Utilizing Mobile Farm Stands to Increase Access to Fresh Fruits and Vegetables in Rural Maine
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INTRODUCTION
- This project was funded by the US CDC State Public Health Actions 1305 Cooperative Agreement.1
- Partnerships For Health is the independent Evaluator for Maine's 1305 Cooperative Agreement.
- Maine's state health department partnered with state and local partners to pilot a Farm Stand in rural Maine.
- The aim of the project was to increase access to fresh fruit and produce and increase acceptance of EBT cards at Farmers' Markets in underserved areas.
- Leveraging an existing “Mainers Feeding Mainers” program allowed produce to be available at a reduced price. The Farm Stand maintained the merchant-consumer interaction of a traditional Farmers’ Market.
- The Farm Stand was implemented in a rural town with a population of 922 residents, with an average age of 45 years old and a median household income of $23,229.

METHODS
- The evaluation followed a mixed methods with qualitative priority using an exploratory sequential design.
- Data collection methods and audiences included:
  - Key informant interviews with partners, implementers and consumers
  - Surveys with consumers
  - Direct observations of consumers
  - Focus group with consumers
  - Sales data
- Data was collected between October 2014 and April 2015.

RESULTS

Consumers’ Characteristics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age</th>
<th>61% 60 years or older</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Income Level</td>
<td>53% SNAP benefits</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health Insurance</td>
<td>47% MaineCare</td>
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<tr>
<td>Health Conditions</td>
<td>53% Arthritis</td>
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<tr>
<td>Food Access</td>
<td>47% live 1 – 2 miles from a grocery store</td>
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<td></td>
<td>57% live more than 5 miles from a Farmers' Market</td>
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Key Activities to Successful Adoption

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Quality</th>
<th>Provide high quality, affordable produce</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Location</td>
<td>Strategically select a location based on far proximity to Farmers’ Markets</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relationships</td>
<td>Form relationships with community partners</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marketing</td>
<td>Use a Communication Plan</td>
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<tr>
<td>Use of EBT</td>
<td>Reduce transportation barriers</td>
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<tr>
<td>Produce Availability</td>
<td>Running out of popular produce early in the day</td>
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<tr>
<td>Convenience</td>
<td>Operating hours (10am – 3pm) can be difficult for working people</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Limited parking</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

LESSONS LEARNED

- Developing local partnerships was essential to coordinating logistics and marketing. Important to include state and local stakeholders in the planning process.
- Funding is needed to support operations, Farm Stand equipment, and staffing.
- Word-of-mouth is an effective promotional avenue.
- A central location and consistent hours resulted in repeat consumers.
- Consumers appreciated the price, quality, and availability of the produce.
- The ability to use EBT cards at the Farm Stand increased acceptance of EBT cards as payment.
- Later hours of operation may increase access for people who work during the day.
- Important to connect with farmers prior to the growing season so they can accommodate for the additional demand.

EVALUATION QUESTIONS

- What are the key activities and/or resources considered critical to the successful adoption of the Farm Stand?
- What are the major facilitators and barriers in adopting the Farm Stand? How were the barriers overcome?

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REFERENCES
1. The State Public Health Actions to Prevention and Control Diabetes, Heart Disease, Obesity and Associated Risk Factors and Promote School Health- FOA – DP13 – 1305.

“Developing local partnerships was essential to coordinating logistics and marketing. Important to include state and local stakeholders in the planning process.”

“And some of them [consumers] will stop coming if you're pretty well sold out. So they say: what's the sense for us to stop?” - Consumer

“So we want to be very careful with the messaging because we do not want to have the message be that kale should be 50 cents a pound, because that's not what it costs and the farmer can't afford to sell it at that.” - Implementer

“It tends to be that people using SNAP benefits don’t want to stand out in their community as being in need of that service so if a Farmers’ Market is only running EBT cards on their machine and then providing tokens for EBT users that stands out and then you’re the only person walking around with your tokens and everybody knows that you're using food stamp benefits; that can be uncomfortable for shoppers...” - Implementer

“Very common is a comment we heard: ‘I went to the farm market and the tokens were gone before I could get there’...” - Implementer

“At one of the farmer stands people would say, ‘I went this morning and I didn’t buy anything. I bought the kale and I was still eating it tonight’...” - Implementer

“...“That’s good [the timing] because you can plan on it. You know you can buy this much for that week; next week you’re coming again and you can plan on that.” - Consumer

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