

Meals at the Market

How Farmers Markets Can Help to Reduce Child Hunger During the Summer



In Massachusetts, over 200,000 youth live in food insecure homes. Hunger impacts a child's ability to thrive academically and puts them at risk for adverse health outcomes. Low-income families rely on healthy school meals to bridge gaps in their food budgets, where can they turn when school is out? The Summer Food Service Program (SFSP) is a federally-funded nutrition program that provides free meals to youth ages 18 and under. With your help, we can reduce child hunger in the summer months.

FARMERS MARKETS AND SFSP: A WINNING PARTNERSHIP TO ADDRESS SUMMER HUNGER

Farmers markets help build a more sustainable local food system by connecting regional producers with local shoppers. Many markets accept SNAP benefits and WIC coupons which often provide incentives for low-income households to help increase their purchasing power. By providing nutritionally-balanced meals to children during the summertime, farmers markets can increase foot traffic and visibility while fulfilling their mission to reduce food insecurity and promote healthy food access.

"Setting up a feeding site at a farmers market can provide a safe place for children to congregate, increase foot traffic to the market, provide access to a variety of seasonal ingredients, connect children with the sources of their food, and raise community awareness about Summer Meal Programs."

-USDA Summer Meals Toolkit

Farmers markets are also particularly well-positioned to serve as summer meals sites. Markets start just before or after the school year ends and extend into the fall. The majority of markets in Massachusetts fall on weekends and/or extend into the evening hours when most traditional SFSP meals are closed. Markets already serve as community gathering places in a high-traffic locations, making them an ideal fit as potential SFSP sites.

SUCCESS STORY: GREENFIELD FARMERS MARKET

Greenfield Public Schools partnered with the Greenfield Farmers Market to establish a summer meals site in 2016. Summer meals at the market quickly attracted many children in the area as the only site open on Saturdays. The meal took place in a grassy, well-trafficked square in the heart of downtown Greenfield, adjacent to the market.



Greenfield Public School staff handing out meals and local fruit at the Greenfield Farmers Market

A banner and lawn sign advertised the program while both sponsor and market staff walked around to personally promote the program. A tree provided shade for the table where the food service staff displayed large bowls of fresh fruit to build excitement about that day's menu. Children especially loved the weeks when fresh-cut, local fruit were offered – particularly the cool watermelon on a hot day.



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SITES & SPONSORS

Farmers markets can help to provide summer meals to the youth in their community by becoming a “site.” Sites function as the physical location in which meals are distributed. Sites work alongside a “sponsor” which produces or procures the meals in accordance with USDA guidelines, delivers meals to the site, and provides administrative support by completing paperwork and handling meal reimbursements.

KEYS TO SUCCESS

Signage: Display a banner at the table where SFSP meals are being handed out. Additional signs should be visible from the road, entrances to the market and at the market manager's table to ensure awareness of the program.

Staffing Matters: Partnering with a sponsor can help to reduce staffing burdens, but it is vital to have dedicated market staff or volunteers on-site to welcome children, document the number of meals distributed, and ensure the program's success. When staffing is a challenge, local partners can assist in providing additional support. As part of the technical assistance that CNOP provides, we can help farmers markets develop innovative local partnerships and staffing structures that work, whatever your capacity.

Interns & Volunteers: Engaging teens and young adults to help with the logistics of setting up a summer meal site, outreach, or conducting complementary programming can be a tool to bridge staffing gaps when resources are limited. Bringing young people aboard to help promote the availability of free meals to their peers and younger youth helps to reduce the stigma that is sometimes associated with the program—plus interns under 18 can receive a free meal themselves!

Cross-Promoting SNAP, WIC and SFSP: SNAP benefits and WIC/Senior farmers market coupons are accepted at most farmers markets and many offer matching incentives as well. Cross-promoting the summer meal site at your market alongside these federal nutrition programs can help your customers to access vital benefits to extend their food budgets. WIC offices hold Farmers Market Days to hand out WIC Farmers Market Nutrition Program coupons. Utilizing special events and other outreach opportunities to spread the word about summer meals helps cast the farmers market as a hub for nutritious food during the summer.

Ideal Location: There is no substitute for seeing others enjoying their meal to entice kids, teens, and families to participate in the program. By having a tent or other designated eating area you can help create this atmosphere. A tent can offer shade and some protection from rain. In the absence of a tent, a park bench, picnic blanket, or even the shady area under a tree can also work.



Revere Public School staff at the Revere Farmers Market

NEXT STEPS: STARTING AN SFSP MARKET SITE!

Contact the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education's Child Nutrition Outreach Program at Project Bread at CNOP@projectbread.org to find out if your market is eligible to provide free summer meals to children and teens or visit us online at www.meals4kids.org.

