

Lucas County

Toledo Offers Pop-Up Farmers' Markets During COVID-19 Pandemic

Providing vulnerable populations with access to affordable, healthy foods

Challenge

Limited access to affordable healthy food options, such as fresh produce, is a major issue in underserved areas of Lucas County. According to Feeding America's Map and Meal Gap, Lucas County in 2018 had a food insecurity rate of 15.9%, which translates to more than 68,000 individuals in 2020. Many of these individuals lack reliable transportation to and from supermarkets, creating roadblocks to obtaining nutritious food options. The COVID-19 pandemic has added many new challenges for Americans, threatening their lives and livelihood. According to Feeding America, food insecurity in the U.S. was the lowest it had been in more than 20 years prior to the pandemic and is likely to rise. It is projected that Lucas County's 2020 food insecurity rate was 21.2%, which is a 5.3% increase over the 2018 rate.

Approach

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), farmers' markets have been named an essential service due to their role in providing communities access to fresh, healthy food during the pandemic. To help address the issue of safely accessing affordable, healthy food options, Lucas County Creating Healthy Communities CHC collaborated with the Toledo Farmers' Market, local farmers, Produce Perks Midwest, the Ohio State University Extension, Live Well Greater Toledo, and Safe Kids Greater Toledo. The collaborative determined that one pop-up farmers' market a month would take place from July to October in food deserts around the City of Toledo. Each market had the opportunity to register shoppers for Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) coupons, the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), and Produce Perks vouchers. As payment for fresh produce, farmers accepted Women, Infant, and Children (WIC) farmers' market coupons, Senior Nutrition coupons, SNAP/double up vouchers, TANF coupons, and Pandemic EBT (PEBT). Safe Kids Greater Toledo, Ability Center, Child Maternal Health, and Buckeye Health Plan were also present at the markets, providing services and giveaways to customers. Marketing occurred through a news release, Facebook posts, newspaper articles, media coverage, and community partners.

Results

The four pop-up markets reached more than 14,500 residents total. The farmers' markets distributed 124 TANF booklets (worth \$4,960), \$361 worth of SNAP, and \$356 worth of Produce Perks. The farmers' market made \$361 from customers using SNAP and \$356 from Produce Perks. The markets also redeemed \$450 of Senior Nutrition, \$285 of WIC coupons, and \$1,135 worth of TANF coupons. Surveys conducted at the farmers' markets revealed that customers were thankful for having the markets close to where they live, especially during the pandemic.



At A Glance

During the COVID-19 pandemic, farmers' markets are providing healthy affordable options to low-income, food insecure neighborhoods while allowing for greater social distancing than a grocery store. The CDC has deemed farmers' markets as essential services and instituted safety guidelines allowing them to operate responsibly. Lucas County (CHC) collaborated with the Toledo Farmers' Market and local farmers to provide four pop-up farmers' markets in different underserved areas of Toledo. Organizers at each market observed high redemption rates of TANF coupons, WIC Farmers Market vouchers, Senior Nutrition Coupons, SNAP and Pandemic EBT (PEBT).



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