

Creating Policy, Systems, Environmental Change: Success Story



Leveraging Partnerships to Enhance Direct Nutrition Education in Farmers' Markets

Background

The Los Angeles County Department of Public Health (DPH) partnered with Sustainable Economic Enterprises of Los Angeles (SEE-LA) to provide nutrition and physical activity education in schools, parks, and community-based settings. In FY2023, SEE-LA created a partnership with the Central Avenue Farmers' Market to provide community-based nutrition education classes at the farmers' market where fresh fruits and vegetables are accessible weekly, alongside nutrition incentive programs to enhance the spending power for CalFresh and WIC recipients. To help boost class participation and retention for effective and impactful nutrition education classes, SEE-LA also partnered with MudTown Farms and Food Forward to provide fresh fruits and vegetables at no cost to nutrition education class attendees.

Classes were conducted at Central Avenue Farmers' Market, which is open rain or shine, every Thursday, from 9am-2pm. The market is in the courtyard of the LA City Council District 9 Constituent Services Center. At the Central Avenue Farmers' Market, community members can use their CalFresh EBT card and WIC Farmers' Market Nutrition Program (FMNP) checks to purchase fresh produce, prepared foods, and pantry staples. Additionally, the market offers Market Match which matches CalFresh recipients up to an additional \$30 for the purchase of fresh fruits and vegetables. These incentives draw many visitors to the market every Thursday and provide an excellent opportunity for SEE-LA to pair nutrition education alongside these robust offerings.

SEE-LA's partnership with Food Forward and Watts Labor Community Action Committee's Mudtown Farms, which are nonprofit organizations that bring fresh surplus fruits and vegetables to people experiencing food insecurity, provided them with the opportunity to pick up produce every first and third Wednesday of the month to provide to farmers' market class participants. Providing fresh fruits and veggies to participants was a means to support their journey towards making healthy food choices.

Body

THE NEED: Challenge

Attendance in community-based adult nutrition education classes has been lacking due to the time commitment and competing priorities on behalf of participants. Despite active promotion efforts and classes being offered twice every market day, participation remained relatively low. Informal surveying of past program participants revealed that adults were interested in classes but were unable to attend due to time constraints and other competing priorities. In an effort to improve class participation and engage community members, SEE-LA partnered with Mudtown Farms and Food Forward to provide fresh produce to class participants. Additionally, the SEE-LA CalFresh Healthy Living (CFHL) team conducted their classes in a central area of the market, allowing participants to utilize their CalFresh EBT, WIC FMNP checks, and/or Market Match before or after the class.

THE WORK: Solution

SEE-LA aimed to increase class participation by providing community members with resources to maximize their time while attending classes at the market. By providing fresh produce and conducting classes in a strategically placed location, health educators were able to effectively share about the available market resources and participants also had immediate access to fresh produce on-site from the market.

SEE-LA's partnership with Central Avenue Farmer's Market allowed health educators to connect lesson objectives with actionable steps participants could take to access fresh produce and limit food waste. Food demonstrations were conducted with each class using market produce that was immediately available to participants. The market location also created space for participants to discuss resources and ideas, such as culturally relevant modifications using unique produce.

Throughout the months of June and July of 2023, SEE-LA conducted two class series' using the Food Smarts for Adults curriculum, as well as single session classes using the Food Smarts for Waste Reduction and OC Nutrition 5 curricula. Lessons were taught in Spanish alongside the market's resource tables in the middle of the market. Staging the class amongst the resource tables at the market encouraged participants to take advantage of all offerings.

SEE-LA's promotion strategies included passing out class flyers, weekly social media posts, and a text message invitation the day before and day of the class. All messaging highlighted the free produce bags, which resulted in increased participation on the days the bags were distributed.

THE IMPACT: Results

Through June and July, SEE-LA conducted two nutrition class series' and four single sessions. The central location and fresh produce for class participants resulted in SEE-LA reaching 103 unduplicated and 134 duplicated participants. This was a 29% (unduplicated participants) and 24% (duplicated participants) increase compared to other community-based settings where fresh produce was not offered with nutrition education classes.

Sustaining Success:

SEE-LA will continue to partner with Mudtown Farms and Food Forward to provide fresh produce for future nutrition education classes. SEE-LA also aims to continue providing nutrition education and food demonstrations within the farmers' markets setting, as the strategic location, access to fresh produce, and resources to participants make for an impactful learning experience for all. Continued partnerships with farmers' markets that are also funded by the American Rescue Plan (ARP), an extension of Market Match benefits, will help continue to provide participants with well-rounded resource offerings that complement food incentive programs with CFHL nutrition education.

Favorite Quote

"I've learned to make more nutritious foods and found out that it actually tastes good" - Adult Participant, Central Avenue Farmers Market, July 27, 2023. Translated from Spanish.

"I learned to cook healthier and to be better. They help me to be better physically and to share recipes with my son." - Adult Participant, Central Avenue Farmers Market, July 27, 2023. Translated from Spanish.

Photograph



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