

## **NUTRITION ASSISTANCE IN FARMERS MARKETS: UNDERSTANDING THE SHOPPING PATTERNS OF SNAP PARTICIPANTS (SUMMARY)**

### **Background**

The USDA has placed a priority on improving access to farmers markets by Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) participants by increasing the number of markets authorized to redeem SNAP benefits. While the number of SNAP-authorized farmers markets has increased dramatically in recent years, the amount of SNAP benefits redeemed at farmers markets has not shown the same increase. This study was undertaken to understand why some SNAP participants shop at farmers markets and others in the same geographic area do not.

### **Methods**

Sixty-five “reference” farmers markets representing 23 States were randomly selected from a list of markets with Electronic Benefits Transfer (EBT) redemptions greater than \$1,000 between June 2011 and July 2012. SNAP participants who shopped at, or lived within 2 miles of, these reference markets were randomly selected for the survey.

Between July and October 2013, 3,247 SNAP participants who used SNAP EBT at reference farmers markets (FM shoppers) and 1,499 nonshoppers completed a survey examining their general food shopping patterns, the advantages of shopping at farmers markets, and the barriers they found to using farmers markets.

In addition, 12 focus groups (6 with shoppers and 6 with nonshoppers) were conducted in Atlanta, San Diego, and San Francisco to collect qualitative data about the benefits of and barriers to shopping at farmers markets.

### **Findings**

**Overall, both FM shoppers and nonshoppers in the study reported spending most of their**

**SNAP benefits at supermarkets and large grocery stores.**

- Almost 97 percent of study participants shopped at large grocery stores or supermarkets, with over 75 percent buying fresh fruits and vegetables there every week or more often.
- About 88 percent of study participants considered good specials or deals and the prices of all groceries when deciding where to buy fresh fruits and vegetables. Low prices of fruits and vegetables and acceptance of SNAP benefits were important factors for 83 percent.

**Participant characteristics influenced shopping patterns and the use of EBT at farmers markets.**

- Women in the study were 1.3 times more likely than men to shop at farmers markets, as compared to data on shopping patterns of all U.S. households showing that women are 1.8 times more likely than men to shop for groceries in general.
- Those receiving support from other nutrition assistance programs, such as the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) were 1.4 times more likely to shop at farmers markets, than those who only participate in SNAP.
- African-Americans and other non-White participants were about 30 percent less likely to shop at farmers markets than White participants. However, among those who shopped, African-Americans reported being 1.6 times more likely to use their EBT card for buying fresh fruits and vegetables at farmers markets than using cash.

- Those with annual household incomes below \$10,000 were about 14 percent less likely to shop at farmers markets than participants with higher annual household incomes.

**The most commonly reported reason for shopping at farmers markets was access to high-quality fruits and vegetables. However, various other factors were also key considerations for shopping at a specific farmers market.**

- Almost 80 percent of FM shoppers mentioned access to high-quality fruits and vegetables as the reason for shopping at their reference farmers market.
- Sixty-five percent of FM shoppers perceived that fruits and vegetables were fresher at farmers markets than in other stores. About 31 percent found them to be just as fresh and only 4 percent thought they were less fresh.
- About 39 percent of FM shoppers believed that the prices of fresh fruits and vegetables were lower at farmers markets than other stores. About 27 percent believed they were the same and about 35 percent thought prices were higher.
- Other important reasons were access to locally grown and different types of fruits and vegetables, helpful staff, and the fun atmosphere of the market.

**Reasons for not shopping at farmers markets generally had to do with convenience and prices.**

- About 42 percent of FM shoppers who frequently shopped at their reference market did not shop there as often as they liked because it was easier to buy all of their groceries at one location, while 35 percent stated that the market was not close to where they lived.
- About 73 percent of nonshoppers stated that they chose not to shop at farmers markets as

it was easier to buy all of their groceries in one location, while 42 percent stated that it was not easy to get to farmers markets. About 33 percent said that the prices at farmers markets were too high.

**Availability of financial incentives was an important reason for participants to shop at farmers markets.**

- Study participants who knew that some farmers markets offered financial incentives to participants who redeemed their EBT benefits there were 40 times more likely to shop at farmers markets.
- Of the FM shoppers who reported that their farmers market offered incentives, 60 percent indicated that the incentives were a very important reason for shopping at the market. They also reported shopping more frequently at farmers markets because of the incentives.
- However, fewer than half reported using more of their EBT benefits at a farmers market to earn the incentive.
- Nearly 60 percent of FM shoppers reported that their household ate more fruits and vegetables because of the incentive they received for using EBT at a farmers market.
- Only 2.8 percent of nonshoppers were aware that some farmers markets offered incentives to SNAP EBT users. Almost 50 percent reported that they would be more likely to shop at a farmers market if an incentive were offered.

#### For More Information

Karakus, Mustafa, Keith MacAllum, Roline Milfort, and Hongsheng Hao. *Nutrition Assistance in Farmers Markets: Understanding the Shopping Patterns of SNAP Participants*. Prepared by Westat for the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service, October 2014. Available online at [www.fns.usda.gov/research-and-analysis](http://www.fns.usda.gov/research-and-analysis).