

San Luis Obispo County: Cross-sector partnerships for food and nutrition security

Overview: San Luis Obispo County's University of California Cooperative Extension Department (UCCE) leads the CalFresh at Farmers Market cross-sector working group to increase equitable access to healthy food and support for local farmers.

Challenge: In San Luis Obispo County (SLO), 8.4% of residents and 9.7% of children are food insecure, defined as lacking consistent access to enough food for an active, healthy life. Food insecurity is related to multiple negative health outcomes. CalFresh (administered by California counties and known nationally as SNAP) is our most effective tool to prevent food insecurity, providing eligible households with an electronic benefits card to purchase food. In SLO, ten farmers markets accept CalFresh and nine of them offer the nutrition incentive Market Match meaning that for every \$1 of CalFresh redeemed, a person can buy \$2 of food at the farmers market. Nutrition incentives can increase access to healthy food in low-income communities, increase income for local farmers, and reduce food miles traveled by supporting the purchase of local foods. However, when we started this project, these programs were underutilized, most markets did not accept CalFresh, and many shoppers were unaware of the Market Match program.

Solution: Starting in 2017, UCCE staff began convening partners through the CalFresh at Farmers Markets work group. The work group includes partners from multiple sectors, including agriculture (farmers market managers and farmers), government (County public health and social services departments), schools, (CSU, UCCE, local districts, etc.), and community-based organizations (food bank, CAPSLO, etc.). The mission of the work group is to increase the use of CalFresh at farmers markets to 1) create equitable access to healthy food and 2) support local farmers. Through this work group, partners have collaborated to increase the number of markets that accept CalFresh and offer Market Match, provide a more consistent and welcoming experience for CalFresh customers across markets, and increase the visibility of farmers market nutrition incentives through social media, text messaging, direct mailers, materials distribution to local client-serving organizations, press releases, paid advertisements, and promotion at local social services offices, food bank distributions, and farmers markets.

Innovation: At the time of writing, we are unaware of any other County-led cross sector collaboratives focused on nutrition incentives and local food access. The first efforts of the work group were to understand

the barriers local people with limited incomes experience accessing farmers market and nutrition incentive programs and to gain support from market associations. Data were collected through focus groups at public housing sites and at meetings with market associations' boards of directors. These data were analyzed by UCCE staff and presented to stakeholders for additional input and interpretation. This assessment formed the foundation for our efforts, including tailoring outreach material and messaging, convening market managers to provide peer-to-peer support for CalFresh program administration, and development of the Farmers Market Navigator program (navigators). Launched in 2022, navigators are leaders from the community who address the language, culture, knowledge, trust, and discriminatory barriers to shopping at farmers markets that low-income clientele often face. Though there are Navigator programs in other counties, we innovated with a community promotores model focusing on outreach and promotion to *new* clientele. In 2022, the multilingual (Spanish, Mixtec, English) navigators began conducting outreach in the community and attending north county markets to create a welcoming environment and answer CalFresh questions.

Results: Of the 13 certified farmers markets in the county, the number of SLO County markets that offer Market Match has increased from 4 in 2016 to 9 in 2023. We have supported a 463% increase in benefit redemption comparing the summer months (March-August) of 2016 and 2022 (\$21,073 and \$118,569, respectively) and a 537% increase in CalFresh customers (478 and 3046, respectively). Further, since 2017 there has been over \$550,841 in CalFresh and Market Match redemptions at SLO County markets, leading to \$917,000 in local economic activity (based on an economic multiplier of 1.9 for Market Match and 1.5 for CalFresh). At markets where the Navigators work, there was a 172% increase in new CalFresh customers and a 171% increase in CalFresh and Market Match redemption in the first six months alone. Surveys conducted across the state by the Ecology Center show that 79% of participants say they buy more fruits and vegetables due to the Market Match program. These results show that cross-sector partnerships can increase access to healthy food and support for local agriculture.

Replicability – This work is easily shared and replicable in any county where there are farmers markets. The 2022 annual outcomes document below highlights potential collaborative partners and other resources to promote CalFresh at farmers markets. Materials developed for the public and Market Managers can be shared with other counties and there are a many promotional materials available from the Ecology Center.

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Additional Materials

[CalFresh and Market Match at Farmers Markets Videos with Farmers Market Navigators \(Spanish/Mixteco\)](#)

[2022 CalFresh at Farmers Market Workgroup Annual Outcomes](#)

[2023 National Farmers Market Week SLO County Proclamation](#)

[Market Match Flyer](#)

[What can I buy with EBT at Farmers Markets?](#)

[Farmers Markets, CalFresh, and Equitable Food Access in San Luis Obispo County](#)