Farmers Feeding Utah: An Innovative Approach to Increasing Healthy Food Access and Supporting Local Agriculture

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Background

At the onset of COVID-19 in March 2020, Utah saw a 300% increase in the need for food assistance. Food pantries reported not having enough food to support the increased need. Additionally, the agriculture sector experienced significant disruptions due to market losses, processing shortages, and labor supply issues. These supply chain disturbances left many Utah farmers without a market for their products.

In response to these crises, Utah State University Extension's Create Better Health (SNAP-Ed) partnered with the Utah Farm Bureau and Miracle of Agriculture Foundation to develop Farmers Feeding Utah (FFU). FFU established a food system change that connects families in need to nutrient-dense, fresh, local food.

FFU is targeted towards food insecure families and struggling farmers. Families experiencing intergenerational poverty are given priority at the food distribution events. Locations for FFU events are identified by need, based on increases in unemployment and SNAP enrollment.

Objective

Farmers Feeding Utah (FFU) aims to help Utah farmers and families who have been impacted by COVID-19. FFU temporarily improves participants’ food security, increases the availability of fresh, local food in pantries, and provides product outlets for farmers.

Program Description

Individual and corporate donations are collected by FFU to purchase nutrient-dense, locally produced foods to distribute to those in need. Additional products are donated by farmers, ranchers, and organizations. The agricultural commodities are distributed directly to families in need through pop-up food pantry events or donated to food pantries. Foods distributed have included a variety of fresh vegetables and fruit, pork, goat, live sheep, beef, eggs, cheese, milk, and yogurt. Culturally appropriate foods are distributed when possible.

Methods

FFU collects participant data at the distribution events, including the household size of those reached and effective marketing strategies. Additionally, the number of farmers and food pantries supported by the program and pounds of food donated are collected.

Results

Since May 2020, FFU has carried out 14 food distributions and 8 smaller projects in urban and rural locations, including in the Navajo Nation, resulting in:

- Over 1.5 million lbs. of nutrient-dense food distributed
- $3,196,707.42 in total value donated
- Over 23,064 Utah families served
- 31 local pantries assisted
- Donors of Utah farmers and ranchers helped throughout Utah

Participant Quotes

- “Thank you so much! I know me and my husband worried we wouldn’t have food the next few days. This helped us so so so much!!!”
- “For the Navajo people, sheep is life. People tell me it has given them hope and helps them know someone cares about them. You will see people here very happy to get sheep, and they will utilize every bit.”
- “This was wonderful!! We got extra and took it around to families we knew who were in need. Thank you!”

Conclusions

While FFU was developed in response to COVID-19, the need for food system changes to better connect individuals experiencing food insecurity with local products will remain beyond the pandemic. FFU is dedicated to finding sustainable solutions towards a more equitable regional food system.

References


SNEB Competencies

Food and Nutrition Policy: 5.5
Agricultural Production and Food Systems: 6.4

For More Information

Visit the following websites for more information
- Farmersfeedingutah.org/about-us
- Extension.usu.edu/fscreate/farmers_feeding_utah