

Midpoint update for OPOHI awards

Please provide a midpoint update on how your project is going. Please limit your update to no more than 3 single-spaced pages and include the following information using these headings:

Accomplishments and challenges to date: Please describe the accomplishments and progress that your team has made toward achieving the program's goals to date. In addition, please describe challenges that your team has faced and how you plan to respond to those challenges.

The Farmers Market Navigator program has made progress to achieve the program's overall goals of increasing purchases of locally grown foods while supporting the health of low-income individuals by improving access and consumption of locally grown produce. Starting in October 2021, University of California Cooperative Extension (UCCE) staff collaborated with the local promotores collaborative to train community leaders to take on the role of Farmers Market Navigators (Navigators). These community leaders work to address the language, cultural, discriminatory, and knowledge barriers low-income clientele may face while shopping at Farmers Markets. Navigators were trained on the basics of CalFresh and Market Match programs, giving a farmers market tour, increasing awareness through community outreach in Spanish and Mixteco monolingual communities and working alongside market managers and vendors. In March 2022, Navigators began community outreach efforts and attending the markets monthly to welcome new customers and to promote the usage of CalFresh benefits at the markets.

To increase awareness of Farmers Markets in Northern San Luis Obispo that accept CalFresh benefits and offer other nutrition incentives such as Market Match, outreach materials have been distributed to the community through a variety of different channels. UCCE sent 2,869 direct mailers to low-income residents in the Paso Robles community and surrounding areas with Farmers Market information. Navigators regularly conduct in person outreach efforts a day prior to attending the Tuesday and Saturday market. Since February, Navigators have distributed over 1,000 printed materials to the community with door-to-door canvassing at low-income housing sites and at local businesses to help increase awareness of the Farmers Markets. Additionally, Navigators have promoted the Farmers Markets at other events the Promotores Collaborative participates in such as mobile vaccine clinics and other community resource events. The Food Bank Coalition of San Luis Obispo County continues to distribute Farmers Market information at their 11 public neighborhood food distributions in Paso Robles. Most recently, The North County Farmers Market board approved funds to distribute a \$5 coupon for CalFresh shoppers to be used in addition to Market Match for the month of September as a means to draw more first time low-income shoppers to the markets. UCCE staff created the coupon and the Navigators, and the Department of Social Services helped to distribute the coupons to community members who receive CalFresh benefits. Another accomplishment includes the promotion of National Farmers Market week led by the Farmers Market Navigators and UCCE staff. Efforts included creating informational packets with CalFresh and Market Match information, recipe cards, family activities and reusable tote bags

that were distributed at the markets in celebration. Additionally, UCCE staff submitted a proclamation that was adopted by the County Board of Supervisors declaring National Farmers Market Week throughout the County of San Luis Obispo.

While attending the markets and conducting outreach, Navigators have reported that community members often do not know about the Farmers Markets, or that they accept CalFresh benefits and are unaware that they can get additional benefits with Market Match. To address these challenges, our team has continued to conduct community outreach to the community to make them aware of the markets that accept CalFresh and the Market Match program. A challenge that has been most frequently reported by the Navigators from the community is that these farmers markets take place in the mornings when a majority of the community is at work. Due to this challenge, our team has placed an increased effort to also promote evening farmers markets in the county that accept CalFresh and offer Market Match. Another challenge faced with the distribution of the \$5 coupons was low redemption rates. A possible reason cited by the market manager was the increased cost of gas and that the coupon had an expiration date. A possible solution includes distributing another coupon without an expiration date to determine if that improves redemption rates at the market.

Evaluation: Please describe your evaluation efforts. If you have created or used any measurement or data collection instruments to assess the impact of your project (for example, a survey, an environmental scan, a qualitative interview schedule, etc..) please include a copy of those instruments with this report, and, if available, the measurement protocol. Describe how measurement/data collection tools will be used to assess the impact of your project including who will complete the measurement/data collection instrument, how many people that you anticipate will be involved in measurement activities, when measurement activities will occur and how you will use the data to evaluate the impact of your project.

From reports provided by the North County Farmers Market Association, there has shown a steady increase in the number of customers utilizing CalFresh benefits and Market Match in the first six months of the Farmers Market Navigator program. Comparing the months of March to August, the total number of CalFresh customers increased from 80 in 2021, to 212 in 2022, indicating a 165% change. New CalFresh customers increased from 18 in 2021, to 49 in 2022, indicating a 172% change. The total amount of CalFresh and Market Match tokens redeemed at the two markets has shown increases as well. From March to August 2021, the total redemption was \$2,109 compared to \$5,722 during the same period in 2022, indicating a 171% change. Although overall attendance for these small markets remains low, the presence of Navigators and their efforts have resulted in increased redemption of CalFresh benefits and Market Match at these markets. Additionally, having Navigators at these markets continues to serve as a bridge between low-income Spanish and Mixteco speaking community members and market managers, making these markets a more inclusive environment for all community members. In year two of the grant period our team plans to evaluate if having navigators at these markets has improved overall market accessibility and healthy food purchases for low-income shoppers through customer intercept surveys. The Navigators will also complete a retrospective survey to assess their knowledge and self-efficacy.

Communication: Please describe efforts your team has made to communicate to the broader community what your project is attempting to achieve. Please include any press releases, news articles or stories that feature your project.

In addition to the outreach efforts described above, other communication strategies have been made to communicate the Navigator project with the community at large. The North County Farmers Markets regularly post on their social media platforms when the Navigators are at the market and information on utilizing CalFresh benefits and the Market Match program. The UCCE team has highlighted the work of the Navigators and overall goals of the project on social media. The Center for Family Strengthening also shared information on the Navigator project and utilizing benefits at Farmers Markets on their social media platforms and in their June Newsletter, which is sent to community based organizations and San Luis Obispo County residents. The UCCE team has written a success story highlighting the work of the Navigator project to our SNAP-Ed national electronic reporting system to communicate with SNAP-Ed partners and funders the accomplishments of the navigator program. Additionally, the San Luis Obispo County Food System Coalition celebrated National Farmers Market Week and their summer social at the Paso Robles Farmers Market. At the event, coalition members were able to become aware of the Navigator program and interact with the Navigators at the market. The work of the Navigators has also been communicated in workgroups within the San Luis Obispo Food System Coalition including the CalFresh Alliance and CalFresh at Farmers Market workgroup which includes individuals from the Department of Social Services, WIC, and other community based organizations serving low-income individuals and communities. With the workgroup, WIC staff have sent text messages to approximately 3,800 WIC participants making them aware of Farmers Markets that accept CalFresh and WIC benefits. A future goal of this project includes sending a press release to media contacts to celebrate the one year implementation of the Navigators at the markets in March 2023.

Quotes: "There was a customer who was showing other customers all the vegetables she had purchased with MM. She had the biggest smile as she showed her friends what she purchased with EBT & MM. Priceless. We also had a disgruntled customer who did not care for the MM initially as she wanted only cooked foods. With patience, kindness, and education she now comes and buys a few veggies and fruits with a grateful attitude. Eustolia was the best at reaching out" – Linda Market Manager

"The reason I want to be part of the Farmers Market program is to improve and help people in my community. What I enjoy most is communicating with people about how they can benefit from the organic fruits and vegetables that they sell locally at farmers markets. Also, providing information that can guide them to use the benefits of their cards. Finally, encourage them to visit the farmers market so that in the future Farmer's Market will have more stalls selling local vegetables and fruits." – Navigator, Eustolia

"I like to participate because it is a project that helps the local community become more aware of the benefits that are available from EBT. One of the things I most enjoy doing is outreach and participating in Farmers Market is being able to have contact with people and be able to share useful information with them." – Navigator, Rosario

Photo 1: Navigator Rosario sharing information with a customer, Photo 2: San Luis Obispo Food System Coalition members celebrating National Farmers Market Week with Navigators, Photo 3: Navigators Rosario and Eustolia conducting door-to-door canvassing at low-income housing sites to share farmers market information

