



Pilot Project Brings Farmers Markets to Seniors: Improving Access to Fresh Produce

Situation: Low-income seniors who participate in the food access program known as the Farmers' Market Nutrition Program (FMNP) may face barriers in accessing traditional farmers markets. While Dane County distributes all their senior Farmers Market Nutrition Program vouchers annually, redemption of vouchers has been historically low in Dane County as compared to other counties across the state. One of the reasons being that some areas of the county did not have markets or vendors who were approved to accept FMNP vouchers. We wanted to test whether providing alternative markets with FMNP certified vendors would help increase voucher redemptions and therefore connect more seniors with more fresh produce.

Response: Claire Mance, Healthy Community Coordinator, along with a small team of Dane County FoodWise educators pursued an 8 month planning effort to understand community needs, program restraints, and participating agency roles. After many conversations, they proposed the idea of pop-up farmers markets at senior centers, as they are places seniors already gather for other programming and services. They conducted a number of surveys to gauge interest in this program, build relationships, and recruit farmers and senior sites. They matched interested farmers with interested senior sites to plan their market schedules. Over the course of the growing season, one farmer held five markets at the Waunakee Senior Center and two markets at the Middleton Senior Center.

To complement this effort, they interviewed FMNP certified farmers to ask about their motivations in participating in this program. They created farmer profiles using this information and other fun facts about their farm business, and posted them on the Dane County FoodWise Facebook page in a Farmer Profile series.

*When asked why she choose to participate as a vendor in this project, she replied, "It was an emotional thing more than a rational thing. I really wanted to do it. It bought me back to the market."
- FMNP Pop-up Vendor*



Seniors shopping at a pop-up farmers market at a local senior center

Results: Over the course of the growing season, the farmer held five markets at the Waunakee Senior Center and two markets at the Middleton Senior Center. This was a win for both the farmer and seniors. The farmer reported that at one September market she had her best day ever of sales in her entire career. The senior sites enjoyed being able to offer an additional opportunity for seniors to connect with local food, regardless of whether they were paying in cash or using FMNP vouchers. The farmer really enjoyed connecting with seniors, and she already plans to return for next season and add a third site.

Another positive outcome from this effort was that the farmers' market hosted by the Village of Waunakee took interest in the market at the Senior Center and recruited the farmer to vend there. The effort nudged them to explore becoming an FMNP certified market, and adding this certified vendor made them eligible for FMNP certification by finally having enough certified vendors. This is a great outcome because it increases fresh food access for both seniors and WIC families who receive vouchers through the FMNP program.

For more information about this project, contact Claire Mance at mance.claire@danecounty.gov.

*"I had heard of the vouchers but hadn't seen them in use, so I'm pleased we had some customers spend theirs at the pop-up market. I also really enjoyed partnering with Claire for the marketing, recipes and other logistics."
- Senior Center Staff Member*