

**Farmers Market LIFE: Using Participatory Research to
Expand the Customer Base of Farmers Market Shoppers**
*USDA Agricultural Marketing Service's Farmers' Market Promotion Program
2019-2021*

Summary: Using community-based participatory research, this project will identify obstacles for low-income residents (e.g. SNAP users, families with young children, and older adults), minorities (e.g. Latinos), and others to shop at farmers' markets and collaboratively devise locally-relevant innovations to make farmers' markets more inclusive, welcoming, and inviting for the whole community.

Structural, operational, and marketing innovations based on research findings will be piloted at three farmers' markets to mitigate commonly experienced obstacles to shopping at farmers' markets, make markets more responsive and reflective of the communities where they are located, and expand the overall customer-base of farmers' market shoppers. Promising practices will be scaled to 15 farmers' markets in Sonoma and Marin County through a community-engagement campaign.

Pre- and post-evaluation will document changes in sales, customer experience, and customer demographics at farmers' markets. Project outcomes will improve the financial viability of farmers' market vendors, support regional economic development, and community health.

<p>Project Partners:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Farmers' Market LIFE ● Petaluma Bounty ● Center for Well-Being ● UC Agriculture & Natural Resources (UC Cooperative Extension & UC Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education Program) 	<p>Collaborators:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Go Local ● KRCB Public Media ● UC Davis Center for Regional Change ● UC ANR News and Outreach in Spanish ● Interfaith Sustainable Food Collaborative ● Market Match, Ecology Center ● County of Sonoma & County of Marin
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Timeline	Year 1 9/30/2018 – 9/29/2019	Year 2 9/30/2019 – 9/29/2020	Year 3 9/30/2020 – 9/29/2021	Year 4 9/30/2021 – 9/29/2022
PHASE I - RESEARCH Participatory Community-Based Research				
PHASE II - PILOT Pilot interventions at 3 Farmers' Market locations				
PHASE III - SCALE Scale to 15 Farmers' Markets locations				
EVALUATE - Evaluate changes in sales, customer experience, & customer demographics.				

Project Description:

“Farmers’ Market LIFE: Using Participatory Research to Expand the Customer Base of Farmers’ Market Shoppers” will build on the lessons learned from the **FM LIFE Nutrition Incentive Program**. In **Phase I** peer-to-peer health educators from the **Center for Well-Being** will conduct **community-based participatory research** (CBPR) to identify commonly experienced obstacles for low-income residents (e.g. SNAP users, families with young children, and older adults), minorities (e.g. Latinos) and others to shop at farmers’ markets and collaboratively devise locally-relevant innovations to make farmers’ markets more inclusive, welcoming, and inviting for the whole community. Health educators work in predominantly low-income, minority, and often rural communities throughout Sonoma County and reflect the communities in which they live and work, often speaking the same primary languages and having the same cultural backgrounds. Because of this, they are uniquely well equipped to lead honest and deep analysis of the challenges perceived to shopping at farmers’ markets and co-create innovative community-based solutions.

In **Phase II**, grant partners and collaborators—along with marketing expertise from **Go Local**—will develop research-based, innovative, and locally-relevant marketing messages in English and Spanish. **Petaluma Bounty** along with partners and collaborators will pilot structural, operational, and marketing innovations based on research findings at three farmers’ markets to help mitigate commonly experienced obstacles to shopping at markets, make markets more reflective of the communities where they are located, and expand the overall customer-base of shoppers. The Center for Well-Being will develop and pilot a **Farmers’ Market Ambassador Program** leveraging their expertise in recruiting, training, and empowering community members to become community leaders. In **Phase III**, transferable promising practices will be scaled to the 15 farmers’ markets across Sonoma and Marin County participating in FM LIFE through a holistic community-engagement marketing campaign that reflects shared values centered on local food, farming, and ranching.

Throughout the grant, the **University of California Sustainable Agriculture and Education Program** (UC SAREP) will lead research and evaluation of the project, including pre- and post-evaluation to document changes in Federal Nutrition Program (SNAP, Senior Farmers’ Market Nutrition Program, and WIC Farmers’ Market Nutrition Program) associated sales and ascertain overall changes in sales, customer experience, and customer demographics at farmers’ markets. The **University of California Cooperative Extension** (UCCE) will coordinate the grant and link University of California expertise on regional economic development, direct-to-consumer marketing, nutrition education, Community-Based Participatory Research (**UC Davis Center for Regional Change**), and media and communications in Spanish (**UC ANR News & Outreach in Spanish**).

Expected outcomes are to increase sales for direct-to-consumer farmers and ranchers by:

- Increasing awareness among low-income consumers about the acceptance of SNAP EBT, Senior Farmers’ Market Nutrition Program, WIC Farmers' Market Nutrition Program, and nutrition incentives at participating farmers’ markets; increasing the total number of customers using Federal Nutrition Program benefits at farmers’ markets; and increasing the total dollar amount of Federal Nutrition Program benefits and nutrition incentives spent at farmers’ markets.
- Making farmers’ markets more inclusive, welcoming, and inviting to the whole community.
- Expanding the overall customer base of farmers’ markets shoppers by increasing the number of new visits, repeat visits, and frequency of visits made to farmers’ markets.

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