

National Nutrition Incentive Network: Foster a Culture of Inclusivity at Your Market

Farmers markets are celebrated not only for the fresh, healthy, local food they provide to a neighborhood but also for the intangible benefits: increasing social ties, serving as a hub for the community, and providing a real connection between producer and consumer. As a nutrition incentive program operator, you are invested in ensuring your market is a place where *everyone* feels welcome. Network members from across the country have used the following strategies to help foster an inclusive market environment.

Getting Started: Set Your Intentions

Take a moment to visualize the ideal market environment where everyone is welcome to shop—no matter their payment mechanism, socioeconomic status, race, or ethnicity—and interactions are friendly among customers, vendors, and staff. Brainstorm the following questions

- Why is inclusivity important to the market?
- What does this look like at the market?
- How does this differ from the current reality at the market?

Identify a few key areas where your market may benefit from a shift toward inclusivity. Even if you think everything is running smoothly, seek others' opinions—including those of customers and other community members.

Know Thy Customer

Find out what “welcoming” means from the customer’s perspective. Survey existing customers to find out:

- How comfortable they feel about shopping and using benefits at the market;
- Whether their interactions with market staff and vendors are friendly and positive and, if not, why;
- What types of products they want to buy at the market (including culturally relevant produce); and
- What suggestions they may have for making the market feel more welcome to them, their friends, and their family.

You'll also want to find out what potential customers think about the market. Reach out to community partners who are in touch with neighborhood residents to help you to communicate with people who may not yet have shopped at the market and to find out why.



Quick Tip: Use FM Tracks to Learn about Your Customers

Use the FM Tracks app at your market as an easy way to survey customers. FM Tracks comes preprogrammed with questions that your market administrator may select to ask customers, such as: “How much do you agree with this statement: I feel welcome at this market.” (with a scale of strongly agree to strongly disagree to capture responses). You can also add your own, customized questions. Market staff can either read these questions to customers or turn the iPad around so they may answer privately. To learn more about customer questions, download the *FM Tracks Toolkit* from the NNIN online Resource Library: wholesomewave.org/our-initiatives/nationalnutritionincentivenetwork/resourcelibrary.

Articulate Your Intentions in Writing

Demonstrate your commitment to inclusivity as an essential component of your market's culture by putting it in writing. Consider incorporating this language in your market's or organization's:

- mission statement,
- website and social media platforms,
- training manuals, and/or
- vendor agreements.

Also consider creating a stand-alone market "policy" that outlines your market's commitment and intentions.

Build Partnerships with the Community

Form partnerships with community-based organizations to build ties to the neighborhoods your market serves. In addition to the large groups that serve the community (who may be easiest to reach), seek out the smaller organizations who may have deeper ties to residents. Some suggestions for helping to develop a relationship include:

- Elicit feedback from partners about how to create a market that feels welcoming to the specific population they serve.
- Invite partners to table at your market, and ask if you can table or distribute your program's promotional materials at their site or events.
- Conduct targeted outreach in communities who may not be aware of your market.
- Organize tours to the farmers market with partners' groups.



Conduct Events and Activities

Demonstrate that your market is for everyone through your events and activities. Some suggestions include:

- Conduct healthy cooking demos for individuals and families on a budget; seek out local chefs from the neighborhood.
- Distribute low-cost and culturally diverse recipe handouts featuring that week's harvest bounty with prices priced out per meal.
- Host events that celebrate the diversity of the community and honor the traditions of the various cultures represented; ask musicians and entertainers from the neighborhood to perform at the market.
- Collaborate with the local SNAP office; for example, invite them to the market to provide information on applying for federal benefits (see NNIN Online Resource below).



NNIN Online Resource

For ideas and guidance on reaching out to and collaborating with your SNAP office, download *Partnering with Your Local/State SNAP Agency* from the NNIN online Resource Library: wholesomewave.org/our-initiatives/nationalnutritionincentivenetwork/resourcelibrary.



Network Member Highlight: Fondy Food Center

Fondy Food Center's (Fondy) mission is to connect neighborhoods to fresh, local food—from farm to market to table—so that children learn better, adults live healthier, and communities embrace cultural food traditions. The non-profit organization was created in 2000 on Milwaukee's Northside as a response to a Food Security Assessment that identified a high concentration of hunger, poverty, and dependence on emergency food pantries in the area. Fondy Farmers Market has been the cornerstone of Fondy's healthy food access efforts since its inception—it was the first market in the state to accept SNAP EBT and is a national leader in attracting low-income consumers to the market to purchase fresh, healthy food.

The Fondy Farmers Market is a pioneer on the federal nutrition benefits front: It has been accepting WIC vouchers since the program's founding in 1992, and was the first market in the state to offer a WIC incentive program, providing a \$1-for-\$1 match for WIC FMNP. The market began accepting SNAP benefits in 2003 and now runs a wildly successful SNAP + WIC Market Match incentive program—which redeemed more than \$30,000 in just a few weeks this past summer. On a typical Saturday morning during the height of the season, you can expect to see a line of customers at the market manager booth by 7am.



To create a culture of inclusivity, Fondy uses a number of strategies:

- **Forms Relationships:** Maintains strong relationships with a large number of community organizations.
- **Develops Relevant Marketing Materials:** Print and online communications reflect the diversity of shoppers and vendors.
- **Celebrates Diversity:** Celebrates the many and varied cultures represented across Milwaukee through:
 - Special Events – BBQ Cook-off, Greens Throwdown, and Pho Cook-off are community cooking contests that celebrate the Northside's Soulfood & Southeast Asian cuisines;
 - Seasonal Soul – a weekly cooking demo features neighborhood residents and professional chefs sharing healthy, seasonal recipes; and
 - Entertainment – a variety of musical, artistic, theater, spoken word, dance, and childrens' community groups and professional entertainers are invited to perform at the market each week.

For more information, visit fondymarket.org.

Use Language that Welcomes

The language you use can have a profound affect on how people feel, even if subconsciously. Take a fresh eye to your promotional materials from a customer's perspective; even better, run your pieces by community members to assess comprehension and to obtain feedback.

In your program's promotional materials:

- Use simple, clear language to explain how the program works; consider also showing it pictorially to accommodate various literacy levels.
- Shift the language at the market booth—even just slightly—to proclaim that the market serves all shoppers; the insertion of a single modifier may do the trick: “We Gladly Accept EBT.”
- Encourage all vendors who participate in the program to advertise using friendly, plain signage, such as “ABC Farmstand Welcomes Bonus Bucks Tokens.”
- Translate all materials into other languages as necessary.



Hire and Train Market Staff

Develop the culture at your market by training vendors, staff, and volunteers. Incorporate the following elements into existing trainings or orientations to help institutionalize a welcoming environment at your market:

- Offer cultural competency and sensitivity training to help staff communicate with and interact with diverse audiences (see Online Resources below).
- Provide a primer on federal benefits programs, including a discussion of “SNAP Myths and Facts” (see Online Resources below) to dispel misinformation.
- Encourage vendors to engage with customers about their products; this benefits not only farmers in terms of potential to increase sales but also customers who learn from and feel more connected to the vendor.
- Encourage vendors to use price signs for all products to make their stand more inviting to price-conscious consumers.
- Using the results from your customer surveys, share information with vendors on what culturally appropriate products customers want to buy at the market.

Finally, when hiring new staff, looking for volunteers, nominating board members, or seeking information about the community, look to neighborhood residents to fill these roles.



Online Resources

Cultural Competency: Read more from the USDA's Food and Nutrition Service: *Engaging Special Populations: Cultural Competency* at fns.usda.gov/sites/default/files/cultural_competency.pdf.

SNAP Myths and Facts: Wholesome Wave Georgia created this fact sheet to help people better understand the facts and overcome misconceptions about SNAP: wholesomewavegeorgia.org/tjffcjyb625qtp9ekzotw4riyo8sdu/2015/6/17/snap-myths-facts.

We want to hear from you! What strategies have you incorporated at your market to create a more inclusive environment? What has or has not worked? Contact us and share your experiences with the Network.