

Farmers Market Mini Lesson

Keeping local food affordable: How to use your SNAP benefits at a farmer's market.

Goal: The goal of this lesson is to help your participants understand that many farmers markets now accept EBT cards, the steps for using an EBT card at the market, and what to expect when shopping at a farmers market.

Preparation: Please visit your local farmers market before teaching this lesson so you can answer any questions confidently. You may want to take photos of the market to show your participants. To make your participants feel especially welcome at the market, ask the market manager if she/he would be will to come visit your class OR give your class a tour of the market.

Supplies:

Post-its and pens

Lesson

Introduction

PA: We are hearing a lot lately about local food. Do you know what the term local food means? If you aren't sure, what do you think it means? *Eating locally has a few different definitions, but basically it means buying food that was grown in or near your community. Much of the food we eat is shipped over hundreds of miles. Eating local food often means the food is less processed, since you buy the fruits and vegetables in their natural state instead of having been made into a frozen meal or other processed food. This allows you to control salt, sugar and other additives when you cook.*

Engagement

PA: Is eating locally something you think about when shopping? Why or why not? Do you know where to buy local food? *Some supermarkets sell local food, but the easiest place to get it is from a farmers market.*

Activity

PA: Let's do a quick activity to show what we mean when we say local food. This activity is to show you the miles your food travels to get to you. All fruits and vegetables are healthy, and all count towards what you should try to eat every day!

Clear a space on the wall or on a table top. Put a post it on the far right with the word "Dinner table" on it. This represents your participant's family, eating the food we will purchase. Put another post it on the far left, with the word "California farm" on it, and another post it close to the "Dinner table" post it with the word "Virginia farm" on it.

PA: We are going to track the food from both farms to your plate. We are tracking food from California because that is where a majority of food is grown in the US.

Give your participants post it's and pens.

PA: Working backwards, where do you buy food? *Have the participants put a post it for the supermarket near the "Dinner table" post it.*

How did the food get to the market? *Have the participants put a post it for a truck between the supermarket post it and the California farm post it.*

OK, it probably took 3 days for the truck to get here, so put 2 more truck post it's there, leading back to our farm in California. *Have the participants put 2 more truck post its between the first truck post it and the California farm post it.*

And how did the food get on the truck? *Have the participants put a post it with the word "picking/packing" on it between the last truck post it and the California farm post it.*

OK. All of these post it's represent steps in the process for getting food to your tables. Each step takes time, so there are many days between picking the food and the day we eat it. What about our local farmers market? We still have to pick it and pack it, *(put one post it down)* and truck it to market *(put another post it down)* and sell it at the market *(put another post it down)* but because the farm is so close, many farmers pick their produce the day before they sell it. This means what you get at a farmers market is extra fresh and full of nutrients. The fruit and vegetables are picked when they are ripe, instead of close to ripe. Many people feel that the fruits and vegetables from a farmers market taste different than the ones from a supermarket. Try it! You might like something you thought you didn't!

Discussion

PA: Who has shopped or does shop at a farmers' market?

PA: What are the differences between the farmers' market and regular markets?

- a. Price- some things cost more, and some things cost less. Some farmers markets offer to double SNAP benefits, and this can be a great way to cut the cost of expensive items in half.
- b. Seasonality- Some farmers markets only have produce which is grown in that particular season. For example: asparagus and strawberries will only be found in the spring
- c. Place-based- They only sell what can grow in Virginia. For example, oranges may not be available.
- d. Physical layout- Each market is different! Some are tents, some are under wooden roofs, some are inside.
- e. Schedule- Markets are usually once or twice a week for a few hours. Find out the schedule before you go!

PA: Why would you shop at farmers' markets?

- a. You can use your SNAP benefits
- b. Matching-fund programs can stretch your SNAP benefits
- c. Freshness of the food
- d. Fun! Often there is music or other events
- e. May encourage kids to try new foods if they can pick it out themselves

PA: Let's go over how best to shop at a farmer's market, since it can be a bit different than what we talked about for shopping at a super market.

- a. Using your SNAP benefits (step by step directions on EBT usage)
 - o Find the market manager's information table. Look for signs that say "Use your EBT card here."
 - o The manager will swipe your EBT card for the amount you request.
 - o You will receive \$1 wooden tokens. These tokens act like cash in the market.
 - o Use your tokens to buy fruit, vegetables, meat, eggs, herbs, baked goods and more!
 - o Tokens don't expire, so hold on to them for your next visit if you have any left over.
 - o At some markets, each farmer will have an EBT machine, so there are no tokens and you pay each farmer with your EBT card.
 - o Most markets use the token system though, so look for the information table to ask the first time you go.
- b. Matching fund programs ****If available in your area**
 - o Some markets will double the SNAP funds spent at the market. So if you spend \$5 of your SNAP dollars, you get another \$5 to spend at the market.
- c. Budgeting
 - a. Compare prices and quality before buying. When you first arrive at the market, do a lap around the market to see who is selling what and the prices. Most of the farmers will sell at about the same price, but see who is selling the best *quality* at that price.
 - b. Save tokens you don't use! This can help you budget for the end of the month if you buy a larger amount of tokens at the beginning of the month, you can hold onto them for the end of the month.
 - c. Ask the market manager if any farmers are able to sell in bulk, or sell "seconds", which are slightly bruised fruits and vegetables.
 - d. Go late in the selling day! Most farmers will be more willing to make a deal closer to market close so they don't have to truck their food home again. This is recommended if you have a relationship with that farmer and have shopped with them before.
 - e. Hagging isn't recommended, farmers work to be competitive in their pricing already.

- d. What you can find
 - If there is something you really want, buy it first! Some things sell out quickly.
 - Each market is different, but most sell fruit, vegetables, eggs, herbs, meat and baked goods.
 - The produce is local, which means it is seasonal. Knowing what is in season can help you have a general plan of what to buy.
- e. How you navigate
 1. Take a walk around the market to compare prices and see what each vendor is selling. Most farmers will have similar prices, but you want to find *the best quality for the price*.
 2. Visit the EBT stand at the manager's table and get your tokens. There may also be recipes and other information available. Now you can shop!
 3. Feel free to ask questions, both at the manager's table and to the vendors. Ask about produce if you don't recognize it or know how to cook it- everyone does! Farmers love to talk about their produce.
- f. Differences in food
 - Food is less processed. There may be "greens" on your carrots and dirt on your potatoes.
 - Always wash your produce before eating.
 - "Greens" on carrots and beets can be eaten! Sauté with olive oil and garlic. Ask the farmer if you aren't sure.
 - Chickens from the market are usually whole. Roast them, or make soup.
 - When you aren't sure how to cook a vegetable, roasting it on a baking sheet in the oven at 350 degrees with olive oil, salt, pepper and garlic is usually an easy answer. Mix it up with different herbs, lemon juice, or nuts for new tastes.

How to find a farmers' market

- g. PA should have information on local markets, which accepts EBT and who has a matching fund program
- h. Show DSS website link: You can look up market locations online at:
<http://www.vdacs.virginia.gov/vagrown/index.shtml>



www.ext.vt.edu

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) is an equal opportunity provider and employer. This material is funded by USDA's Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program – SNAP which provides nutrition assistance to people with low income. It can help you buy nutritious foods for a better diet. To find out more, contact your county or city Department of Social Services or to locate your county office call toll-free: 1-800-552-3431 (M-F 8:15-5:00, except holidays). By calling your local DSS office, you can get other useful information about services.

Virginia Cooperative Extension programs and employment are open to all, regardless of race, color, national origin, sex, religion, age, disability, political beliefs, sexual orientation, genetic information, marital, family, or veteran status, or any other basis protected by law. An equal opportunity/affirmative action employer. Issued in furtherance of Cooperative Extension work, Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University, Virginia State University, and the U.S. Department of Agriculture cooperating. Edwin J. Jones, Director, Virginia Cooperative Extension, Virginia Tech, Blacksburg; Jewel E. Hairston, Administrator, 1890 Extension Program, Virginia State, Petersburg.