens are different colors. Once you get them there once, they will keep coming back. The booth at which they pay should also be an information booth, which will help reduce the identification of using SNAP. Also, realize that the irony is that there are many farmers who are on food stamps. There are also other models where customers write down what they've bought on a credit slip, and then pay at the end to reduce the stigma of using the colored tokens. Also, be sure that people understand what they could buy with \$5 at the farmers' market, and make sure people know about your market.

In Portland, low income people often pass through the location of the market. At smaller markets you might consider catering to different neighborhoods and getting out to where the people are.

The woman who runs the EBT both at the Bath Market, has been a SNAP recipient, and connects with those people on a personal level.

Terminals? Most work with credit processing company Power Pay. You can get a wireless credit card machine, if you don't have access to internet, which can process credit, debit, and snap. It costs around \$17 a month for the service. Any fees associated with processing SNAP, can be reimbursed by DHHS. It costs \$.15 per transaction, which can vary depending on the type of card. You could deduct 3% from credit tokens that are handed in, which can be really crucial to developing the program as a whole.

Record keeping is very important! Use Google Docs! Provide end of year reports to all the farmers.

(Notes submitted by Greta Huff.)