

The Farmers Market Effect



Westbay Community Action| Warwick, RI| Presented By: Sarah Lopatka, WIC Project Outreach Manager & Kelsey Quinn, WIC Community Educator

Introduction

Westbay Community Action serves the West Warwick area of Kent County, located in central Rhode Island, with a population of 29,191 (Census, 2010). In Kent County, the number of estimated individuals that are food insecure is 20,020.

Many lack access to healthy food and beverage options – West Warwick has few grocery stores and a high prevalence of corner stores. Public transportation is limited. One farmers market exists, but its location far from a bus route and expensive produce make it unreasonable for most. Without healthy options available, it becomes increasingly difficult to make healthy choices, resulting in chronic disease and obesity.

This project sought to address the high rates of food insecurity, chronic disease, and obesity in West Warwick by improving access to environments of healthy food and beverage options. By establishing additional farmers market locations that accept WIC checks, SNAP, and senior vouchers, we were able to provide healthier food and beverage choices to West Warwick residents.

Project Overview

Two WIC pop-up farmers markets were held in 2016. Families were able to pick up their WIC checks at the market and spend instantaneously at the market. SNAP and Senior Vouchers were also redeemable. An incentive program gave \$2 free in Bonus Bucks tokens for every \$5 in EBT/SNAP or WIC spent.

Community organizations offered information on additional health resources including diabetes self-management classes, GED programs, and hearing assistance. The National Guard offered a rock climbing wall, while local police conducted car seat checks. Balloon animals, face painting, and nutrition education activities were also available.

By working together with partner agencies, local farmers, and small businesses, the pop-up farmers markets we were able to make the markets fun, inviting, and educational.

Activities

- Coalition meetings
- Location procurement
- Collaboration with local farmers
- Vendor and community partner bookings
- Advertising/ marketing
- Plan engagement activities for adults and kids
- Coordinate participation system/ log for farmers

Outcomes

The two 2016 farmers markets served 598 people and sold \$3,124 worth of food. Of the \$831 in issued in Bonus Bucks in West Warwick, \$514 were redeemed, which is a similar redemption rate compared to other locations across the state.

The wonderful lasting relationships made with partners in and around our community are valuable. Before the NWA Grant we didn't realize how many partners in our community have similar missions to our own. Through the enthusiasm of our partners, we have decided to continue collaborating and implement four farmers markets this year.



Next Steps

Due to increased demand, the number of market days will increase from two to four in the 2017 season. More and more businesses and organizations in the community have expressed interest in getting involved. Donations from the community and partner organizations are being collected, while plans for a cooking demonstration and chef lead fundraiser are underway to fund additional market activities.

Lessons Learned

Check redemption and use of benefits had to be simple and discreet. Farmers had to be educated on how to accept the vouchers and bonus bucks to make the process seamless.

The farmers markets had to be mutually beneficial for both the farmers and consumers. Prices of fruits and vegetables had to be high enough for farmers to profit, but low enough for market-goers to justify the cost. Broadening the variety of fruits available for purchase is a goal for the future, but first there must be the clental to demand it of farmers.

Marketing the farmers market to West Warwick and surrounding towns would expand the market beyond just those on WIC, SNAP or Senior Vouchers. In doing so, the market would be increasingly beneficial for farmers and vendors, as well as the community.



Best Practices

1. Creatively promoting the farmers markets to consumers through proper messaging and an awareness of reading levels and language barriers was important. We would do a day of street outreach handing out flyers in-person about a week before the farmers markets.
2. We also found having a friendly face to approach farmers market guests and act as a chauffeur really helped to alleviate anxiety for new guests. The chauffeur would personally introduce the guest to each farmer as well as explain the services available to them for extra financial assistance.