Prescription for Health
Patient and Farmers’ Market Outcomes

Funded by the Kresge Foundation and coordinated by Washtenaw County Public Health, the Prescription for Health program connects the medical system and the food sector by creating a relationship between clinic staff, their patients, and the local farmers’ market. Health care providers write “prescriptions” for their patients to eat more fruits and vegetables.

Participants receive $40 in tokens to spend like cash at two local farmers’ markets, as well as nutrition education and support during market visits.

In 2011, 311 patients from five local health clinics participated in the program. These patients spent $5,967 on fresh fruits and vegetables at the markets, improving their access to produce and providing local farmers with increased income.

Key Findings:

- The average daily consumption of fruits and vegetables of program participants increased by nearly one cup per day from pre- to post-program (mean=0.7, p<.001)
- 98% of patients who visited the farmers’ market at least once stated they were likely to visit the market again in the future
- 96% of participants agreed that visiting the farmers’ market helped them or their family members eat more fruits and vegetables
- 91% of participants agreed that eating more fruits and vegetables would help them manage their health condition(s) better
- 73% of participants reported knowing that a Bridge/EBT card (food stamps) could be used at the farmers’ market post-program, compared with only 25% pre-program

Participant Demographics:

- 73% female
- 44% African American, 44% White, 1% Asian, 4% Hispanic/Latino and 7% identified as two or more races or other
- Average age 44
- 56% reported having at least one child living in their household

Participants were at high risk for food insecurity:

- 74% had a yearly income of less than $15,000
- 62% had cut the size of meals or skipped meals within the past year because of a lack of money for food
- 62% use a Bridge/EBT card
- 61% had not shopped at the Downtown Ypsilanti Farmers’ Market and 78% had not shopped at the Westside Farmers’ Market before the program

Special thanks to our clinic and farmers’ market partners: Neighborhood Family Health Center, Packard Health, The Corner Health Center, New Hope Outreach Clinic, the Downtown Ypsilanti Farmers’ Market (run by Growing Hope) and Westside Farmers’ Market.
How the program worked:

Clinic staff identified patients for the program based on food access difficulties, chronic disease risk, and interest. Using a Prescription for Health “prescription” card, staff indicated the patient’s health issues and goals for healthier eating.

When a patient came to the Prescription for Health table at the farmers’ market, Washtenaw County Public Health (WCPH) staff reviewed his/her prescription card and provided nutrition education and support accordingly. WCPH staff offered recipes featuring a fruit or vegetable currently available at the market and other nutrition-related materials.

After the educational support, the patient would exchange one of his or her coupons for $10 in tokens to spend on produce at the farmers’ market.

The Prescription for Health table shared the same space as EBT/Bridge card registration and Double Up Food Bucks at the farmers’ markets, making referrals to these services easy and seamless.

Clinic staff outcomes:

Clinic staff reported that the program was personally rewarding, and staff liked being able to provide tangible access to healthy food. After the program ended, staff indicated they are now more likely to refer patients to the farmers’ market.

“[The program] raises awareness that the farmers’ market can be a really great resource for low-income populations. [There is a] common misperception that farmers’ markets are for the wealthy.”

-Clinic Staff Member

Program results:

Program participants visited the farmers’ markets an average of two times, with 65% of participants visiting the market at least once. In total, program participants visited the two participating farmers’ markets 605 times.

Post-program survey results were obtained from 67% of program participants after the end of the market season.

Of the patients who visited the market at least once, 61% used another form of payment to make purchases at the market (see table below).

![Other Forms of Payment in Addition to Prescription for Health Tokens](chart.png)

Comments regarding the farmers’ markets were overwhelmingly positive. Participants liked the idea of purchasing local foods and supporting farmers within their community. They also commented on the friendly and helpful nature of the vendors and the quality of the produce.

Participants indicated the most common reasons for not visiting the market were transportation issues and market days/times not suitable.

“[This program] actually got me down to the farmers’ market more often. It was a good time just to walk through the market.”

-Clinic Patient

“[The farmers’ market is a] great network of people! The farmers were very helpful, very much like a family.”

-Clinic Patient

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March 2012