



Creating Policy, Systems, Environmental Change: Your Success Story and Lessons Learned

Title

Food Bank of San Luis Obispo County Children's Farmers Market: Helping Children and Their Families Become More Invested in their Health

Intervention Summary

There are many families in San Luis Obispo who struggle with the lack of adequate access to fresh and affordable produce. The Food Bank Coalition of San Luis Obispo, or SLO Food Bank, acknowledges this and makes it a priority to provide access to fresh fruits and vegetables to those who need it. However, this often produces new challenges, such as lack of knowledge of how to prepare certain items, an example being locally harvested kale. In an effort to prevent food waste and promote healthy eating, SLO Food Bank has been able to provide Nutrition Education to their clients at food distributions and local schools.

Beginning in 2014, The Food Bank partnered with schools and after-school programs throughout the county to provide fresh produce to students in need. The Children's Farmers Markets serves as an extension of Nutrition Education to encourage families to include more fresh fruits and vegetables in their diets. Similar to a real farmers market, children are provided a reusable bag and mock money, or "Food Bank Bucks", to be used to shop independently for produce to take home and share with their families. In addition to "shopping" for fresh produce, the Food Bank also provides nutrition education in the form of enrichment activities to teach children the benefit of choosing healthy foods and shopping from local farmers. The Food Bank believes that working with youth between the ages of 5-18 allows the student to learn at an early age the benefits of a nutritious diet and sharing with their families what they have learned at the Children's Farmers' Market.

The overall response from the community, schools, volunteers, and the families receiving the Farmer's Market produce has been overwhelmingly positive. The Food Bank has been fortunate to receive requests from multiple local agencies, organizations, and local businesses about partnerships and collaboration. The Food Bank has been able to successfully recruit farmers to come out and teach lessons to the children about growing and harvesting produce, thanks to Robin Song Farms of San Luis Obispo County. We have received feedback from families with children participating in the Farmers Markets; one example being that children have become more willing to try new fruits and vegetables because of their experience at the Children's Farmers Markets. Another example of recent feedback is a family who reported that their child desires to be more involved in cooking and food preparation at home.

Overall, the Children's Farmers Market Program tied with Nutrition Education has been a huge success and SLO Food Bank looks to continue to grow the program and create new sites throughout the county.

Description of Barriers Encountered and Identified or Proposed Solutions

There are very few barriers that are encountered with Nutrition Education and Outreach at Children's Farmers Markets. The implementation of Nutrition Education is very well-supported and seamless, thanks to the abundance of resources and materials available to SNAP Ed.

There are some challenges and barriers, but most are related to the operation of and sourcing for the Children's Farmers Market. It is a challenge to set up times and dates that don't conflict with school calendars or regular food distribution schedules. Children's Farmers Markets require more detailed planning for delivery routes, as the same trucks are being used. More detailed planning is necessary for produce sourcing and distribution, as Children's Farmers Markets might interfere with produce being distributed at Public Food Distribution sites. Another challenge is sourcing and funding for reusable shopping bags and printed "Food Bank Bucks" to be used at Children's Farmers Markets. One way to address the issue was to encourage children to return with the bags to the next market. There were donation requests sent out to local vendors and businesses, which proved to have some success. Finally, The Food Bank was able to obtain funding from Must Charities to print mock money and design and source bags specific to the Children's Program with logos. Some minor barriers also include seasonality and low variety in available produce during winter months, school staff buy-in and program self-sufficiency.

Future Directions/Sustainable Success

The Food Bank Coalition of San Luis Obispo County and SNAP Ed wish to continue to grow this successful program so that Children's Farmers Markets can continue to have the positive impact on the community and families involved. Currently there are 11 sites throughout the county. The Food Bank wishes to continue to increase the number of sites and to have the events occurring on a monthly basis at each individual site.

Another short-term goal for the program is program self-sufficiency; that Children's Farmers Markets could be run internally within schools and school programs by staff, parents, and volunteers. With continued funding and support from the community, we can continue to achieve our goals within the program.

Contact information about this Narrative

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