

Update on New York's Farm-to-Where-You-Are Programs

CSA Farm Express Initiative

Eat Well Play Hard is a childhood obesity prevention project of the New York State Department of Health. The state collaborated with GardenShare, a community-led nonprofit organization, to pilot the CSA Farm Express Initiative in 2009. CSA Farm Express provides fresh fruits and vegetables to underserved and low-income households with children aged 2-10 years old in St. Lawrence County.

To join the CSA, interested parties had to be enrolled in the SNAP or WIC program and pay an advance deposit of \$32. Families could repay their CSA membership to GardenShare biweekly with their EBT card. GardenShare underwrites the cost of membership, so the consumer only pays about half of the standard price. In 2009, four CSA farms and 15 families participated in the initiative for 18 weeks.

The CSA Farm Express Initiative is now called GardenShare's CSA Bonus Bucks program. The program now provides a \$150 discount off the cost of a CSA membership for low-income families. Bonus Bucks is funded through individual donations and grants. In 2011, the program served 40 families. In 2012, GardenShare hopes to serve eight additional families.

This project has received a second round of funding. Additional data and results should be available towards the end of 2012.

Increasing Access to Farmers' Markets

This Eat Well Play Hard project focused on Delaware, Onondaga, Madison and Orange counties. This project coordinated the SNAP and WIC programs and secured EBT devices for farmers' markets in low-income rural and urban communities to facilitate increased redemption of farmers' market nutrition program (FMNP) checks. As a result, many of the targeted farmers' markets reported significant increases in FMNP redemption rates and EBT transactions by SNAP participants. Increased attendance, visibility and variety of purchasing methods resulted in a greater number of farmers participating in the markets as well as extended hours and expansion of market days.

The state now provides EBT devices free of charge to farmers' markets serving low-income communities. These devices are costly and were a barrier to the markets serving more low-income families. Project coordinators are now working on expanding the number of farmers' markets to low-income areas in additional counties. The project currently includes 39 farmers' markets. Nine of these markets are established; thirty are in process.

Farm to Childcare Veggie Mobile

This initiative is a collaboration between Eat Well Play Hard and the Capital District Community Gardens, a nonprofit organization that promoted community gardening, healthy food access and urban greening programs. Capital District Community Gardens (CDCG) sponsors a Veggie Mobile Program for senior centers, public housing projects and other densely populated areas in Albany, Schenectady and Troy. The project initially delivered wholesale produce to four childcare centers and one Boys and Girls Club. Each center serves at least 40 children from low-income families. This program breaks down the cost, storage and delivery barriers to serving healthy produce.

The CDCG program now operates three Veggie Mobiles and serves additional childcare centers in areas identified as food deserts. While it is making positive changes for the children served, the program is costly. The state is hoping that CDCG will find alternate funding to ensure the sustainability of the program.

Farm to School

As part of the Eat Well Play Hard initiative, the State Health Department partnered with the Jefferson County public schools to put to use a recently enacted bill that permits the direct sale of fresh produce to schools. The elimination of a distributor allowed farmers to make an increased profit from the same product and increased the supply of fresh, locally grown produce in the schools.

The Jefferson County schools purchased 6,000 pounds of local produce over just nine months. That meant that more schools are providing local fruits and vegetable and the quality of school meals has improved significantly.

This initiative eliminated one of the main barriers to making the purchase of local foods affordable. The state is not currently funding this program. However, Jefferson County is continuing to purchase local produce directly from farmers. The Jefferson County schools' continuation of this practice, without state funding support, speaks to the likely sustainability of the program.



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