

You SNAP, We Match: Improving Food Access and Stimulating a Rural, Local Food System During a Public Health Crisis



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Background

In 2018, the St. Helena Healthy Communities Coalition held a forum to develop strategies to improve community health. Participants identified the reopening of a local farmers market accepting Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits as a way to increase food access and improve community health. The St. Helena Farmer’s Market, located in a rural Louisiana parish, launched the *You SNAP, We Match* (YSWM) program during the COVID-19 pandemic (July 2020), offering a \$3 match for fresh fruit and vegetables for every \$1 in SNAP benefits spent at the market. The objective of this study was to evaluate the implementation of a rural farmer’s market *You SNAP, We Match* (YSWM) program during the COVID-19 pandemic.

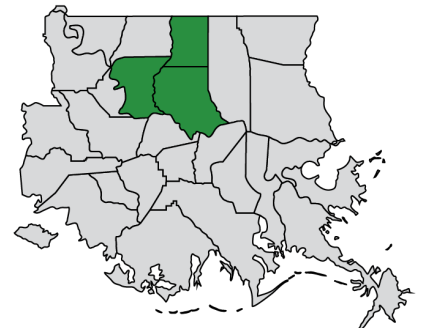
Methods

- Observational data collected at the market:
- Market customer counts
 - Geographic reach (via customer zip codes)
 - SNAP customer data at point-of-sale (first-time SNAP visitors, reason for shopping, exposure to marketing materials)
 - Vendor data (SNAP sales data, vendor counts, vendor variety)

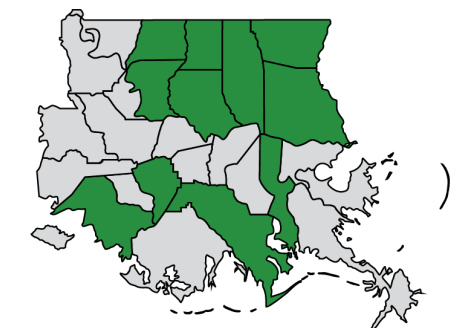
Results

Since implementing the YSWM program, the market has seen a 112% increase in the average number of daily customers. In addition, geographic reach has expanded since the implementation of the SNAP Match Program.

Pre-SNAP Reach

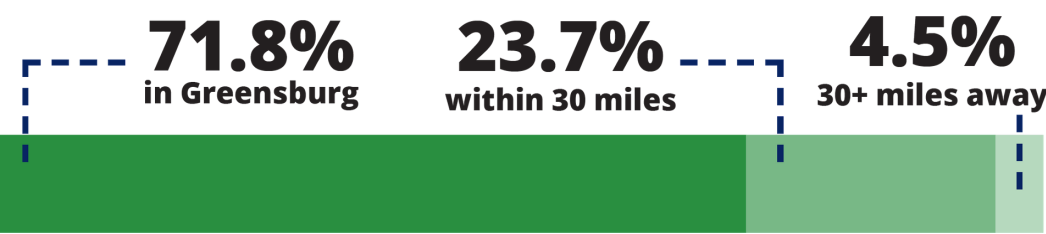


Post-SNAP Reach



Prior to the YSWM Program, the market averaged between 2 and 3 vendors per market day. Following implementation, the market has seen on average 4 to 5 vendors each market day. Additionally, almost 30% of customers post-SNAP Match reported traveling to the market from a town other than the market town, compared to just 5% prior to the SNAP Match Program.

Where are customers coming from?



Sustainability

The YSWM program was initially funded through the Gus Schumacher Nutrition Incentive Program (GusNIP). To address the sustainability of the YSWM Program, a market sponsorship program was created and promotional materials were distributed to potential sponsors. The market has since secured two \$1000 donations from Healthy Blue (Blue Cross Blue Shield of Louisiana) to sustain the YSWM Program at the market.

Conclusions and Next Steps

Throughout implementation, the YSWM Program garnered a substantial amount of publicity and awareness for the market. As a result, the market has generated interest from community members, local producers, and sponsors. Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, the St. Helena Farmer's Market has proved to be a viable source of affordable healthy foods for the surrounding communities. The market is considering expanding offerings through new outlets, such as online purchasing, CSA's, and additional market locations.

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