

Mobile Market Advances Healthy Food Access for the Community in Petersburg, VA

August 2020

At A Glance

POP! Market, a new mobile market in Petersburg, began in July 2020. The market operates via the collaboration of groups aiming to address food insecurity by providing improved access to fresh fruits and vegetables. With almost 1 in 3 families in Petersburg receiving SNAP benefits, the Market strives to provide accessibility and affordability to produce through acceptance of SNAP and the Virginia Fresh Match Program (VFM). In its first two months, the Market has provided \$2400 of produce to the community, half of which was SNAP/VFM.

Public Health Challenge

Lack of access to healthy foods is associated with a community having higher levels of obesity. This is true in Petersburg, where two of every five adults are obese (BRFSS, 2016), and the two major grocery stores in the city are located near one another in an area which is not easily accessible from many neighborhoods. The local farmers' market struggles to provide full access to fruits and vegetables for the community. Per USDA's Food Access Research Atlas, 8 of 11 census tracts are considered to be low income and have low access to healthy foods. The City has struggled to find solutions to increase healthy food access, especially for those who can least afford it. For years, Petersburg has tried to bring another grocery store to the city. The community is asking for a solution. In a 2019 Community Survey, 4 of 5 respondents said they would visit a mobile market if available (PHOPs).

Approach

In response to the need, the POP! Market (Petersburg Offers Produce) was created. POP! Market is a mobile market offering fresh, local food that provides the community with the opportunity to purchase produce and maximize their SNAP benefits through the VA Fresh Match program (2 for 1 produce incentive). The Market travels to a consistent community location in a healthy food priority area twice a month. The Market exists due to the integral partnerships of PHOPs (Petersburg Healthy Options Partnerships), Petersburg Healthy Community Action Team, River Street Market & the Harding St. Urban Ag Center. All of the food provided at the market is local, with food traveling an average of 21 miles.



Find Out More

Our goal is to have everyone in Petersburg have full access to healthy foods (especially produce), while supporting and sustaining local farmers and producers. We are working to create systems in Petersburg that will move this goal forward in the future. To find out more about the POP! Market visit

<https://www.facebook.com/petersburgoffersproduce/>

To find out more about PHOPs visit

<https://cphpr.publichealth.vt.edu/phops.html>

This project is supported by DP18-1809 / High Obesity Program.

Results

Though the POP! Market only began in July 2020, there have been four markets thus far, providing the community with access to 120 fresh produce boxes or \$2400 in local, fresh foods. Almost half of the purchases were made using SNAP dollars, which enabled the Virginia Fresh Match Program to render half the cost of the box (\$10) for free to SNAP customers. This amounts to almost \$600 worth of free, local produce in less than two months for the residents of Petersburg who need it most. The Market is currently improving access for over 3500 community members. The POP! Market has been well received by the community! All of customers surveyed said they will return again and 100% of customers said what they like best about POP! Market is something related to its enhanced accessibility (affordability, friendliness, convenience, produce and more)!

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Almost 60% of the POP! Market Customers are SNAP recipients. This means that the Virginia Fresh Match program covers half the cost of fresh, local fruits and vegetables for the majority of community members getting these delicious boxes!

What's Next

An integral component to sustaining the market is its sourcing mechanism. The \$2400 worth of healthy foods sold to the community have all been bought from local farmers/producers to populate the fresh produce boxes. This strategy allows local producers new consistent & additional sales outlets for their products. Since, market staff pick up the food and even provide some needed processing, the process benefits producers further, allowing them to focus on what is most important (growing, harvesting, etc.). There are plans to add two additional community sites as regular mobile market stops. These will be located in neighborhoods with the greatest need (low access/income, lack of transportation). The POP! Market will be held year-round.