

Family Nutrition Program Assistants' Perception of Farmers' Markets, Alternative Agricultural Practices, and Diet Quality

Sarah Misyak, MS¹; Meredith Ledlie Johnson, MSW²; Mary McFerren, EdD²; Elena Serrano, PhD¹

ABSTRACT

Objective: To explore Family Nutrition Program assistants' perception of farmers' markets and alternative agricultural practices for themselves and their clients.

Methods: Cross-section design, survey of Virginia Expanded Food and Nutrition Education Program (NEP) and Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program–Education Family Nutrition Program assistants (n = 52) working with limited-resource populations.

Results: Twenty-one percent to 55% of FNP assistants valued alternative agricultural practices, and only 5% to 8% of FNP assistants perceived that their clients did so. Benefits to shopping at farmers' markets included supporting local economies, and food price, quality, and safety. Barriers included lack of transportation, location/convenience, hours, and food prices. Assistants rated the benefits to shopping at farmers' markets similarly for themselves and their clients, but rated many of the barriers to shopping at farmers' markets as significantly lower ($P < .05$) for themselves than for their clients.

Conclusions and Implications: Future assistant trainings should address the connection between agriculture and health, and how to overcome barriers to shopping at farmers' markets for their clients.

Key Words: nutrition education, farmers' markets, local, alternative agriculture (*J Nutr Educ Behav.* 2014;46:434–439.)

Accepted February 18, 2014. Published online April 19, 2014.

INTRODUCTION

The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program–Education (SNAP-Ed) and the Expanded Food and Nutrition Education Program (EFNEP) are 2 of the largest national nutrition education programs in the US. They are directed by the US Department of Agriculture (USDA) and reach approximately 4.5 million people and over 500,000 low-income families, respectively.¹ Traditionally, these programs focused on food acquisition, preparation, and safety, as well as managing food budgets and resources, health, and, more recently, physical activity. Program implementation resulted in positive effects on fruit and vegetable intake, overall diet quality, reading nutrition labels, stretching food dollars, storing and thawing food

appropriately, meeting recommended amounts of moderate physical activity among low-income populations, and quality of life.^{2–5} Recently, USDA encouraged Cooperative Extension to use SNAP-Ed to connect limited resource populations with fresh and healthy local foods through farmers' markets,⁶ largely because the lack of access to and availability of fresh foods such as fruits and vegetables has been tied to health disparities in addition to obesity and diabetes risk across the US.^{7–9} Increasing access, or even perceived access, to fresh foods may increase the consumption of fruits and vegetables.^{10–15} The use of federal benefit dollars at markets also may foster and support local economies and small farms.^{16,17}

The use of SNAP-Ed to connect limited-resource populations with

farmers' markets as suggested by the USDA can be accomplished through several strategies, including encouraging the use of farmers' markets and roadside stands as access points to fresh fruits and vegetables through the use of Electronic Benefits Transfer (EBT) and incentive programs at farmers' markets, which match the value of federal nutrition benefits spent at farmers' markets. Past research shows that eating local foods and using of EBT/incentives at farmers' markets lead to increases in fruit and vegetable consumption and sales.^{18–20}

Yet, for SNAP-Ed to be effective in reaching the goal of connecting low-income consumers to farmers' markets, extensive training and professional development of the Cooperative Extension's Family Nutrition Program (FNP) assistants (the professionals responsible for delivering EFNEP and SNAP-Ed programs in Virginia) are requisite. To date, little is known about FNP assistants' perceptions and attitudes toward farmers' markets and alternative agricultural practices, particularly within EFNEP and SNAP-Ed. The perception of educators and whether they value a program are important if a program is to be effective

¹Department of Human Nutrition, Foods, and Exercise, Virginia Tech, Blacksburg, VA

²Family Nutrition Program, Virginia Cooperative Extension, Virginia Tech, Blacksburg, VA

Address for correspondence: Sarah Misyak, MS, Department of Human Nutrition, Foods, and Exercise, 1-A Wallace Annex, Virginia Tech, Blacksburg, VA; Phone: (540) 842-9711; Fax: (540) 231-7576; E-mail: smisyak@vt.edu

©2014 SOCIETY FOR NUTRITION EDUCATION AND BEHAVIOR

<http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.jneb.2014.02.011>

and elicit behavior change.²¹⁻²³ Considering that EFNEP and SNAP-Ed assistants may represent the target population as paraprofessionals,²⁴ FNP assistants may face many of the same struggles their participants face in accessing local fruits and vegetables. Therefore, they may be resistant or less effective in encouraging these initiatives in practice.

The purpose of this study was to explore EFNEP and SNAP-Ed assistants' perception of farmers' markets and alternative agricultural practices, as they relate to health and perceived barriers and benefits for shopping at farmers' markets for assistants and their clients, based on the conceptual framework that access and availability to sustainable community food systems affect dietary quality and overall health.

METHODS

Participants

Subjects were Virginia Cooperative Extension (VCE) EFNEP and SNAP-Ed adult FNP assistants (those responsible for teaching an adult population). Consent was implied upon completion of the survey. The Virginia Tech Institutional Review Board approved all aspects of the study.

Survey

The researchers asked FNP assistants their thoughts and perceptions about farmers' markets, food, food shopping, food preparation, alternative agricultural practices, and health. Specifically, they were asked to rate and rank the importance of barriers to and benefits of shopping at farmers' markets using a scale from 1 to 10, in which 1 indicates not an important barrier or benefit and 10, a very important barrier or benefit. Barriers and benefits were identified through a pilot study consisting of a focus group discussion and farmers' market tour with limited-resource mothers, with input from other researchers and through a search of the literature for identification of critical contributors and themes.²⁵⁻²⁷ The FNP assistants' attitudes and perception of their clients' attitudes toward alternative food production practices were assessed using categories previously

adapted from Project Eating and Activity in Teens.^{28,29} As with the study by Pelletier et al,²⁹ definitions of these terms were not provided, so responses were based on FNP assistants' perception of the terms. Questions on sociodemographic characteristics (gender, age, educational level, salary, time spent as an FNP assistant for the VCE FNP) and factors related to health (self-perceived health status, cooking skills,³⁰ meals prepared at home, and fruit and vegetable intake) also were included in the survey. Finally, participants were asked whether information on farmers' markets should be included in the curricula.

Study Design

The study used a cross-sectional design consisting of a secure, electronic survey. The researchers developed the questionnaire specifically for this study. Face validity was achieved through reviews by expert researchers and practitioners specializing in local food access and the impact on diet, weight, and health. Questions also were pilot-tested with junior researchers and nutrition students. The questionnaire was e-mailed to VCE FNP adult assistants ($n = 54$) by the state's FNP director. In exchange for participation, assistants were entered into a raffle for an e-reader device. The questionnaire consisted of 49 total questions and required approximately 15–30 minutes to complete. Informed, voluntary consent was implied by completion of the survey.

Analysis

The researchers used descriptive statistics to summarize quantitative data from questions on sociodemographic and dietary characteristics and the attitudes and perception of FNP assistants on alternative production practices. The data were checked for normality using Shapiro–Wilk test; t tests ($P < .05$) were used to assess differences between FNP assistants' attitudes toward alternative agriculture practices and the perceived attitudes of their clients. The researchers also used t tests to assess the difference between ratings of benefits and barriers to shopping at farmers' markets for FNP assistants,

and their perceptions of clients' benefits and barriers. Bonferroni corrections for multiple comparisons within data sets were included. Nonparametric Spearman's rank correlation test was used to assess the relationship between FNP assistants' own shopping patterns, self-rated cooking skills, self-perceived health status, and attitudes toward alternative agriculture practices. All analyses were conducted in SAS JMP (version 10, SAS, Cary, NC, 2010).

RESULTS

Participant Characteristics

Of 54 FNP assistants in the state of Virginia, 52 completed the survey. All survey participants were female. The mean age of the participants was 48.8 ± 11.9 years, the mean salary was about $\$28,000 \pm \$3,500$, and participants had 7.6 ± 6.5 mean years' experience as a VCE FNP assistant. A total of 57% of participants had at least some college education. Mean daily servings of fruits and vegetables consumed by participants were 3.0 and 3.4 servings, respectively. Of the respondents, 36% reported having good health and 58% reported having very good to excellent health. Only 4% rated their health as fair, and 2% rated their health as poor. The majority of FNP assistants prepared their own meals at home either 3–4 d/wk (36%) or 5–7 d/wk (63%) and rated their cooking skills as good (27%), very good (46%), or excellent (23%).

Farmers' Market Availability and Shopping Behaviors

There was a mean of 2.2 farmers' markets in the town or city where the FNP assistants' office was located; 1.7 of them accepted EBT and 1.5 offered a matching dollar incentive program. The mean number of farmers' markets in the town or city where FNP assistants lived was 2.0; 1.5 of them accepted EBT and 1.4 offered a matching dollar incentive program. For 82% of participants, travel time to the farmers' market at which they shopped most frequently was ≥ 20 minutes.

Of the survey participants, only 15% shopped at a farmers' market weekly, 25% monthly, 46% rarely

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/361253>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/361253>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)