

# Sacramento Region Farmers' Market Access Study

*Survey results from certified farmers' market managers in nine counties discussing the availability of food assistance programs at markets*

## Background

**Purpose:** To understand the regional picture of food assistance programming at certified farmers' markets, and how technical assistance could increase acceptance and address managers' needs.

**Sample:** Market managers in 9 counties including Solano, Sacramento, Yolo, El Dorado Placer, Nevada, Butte, Yuba and Sutter who operated certified markets in 2023. Of 72 possible markets, the authors-spoke to managers of 59 markets.

**Method:** The authors delivered a phone survey to all market managers and followed up with 9 markets for in-depth interviews.

## Findings

### Program availability

**Table 1: Program availability at markets**

	Frequency	Percent
CalFresh	35	59%
WIC/Senior FMNP	38	64%
Incentive	20	34%

**Benefits were widely accepted:** 59% of markets accepted CalFresh and 64% accepted WIC/Senior FMNP. 34% of markets – more than half of those that accept CalFresh – also offered an incentive such as Market Match.

**Many markets participated in multiple programs:** 18 markets – about 30% of all surveyed markets – accepted CalFresh and FMNP and offered incentives. 11 markets – about 19% of all surveyed markets – accepted both CalFresh and FMNP but did not offer nutrition incentives.

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## Program Types (2023)

**CalFresh or SNAP:** Participants in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) swiped benefit cards at a central terminal at the market and received tokens to shop with.

**WIC and Senior Farmers' Market Nutrition Program (FMNP):** Low-income families and seniors received paper checks that could be spent like cash with authorized farmers at authorized markets.

**Nutrition Incentives:** The California Nutrition Incentive Program (CNIP) funds incentives to shoppers using CalFresh and WIC/Senior FMNP at certified farmers' markets. Markets or nonprofit partners applied to the program to distribute incentives. Some markets also had private incentive or matching programs.

### Market characteristics

**Markets operated by nonprofits were more likely to accept CalFresh:** Among markets that accepted CalFresh, 80% were operated by nonprofits, 14% by certified producers and 6% by a government entity. This was out of step with the general distribution of operator types in our sample – in general, roughly 1/3 of markets were operated by farmers and the other 2/3 by nonprofits government agencies. For markets accepting FMNP checks, the operator distribution was much more in line with the general sample.

Table 2: Program Acceptance by Operator Type

	Sample Frequency	Accept CalFresh	Accept FMNP
Certified Producer	36%	14%	32%
Nonprofit	61%	80%	66%
Government	3%	6%	3%

**Nutrition incentives were much more likely to be offered by nonprofits:** 90% of markets that offered a nutrition incentive such as Market Match were operated by nonprofits, and only 5% by certified producers and 5% by government agencies.

**Operators of single markets were less likely to accept benefits:** People or organizations that managed multiple markets were slightly more likely than those operating single markets to accept CalFresh and FMNP, and to offer nutrition incentives.

Funding for program acceptance

**Half of markets had external funding to help them accept CalFresh:** Around half of markets reported that they exclusively self-funded their CalFresh acceptance, meaning that the market or its sponsor paid for staffing or organized volunteers, as well as paid for materials such as tables, tents, tokens and other supplies. About 25% of markets reported that they exclusively used external resources to pay for CalFresh acceptance – usually meaning that a partner nonprofit handled all of the redemption staffing and materials. The other roughly 25% of markets used a mixture of internal and external resources.

Challenges and benefits to CalFresh

Table 3: Most common challenges among markets that did not accept CalFresh

	Agreement
Additional bookkeeping and back office costs	67%
Staffing needs for at-market operations	63%
Hard to get information from the appropriate agencies	54%

**Staffing and bookkeeping were the top challenges to accepting CalFresh:** Among markets that accepted CalFresh – as well as those that did not – the most commonly reported challenges were: staffing the booth during market

hours, completing paperwork on the backend and issues with communicating with the USDA.

**Increased sales were the top reported benefit to accepting CalFresh:** The top three most commonly agreed to statements were that CalFresh: increased sales for producers, promoted access to healthy food in the community, and increased different types of customers at the market.

Challenges and benefits to WIC/Senior FMNP acceptance

**Lack of customers was the most common FMNP challenge:** When we asked managers about existing and potential challenges to the FMNP program participation at their market, they most commonly agreed to the statements: that there was a perceived lack of FMNP customers at the market; a perceived lack of farmers interested in becoming FMNP authorized; and there was a lack of information about the program from the appropriate agencies.

**Managers believe FMNP promotes healthy food access:** When we asked managers about benefits to the FMNP program at their market, they most commonly agreed to the statements: it promoted access to healthy food in the community; it increased sales for producers; and it increased different types of customers.

Additional concerns

**Social security numbers:** Nonprofit employees regularly raised concerns about providing their personal social security numbers on SNAP applications. After inquiring with the USDA, the authors learned that this was not required of 501(c)(3) organizations.

Recommendations

**Outreach to certified producer managers:** 31% of markets in the region did not accept CalFresh, and farmer-run markets were disproportionately represented.

**Develop educational materials:** Resources that outline the potential income from benefits programs – as well common models of funding and staffing CalFresh acceptance – could help address documented motivators and barriers.