

Abstract

Objective: To better understand potential supports and barriers to cost-offset community supported agriculture (CO-CSA) for low-income families.

Description: In 2015, formative interviews were conducted with adults (n=41) and children (n=20) from low-income households and cooperative extension nutrition educators (n=20). These same adults also completed a choice experiment to examine willingness to participate in CSA under a variety of price, distance, and produce content conditions.

Evaluation: Formative interviews revealed parents were unfamiliar with CSA, and most were worried about cost, accessibility, produce quality, and selection. Their optimal CSA share would have 8 to 9 items of mixed variety, pick-up every other week, price less than \$15, no more than 10 minutes further than the supermarket, and preferably less expensive but no more than 20% more expensive than supermarket prices. Formative interviews with educators revealed positive views toward local foods and the importance of integrating local foods into extension programming.

Conclusion: Findings from the formative research informed the Farm Fresh Foods for Healthy Kids (F3HK) intervention which was first implemented during the 2016 CSA season and included a 15-24 week summer CO-CSA share (50% subsidy), weekly payments (allowing SNAP-EBT), 2-4 cooking tools, and 9 CSA-tailored education classes. In the Fall of 2016, fourteen focus groups were conducted with F3HK participants following the first year of CSA participation to understand challenges faced and support received. Unfamiliar foods, storage, and spoilage were challenges with CO-CSA; the CSA-tailored classes and farmer advice and newsletters helped in this regard. F3HK participants generally thought the CO-CSA was affordable; they reported that farmers were helpful working out alternate payment arrangements when needed. The F3HK intervention trial incorporates modest adaptations to the traditional CSA model in order to make participation feasible for low-income families. Despite these adaptations, additional support may be needed to promote full participation and enhance produce use.

Objectives

1. Conduct formative research with low-income parents and extension educators to inform a randomized controlled trial.
2. Design a randomized controlled trial informed by the formative research that will rigorously evaluate the impact of CO-CSA plus tailored education on dietary intake and weight status among low-income families with children.
3. Analyze the five dimensions of food access related to CO-CSA, through post-season focus groups. The five dimensions of access include: Affordability, Availability, Accessibility, Accommodation, and Acceptability.

Description

Parents interviewed for formative research (n=41) were commonly:

- women (90%); white (51%) or black/African American (27%)
- had three or fewer children in their household (83%)

Extension educators (n=20) were commonly:

- women (100%); white (80%)
- ranged in age from 24-67 years (mean 48)
- worked in extension for a range of 0.5-40 years (mean 9)

Focus group participants (n=53) were commonly:

- women (94%); white (64%) or black/African American (19%)
- had three or fewer children in their household (81%)
- employed (45%) or self-identified as a homemaker (43%)

Evaluation

Formative Research

PRODUCE QUALITY

"I don't know 'cause I've never done it before, so I don't really know. Like what if the fruit or something is bad?"

ACCESSIBILITY

"Especially if it were delivered! I think for a lot of families that would take away huge barriers, you know, 'cause I'm in such a time crunch and I even have a car, and I know lots of people that don't have any way to get around."

Low-income parents were unfamiliar with CSA, and most had concerns.

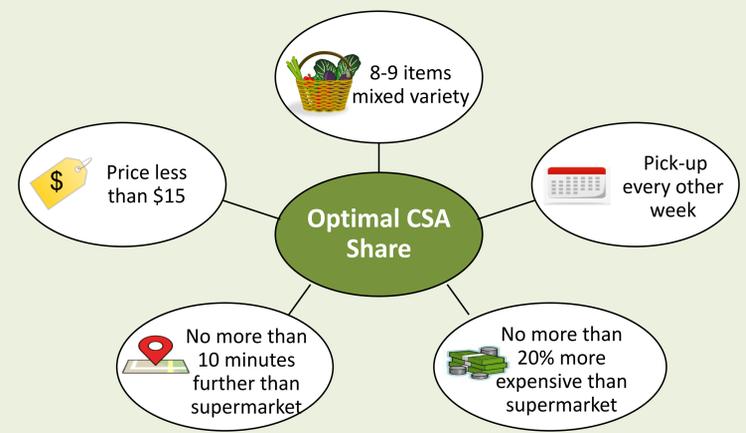
SELECTION

"Selection. Choice. Because I think you said in the beginning that, uh, some of the items might not be available that we choose. So I wanted to know what would happen with that, would they just, you know, give us something that they wanted us to have, or...?"

COST

"If I could pay my portion of it with my food stamps, that would be ideal... If you're not able to use the EBT to pay for it, and let's say I've committed to this, and then I don't have the cash to pay for this week... I might be stressed to commit to something that I have to pay every week, if I don't know that I can pay it every week."

Low-income parents



Intervention: Randomized Trial

Intervention Enrollment

n=305	Control	Intervention
2016	103	87
2017	54	192
2018	--	63



Cost-offset CSA share "CO-CSA" logistics:

- 15-24 week summer share
- Share size and pick-up location selected by participant
- Share price subsidized 50%
- Balance of share price paid weekly (\$8-\$21 depending on share size)
- SNAP/EBT accepted for payment

Selection of 2-4 large kitchen tools:

- Slow cooker
- Food processor
- Chef's knife
- Salad spinner
- Reusable grocery bag
- Chef's knife
- Salad spinner
- Cutting board
- Stock pot

9 CSA-tailored education classes to:

- Improve skills and self-efficacy to:
 - store, prepare, and consume CSA produce
 - substitute FV for energy-dense foods
 - prepare foods to minimize added (solid) fat and sugar
 - be more active in daily life and reduce sedentary time
- Promote the value of consuming FV
- Reduce barriers to CSA produce acceptance

Focus Groups

AFFORDABILITY

"I thought that the cost was very reasonable. [...] We were making more food than we normally were but it didn't impact the cost for us. To me, it's a really big tool."

ACCEPTABILITY

"I know that they are organic so they don't use pesticides...during the end of it there were a lot of cabbage aphids, which I wasn't too certain on how to go about removing them...so I threw away a lot during the end of it because of that."

ACCOMMODATION

"[The farmer] always... I felt that if you were unsure about something or if you stood in front of a bin long enough [...] She would come over and say, "Oh that is such-and-such and this is a good way to use it."

AVAILABILITY

"I think we got overwhelmed with the kale at the end, it seemed like it was going okay, but at the end it just seemed like we were getting a lot every week, and it was too much, some of it did end up going to waste."

ACCESSIBILITY

"I think it was just difficult for me 'cause like, I finish work at three, then get my son from the bus, but I still have a whole, like hour something, to kill...you know, sometimes you just wanna go home..."



Conclusions

The F3HK intervention trial incorporates modest adaptations to the traditional CSA model in order to make participation feasible for low-income families. Despite these adaptations, additional support may be needed to promote full participation and enhance produce use.

Acknowledgements

This material is based upon work that is supported by the National Institute of Food and Agriculture, U.S. Department of Agriculture, under award number 2015-68001-23230. Any opinions, findings, conclusions, or recommendations expressed in this publication are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the view of the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

Nutrition educators

"WAY OF LIFE"

"Um, we've always had gardens...there's always been farmers markets. So it's just a way of life around here. Now that cooperative extension is, you know, puttin' more of a focus on that, you know, that just brings it even further up into the forefront. It goes along perfectly with the things that we teach through cooperative extension."

Educators are interested in local foods.

LOCAL SUPPORT

"Honestly my interest in local foods is just wantin' to help...to know where my food is comin' from, and support my community as much as possible, or at least my state's economy."

AGRICULTURAL TIES

"My in-laws have a farm...and I work on that farm. It's associated with a camp that grows 70 percent of its own food, and the kids participate in growing that food."