Bringing the Grocery Store to the People: Process and impact evaluation of a social marketing strategy to reduce rural food access disparities and provide nutrition education

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Background
Food deserts have high concentrations of low-income populations; the nearest full-service grocery store is 10 or more miles away.
Mobile markets offer a relatively low-cost, high-impact way to increase access to fresh produce and improve diets of vulnerable populations. However, little is known about factors that make mobile interventions successful.

Merced County is a largely rural county in Central California’s San Joaquin Valley. Its 263,228 residents are spread out across 1,935 square miles. It is tremendously diverse; 57% of the population is Hispanic/Latino, and there are extreme economic, educational, and health disparities.

Purpose
To conduct a process evaluation of the implementation of a mobile grocery food access intervention.

Environmental Assessment

| SITE 1 – WINTON
| SITE 2 – Franklin-Beechwood
| SITE 3 – FAIRDALE – SOUTH MERCED
| SITE 4 – GEH – SOUTH MERCED
| SITE 5 – PLANADA

Methods

| IMPLEMENTATION |
| ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT |
| MARKET COMPARISON |
| COMMUNITY INTERVIEWS (30) & FOCUS GROUPS (2) |

November 2013
• Intervention to address food access in Merced County is established
• Multi-step process
• 5 sites selected for intensive intervention and evaluation

February 2015 – March 2015
• Assessment of contextual features that may hinder or help success
• Publicly available data
• Walking tour of selected sites during truck visit

February 2015 – May 2015
• Survey of produce truck interventions nationwide
• Phone/email interviews with directors

February – May 2015
• Assess community member perceptions of barriers to healthy eating and food access and opinions of Produce on the Go

Market Comparison

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Produce on the Go</th>
<th>Fresh Truck</th>
<th>Fresh Stores</th>
<th>Mobile Market</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Merced County, CA</td>
<td>Boston, MA</td>
<td>Camarillo Co, CA</td>
<td>Chicago, IL</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rural and Suburban</td>
<td>Urban and Suburban</td>
<td>Urban and Suburban</td>
<td>Urban</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Merced County Human Services Agency</td>
<td>$32,000 Kickstarter</td>
<td>USDA, Farmer’s Market Promotion Program</td>
<td>Various donors (money &amp; services)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>California Freshworks</td>
<td>California Freshworks</td>
<td>California Freshworks and NBC Universal Century Solutions Grant Challenge</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Location</td>
<td>Started (ended)</td>
<td>Current Funder(s)</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

| California Freshworks USDA | 20% of budget-produce sales & contracted events | Kaiser Permanente Community Benefit | N/A |
| California Freshworks | N/A |

| Up to 2 locations | One neighborhood each day, 2-3 different locations | Four different locations each day 3 times a week | Three stops per day two days per week |
| Cash, Credit, Debit, EBT, SNAP | Cash, Credit, Debit, EBT, Veggie Rx Vouchers | Cash, Link, food stamps | Cash, Link, food stamps |

| Truck Driver; cashier | N/A | Bus Driver, two employees, volunteers | N/A |
| Bus Driver; two employees, volunteers | Staff |

Key Themes

- SUSTAINABILITY CHALLENGES
- ACCESSIBILITY
- COMPETITION

Community Interviews

Perceptions of Produce on the Go
Participants familiar with produce truck had generally positive perceptions of the truck.

“When it first started it had excellent fruit and here lately I know they went through some kind of trouble with the delivery system, they weren’t getting the produce as fresh as it was supposed to be.”

BARRIERS TO SHOPPING AT PRODUCE ON THE GO

- Quality of stock: Mixed feelings about quality of produce.
  “Some of the fruits and vegetables that I’ve seen there are kind of you know... not... I don’t know if it would be called outdated but they’re not as fresh as some at the grocery stores.”

Conclusions
- Community engagement is critical for success of interventions.
- Consideration of public transportation options and leveraging existing events, retail, and services may improve success of intervention.
- Sites where competition exists provide future opportunity to collaborate so produce truck may provide training and distribution functions to small store owners.

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