The Impact of Farmers’ Market Incentives and Nutrition Education on Fruit and Vegetable Intake—A Qualitative Study

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Introduction:
Despite evidence that consuming fruits and vegetables (F&V) reduces the risk for obesity and other chronic diseases, low-income Americans are not consuming recommended intakes.1 Farmers’ markets have been promoted as a way to decrease perceived barriers associated with poor intake of F&V.2,3,4 Farmers’ market incentive programs have been established to encourage the use of federal nutrition assistance benefits at farmers’ markets and to improve intake of F&V in this population.5 This study is the first to use collect qualitative data among participants to understand the experience of low-income participants who have received farmers’ market incentives and nutrition education. The purpose of this study was to determine whether farmers’ market incentives and nutrition education influence the beliefs, values, and experiences among participants.

Methods:
Intervention: Participants from a farmers’ market incentive pilot study were recruited to participate in interviews. Participants received 8 weeks of SNAP-Ed nutrition education and farmers market incentives over the summer and fall of 2014.

Interviews: Qualitative semi-structured interviews of a convenience sample of participants were conducted until theoretical saturation was reached. A 10 question interview guide was used to conduct the 45 minute interviews. Participants received $20 to compensate.

Interview Topics:
• Experiences using incentives at the farmers’ market
• Experiences with SNAP-Ed nutrition education classes
• Nutrition-related changes based on incentives and education

Participant Quotes:
Improving Cost and Access to F&V
“The incentives helped with cost, which was good. I was able to get more fruit and vegetables. … I thought it helped me purchase better food too. Just because I was being aware and I knew where it was coming from and going to the farmer’s market versus just grocery store I think I was making healthier choices.”

Increased Children Involvement in Buying Produce
“And I involved my kids, that was the nice thing. And so we got to let them pick out different ones [F&V] that they wanted, and we had them use the tokens and pay for it too.”

“My daughter… ‘Can I have a peach, can I have a peach?’ And instead of having to tell her, “No we can’t afford it” or, “No we have to buy things that we’re going to have for lunch” or whatever, I could give her a treat. I could give her a peach for a treat.”

Improving Consumption & Variety of F&V Intake
“Because of the availability of [F&V] there was a lot more variety to choose from and I felt like I could choose more variety because I had a little extra money to do so.”

“Because I had so many fruits and vegetables at home, I had to make sure that I was consciously finding ways to use them, or they would go bad. And so I think I ate them quite a bit more often.”

“When I am hungry or need a snack or something—on or off my diet— I’m much more likely to choose those fruits and vegetables. And I prepare a lot more fruits and vegetables at meal times.”

Improving Skills, Knowledge, & Self-efficacy Related to F&V Intake
“Well one thing that I know I learned for sure is about frozen vegetables, which I think I’ve known this, but for some reason I’ve always been like, “Emm frozen vegetables aren’t good.” But she’s [the educator] like, “They’re frozen in their prime so they’re still packed with nutrition.”

“I loved learning about the different ways you can prepare vegetables, or which vegetables and fruits were in season, and things like that. Because that was all information that I didn’t know.”

“With the farmer’s market stuff[incentives] I bought extra veggies, cut them up and froze them and that’s actually one thing that started to work. Being able to buy in bulk when something is on sale and then I can use it as I need it. Being able to store it, learning how to store it.”

Results:
Fourteen low-income individuals were interviewed. Several themes were identified. Participants reported that farmers’ market incentives decreased barriers associated with consuming F&V such as cost, availability, and accessibility. Participants reported trying new F&V and replacing high fat, high calorie foods with F&V purchased with their farmers market incentives. Participants reported consuming a greater amount and larger variety of F&V when they received incentives to use at the farmers’ market. Furthermore, participants indicated the incentives allowed them to treat their children with F&V that they wouldn’t typically be able to afford. Participating indicated that receiving nutrition education through SNAP-Ed improved their knowledge, skills, and self-efficacy related to preparing, storing, and cooking produce.

Conclusions and Implications:
Farmers’ market incentives coupled with nutrition education is an intervention strategy that addresses the common barriers of cost, access, skill, knowledge, and self-efficacy associated with poor intake of F&V among SNAP participants. SNAP-Ed programs should consider collaborating with farmers’ market incentive programs in their states to provide this combined intervention strategy for SNAP participants.

References:

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Figure 1. Improving Food Security and F&V Consumption by Reducing Common Barriers