Fresh Food for All: Connecting Women, Infants, and Children with Local Farmers

Jennifer Russomanno, MPH, CHES, CMP
Chelsea Allison, BS
Marissa Black, BS
Marleah Payne, BS
Marissa McElrone, BS
Sarah Griswold, MS-MPH, RD, LDN
Marsha Spence, PhD, MPH, RDN, LDN
Learning Objectives

- Explain how online resources can be used to improve the WIC Farmers Market Nutrition Program (FMNP)

- Document how various community agencies can work collaboratively to create sustainable policy solutions
Disclosure

Local area farmer (owner, 2 Chicks and a Farm) and a WIC-authorized farmer in both 2017 and 2018.
What is WIC?

The Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) provides Federal grants to States for supplemental foods, health care referrals, and nutrition education for low-income pregnant, breastfeeding, and non-breastfeeding postpartum women, and to infants and children up to age five who are found to be at nutritional risk.
**WIC Farmers Market Nutrition Program (FMNP)**

**Program goal:** Provide fresh, unprepared, locally grown fruits and vegetables to WIC participants, and to expand the awareness, use of, and sales at farmers’ markets.

- All WIC-eligible women and children in select Tennessee counties are able to participate in the WIC FMNP.
- Program established in Knox County, Tennessee in the Summer of 2017 (July and August).
- Farmers (rather than farmers markets) were authorized to accept WIC-FMNP vouchers.
FMNP Structure (Tennessee WIC)

Under the WIC-FMNP, WIC recipients in select Tennessee counties receive two $5.00 vouchers per eligible household member in the months of July and August to spend on locally grown fruits and vegetables from area farmers.
Initial Implementation Concerns: Logistics

Program did not receive funding until July 2017.

Many WIC recipients did not receive FMNP vouchers until after the program had already started.

Only 4 farmers participated as WIC-authorized vendors and attended multiple farmers markets.

Locating WIC-authorized farmers in multiple markets proved challenging.
## Initial Implementation Concerns: Farmer Perspective

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Concern</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>WIC-FMNP customers seemed unfamiliar with seasonal produce and what to expect at markets.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WIC-authorized farmers were flooded with extra customers which resulted in long lines and quickly running out of produce.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WIC-FMNP customers seemed frustrated at the lack of variety and availability of seasonal produce.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WIC-FMNP customers seemed frustrated about how much a $5 voucher would buy.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Total Knox County WIC-FMNP voucher redemption in 2017
UTK Public Health Nutrition Policy & Advocacy class created a policy brief to address some of the 2017 WIC-FMNP implementation concerns.

Policy required Knox County WIC office staff to provide educational tools that assisted WIC customers in navigating area farmers markets.

Policy brief won the grand prize in the UTK Howard Baker Public Policy Challenge.
Collaborative Partners

- Educating Knox County WIC recipients on the new educational tools & distributing vouchers
- Getting bios of farmers, helping with produce seasonality, marketing program
- KCHD WIC Office
- KCHD Assessment & Planning
- Nourish Knoxville
- UTK Graduate Students
- Marketing program, assisting with distributing program information, staffing on-site FMNP information booth.
- Designing educational materials and evaluation survey
Collaborative Partners

2018 WIC-FMNP Policy Planning Committee

- UTK Student-led policy team
- Daniel Aisenbrey (KCHD Assessment & Planning)
- Fiona McAnally (KCHD Assessment & Planning)
- Sarah Griswold (KCHD WIC Office)
- Lorna Emond (KCHD WIC Office)
- Charlotte Tolley (Nourish Knoxville)
- Kimberly Pettigrew (Nourish Knoxville)
Informational Handout

Distributed at WIC Office

Available at farmers’ markets and farmer stalls.

Distributed at community partners

WIC-FMNP information booth at Market Square Farmers’ Market & New Harvest Park Farmers’ Market
Total of 1739 unique visitors and 5310 visits to the site in July & August 2018
Other program improvements

1. Knox County WIC started issuing FMNP vouchers for July and August to eligible participants in May and continued issuing the FMNP vouchers into August.

2. # of WIC-approved farmers tripled

3. Program was more heavily marketed by the WIC office and community partners
Evaluation Results: Survey

Online survey (designed by policy team) was distributed to WIC-FMNP recipients

- Push notifications sent via text and email by Knox County WIC Office

Total survey participants: 133

- 75% indicated this was the first year they used FMNP vouchers
- 71% plan to participate if vouchers are offered in subsequent years
Evaluation Results: Survey

Knox County FMNP Voucher Redemption Locations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Percentage of Participants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Market Square Farmers’ Market (Downtown Knoxville)</td>
<td>60.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Harvest Park Farmers’ Market (East Knoxville)</td>
<td>46.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ebenezer Methodist Church Farmers’ Market (West Knoxville)</td>
<td>16.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lakeshore Park Farmers’ Market (West Knoxville)</td>
<td>7.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>1.0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Evaluation Results: Survey (n=133)

- **FMNP Information Booth**
  - 35.9% visited booth
  - 75.7% found booth useful or extremely useful

- **FMNP Information Website**
  - 31% visited website
  - 86.6% found website useful or extremely useful
Evaluation Results: Survey

FMNP Program Effects

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Percentage of Participants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Went to the farmers’ market for the first time.</td>
<td>60.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ate more fresh fruits and vegetables this summer than usual.</td>
<td>78.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plan to eat more fresh fruits and vegetables all year round.</td>
<td>81.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learned a new way to prepare or cook fresh fruits or vegetables.</td>
<td>61.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Will continue to shop at farmers’ markets even without a voucher.</td>
<td>72.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bought a fresh fruit or vegetable that I had never tried before.</td>
<td>58.0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Evaluation Results: Survey

Reasons for not using vouchers

- Market times or locations were not convenient: 55.6%
- I did not have transportation to the markets: 22.2%
- I forgot to use my vouchers: 22.2%
- I did not think the markets had enough selection: 0.0%
- I did not know about the program: 5.6%
- I chose not to receive farmers' market vouchers: 5.6%
Evaluation Results: Redemption

Percent of FMNP vouchers redeemed, by year

- 2017: 32%
- 2018: 41%
Evaluation Results: Redemption

Amount of FMNP income collected by WIC-authorized farmers, in USD
Evaluation: Farmer Perspective

- Lines and number of WIC-FMNP customers were more manageable with additional vendor participation.
- WIC-FMNP customers seemed slightly more familiar with what to expect at markets.
- WIC-authorized farmers reported to be pleased with the program.
- We will definitely participate if the program is offered in future years.
- We, as a farm, were able to talk with and educate people on local produce and suggest recipes (directing them to FMNP website).
Sustainability

Nourish Knoxville will take over website hosting duties

Rack cards were printed in bulk and delivered to Knox County WIC office (can be easily reprinted at a low cost)

Informational website and booth will continue in 2019

Program redemption goal moving forward is 50%
Knox County WIC-FMNP program was a success in 2018.

Both online and print educational materials were used, and were deemed helpful resources to program participants.

Community collaboration is a MUST when designing interventions. Working in silos would have gotten us nowhere.

Working with a multi-institution planning team was the key to success.
References


Questions