

Success Story

Power of Produce (POP) Club Builds Youth Excitement for Locally Grown Fruits and Vegetables

SUMMARY

In 2017, **Maine SNAP-Ed** and the **Sanford Farmers' Market** teamed up to create a **Power of Produce (POP) Club**. The program encourages York County kids to engage in the local food system and eat more fruits and vegetables from neighboring farms. POP Club is a farmers market model used across the nation. It is designed to teach youth and adults about the importance of healthy eating. Children in kindergarten through 8th grade who participate in the Sanford Farmers' Market club receive **\$2 tokens to purchase fresh fruits and vegetables**. The tokens empower kids to select fruits and vegetables they would like to try, and they are encouraged to have conversations with farmers as they shop. POP Club also provides **nutrition education games, tasting opportunities, and food demonstrations**. In 2018, the Sanford POP Club reached **175 youth** over the course of the market season. The program is ongoing, promoting the local farmers market experience to children and their families every week from May through November.



CHALLENGE

In the United States, **only 1 in 10 children eat the recommended servings of fruits and vegetables**. One third of children are overweight or obese. In Maine, one of the most obese states in the nation, **41% of children are overweight or obese**. When families have difficulty accessing healthy food because of cost and availability, children could be at a greater risk for obesity and diet-related diseases such as diabetes.



Maine SNAP-Ed

Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program – Education

Maine SNAP-Ed is a **USDA-funded program** that teaches low-income Mainers skills to make healthier lifestyle choices. By making sustainable changes to the environment, Nutrition Educators are fostering healthy behaviors that aim to **reduce the burden of obesity across Maine**.

In 2019, **17 SNAP-Ed Nutrition Educators** are working to **increase access to local fresh fruits and vegetables** for kids, families, and older adults. Eight of these were working in farmers markets.

Power of Produce is a national program used across the nation that has a set of 50 tools, guides, and templates to help communities engage younger customers in farmers markets. This program was developed in Oregon and is being supported nationally through the non-profit Farmers Market Coalition.



SOLUTION

In 2017, the Sanford Farmers' Market manager learned about POP Club from a Minnesota farmers market. The program had experienced an increase in kids eating fruits and vegetables and an increase in people attending the market. With the help of Maine SNAP-Ed, the program was piloted in Maine. To launch POP Club, the market manager raised \$1,300 in community donations and created the wooden tokens on his farm. That first year, **349 POP tokens were distributed to 139 kids in kindergarten through 8th grade.** A survey of program participants found that 85% of parents reported that they are attending the farmers market more often because of the POP Club, and 100% of surveyed children enjoyed the intervention. Their favorite foods were cucumbers, cherries, tomatoes, and apples.

The Maine SNAP-Ed Nutrition Educator develops a weekly market calendar that provides educational programming for the entire market season. Typical youth activities are produce scavenger hunts and games such as "Guess the Fruit or Veggie" or "Herb Tasting." After participating in POP Club, **two-thirds of the parents report that their children are more excited to try new fruits and vegetables.**



SUSTAINING SUCCESS

The Sanford POP Club is now in its third season. There have been some challenges along the way, including the difficulty of raising funds to cover the tokens for the full market season. The Maine SNAP-Ed **Nutrition Educator helps support fundraising efforts** by highlighting program successes and is actively involved in recruiting volunteers to help sustain the program. As the intervention takes root in the community, **market support has continued and grown.** In 2019, information booth attendants employed by the market started giving out the POP Club tokens and providing information about the club – making it more convenient for families as they enter the market. **Maine SNAP-Ed has provided guidelines, resources, and signage** to ensure the club can be maintained by volunteers and market staff, and the Nutrition Educator promotes POP Club during youth and adult direct education classes in the York County area. The partnership continues to flourish, allowing youth to connect with their local farmers and experience the **power of fresh fruits and vegetables.**

"It really motivated us to come to the market: the kids loved it and reminded me on Saturday!"
— Parent

For more Success Stories from the Maine SNAP-Ed program or to get in touch with your local Nutrition Educator, please visit www.mainesnap-ed.org.

Data sources are available upon request by emailing mainesnap-ed@une.edu.

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