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Evaluating and Identifying Barriers to Participation of SNAP Recipients at Farmer's Markets

Many farmers' markets are authorized to accept Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits nationwide. Farmers' markets are a potential strategy to help low-income families access fresh fruits and vegetables. However, SNAP authorized farmer's markets are often underutilized. The purpose of this study is to identify barriers that discourage participation and propose solutions that may increase participation in the SNAP farmers' market program. SNAP recipients were recruited from one non-metro county in Montana. A mixed methods approach was used for this research. First, interviews were conducted with eight SNAP recipients who used the farmer's market and eight SNAP recipients who did not use the farmers' market. This qualitative data was used to inform a survey distributed to the wider community. Qualitative results indicate that the following barriers exist for SNAP recipients to shop at the farmers' market: lack of awareness, marketing and signage and lack of consistent EBT machine function. Preliminary survey results also indicate lack of awareness as a barrier. Potential solutions include increasing outreach efforts to create more effective marketing in order to spread awareness. SNAP beneficiaries do not use their benefits at the farmers' market because of a general lack of awareness of the program. To address this issue, farmers' markets should find ways to increase awareness and establish consistent venues of marketing. Other research has shown that access to high quality, fresh fruits and vegetables is limited in non-metro when compared to metro areas. These results may be applicable to efforts in other non-metro and metro areas to increase access to healthy foods and dietary quality for SNAP recipients.