

# You SNAP, We Match: Improving Food Access and Stimulating a Rural, Local Food System During a Public Health Crisis



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## Background

In 2018, the St. Helena Healthy Communities Coalition held a forum to develop strategies to improve community health. Participants identified the reopening of a local farmers market accepting Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits as a way to increase food access and improve community health. The St. Helena Farmer's Market, located in a rural Louisiana parish, launched the *You SNAP, We Match* (YSWM) program during the COVID-19 pandemic (July 2020), offering a \$3 match for fresh fruit and vegetables for every \$1 in SNAP benefits spent at the market. The objective of this study was to evaluate the implementation of a rural farmer's market *You SNAP, We Match* (YSWM) program during the COVID-19 pandemic.

## Methods

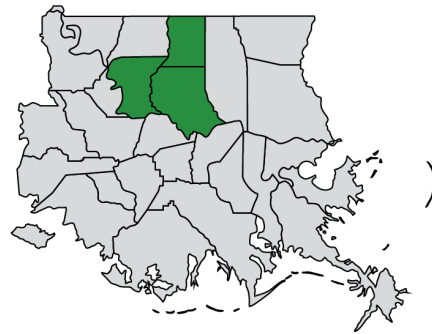
Observational data collected at the market:

- Market customer counts
- Geographic reach (via customer zip codes)
- SNAP customer data at point-of-sale (first-time SNAP visitors, reason for shopping, exposure to marketing materials)
- Vendor data (SNAP sales data, vendor counts, vendor variety)

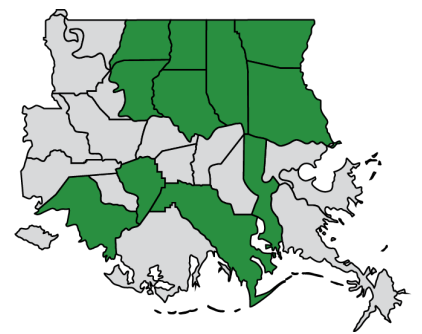
## Results

Since implementing the YSWM program, the market has seen a 112% increase in the average number of daily customers. In addition, geographic reach has expanded since the implementation of the SNAP Match Program.

### Pre-SNAP Reach



### Post-SNAP Reach



Prior to the YSWM Program, the market averaged between 2 and 3 vendors per market day. Following implementation, the market has seen on average 4 to 5 vendors each market day. Additionally, almost 30% of customers post-SNAP Match reported traveling to the market from a town other than the market town, compared to just 5% prior to the SNAP Match Program.

## Where are customers coming from?



## Sustainability

The YSWM program was initially funded through the Gus Schumacher Nutrition Incentive Program (GusNIP). To address the sustainability of the YSWM Program, a market sponsorship program was created and promotional materials were distributed to potential sponsors. The market has since secured two \$1000 donations from Healthy Blue (Blue Cross Blue Shield of Louisiana) to sustain the YSWM Program at the market.

## Conclusions and Next Steps

Throughout implementation, the YSWM Program garnered a substantial amount of publicity and awareness for the market. As a result, the market has generated interest from community members, local producers, and sponsors.

Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, the St. Helena Farmer's Market has proved to be a viable source of affordable healthy foods for the surrounding communities. The market is considering expanding offerings through new outlets, such as online purchasing, CSA's, and additional market locations.

*This project was made possible with funding from the Centers for Disease Control (CDC).*