FARMERS MARKET FOOD NAVIGATORS: A MICHIGAN HARVEST OF THE MONTH™ PARTNERSHIP

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Relevance: A social ecological approach to healthy eating theories that both nutrition education to improve individual knowledge and skills and environmental supports to increase access to affordable produce are essential components of programming. Farmers markets in low-income areas can increase access to affordable, local produce and offer food assistance benefits; however, low-income consumers still face economic, social, and personal barriers to using farmers markets.

Priority: Previous programs reported success influencing low-income farmers market consumers’ attitudes, purchases, and consumption of fruits and vegetables through nutrition education and coupons/vouchers.

Originality: Through a partnership between the Michigan Fitness Foundation and the Michigan Farmers Market Association, the Food Navigator Pilot combines unique elements addressing recognized barriers without directly subsidizing purchases. Over the past two years, food navigators in eight communities conducted outreach to increase awareness of local farmers markets and relevant assistance programs. Navigators provided individualized support at farmers markets, including experiential nutrition education utilizing Michigan Harvest of the Month™ materials, food tastings, cooking demonstrations, and tours to help shoppers maximize their food dollars.

Synthesis: Over two market seasons, navigators had 9,852 contacts with consumers. Vendor and market managers at the eight markets reported that the presence of navigators increased produce sales. Consumers at markets described because that of the Navigator, they were more likely to shop at the market (65%) and eat more fruits/vegetables (78%). The third and final year of the pilot will test an implementation guide, collected resources, and refined evaluation tools in order to support broader adoption of best practices.

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