Literature Review:  
Barriers for Low-Income Individuals to Access Farmers’ Markets

I. Goal  
To increase participation of low-income individuals and families in farmers’ markets in San Luis Obispo County. Farmers’ market participation is associated with increased consumption of fruits and vegetables which is beneficial to overall health and prevents chronic diseases (Freedman 2016).

II. Barriers to Access Farmers’ Markets  

A. Lack of Knowledge  
- Do not know the location and hours of farmers’ markets (Grace 2007)  
- Do not know which farmers’ markets accept EBT (Leone 2012)  
  - Belief that farmers’ markets do not accept EBT (Freedman 2016)  
- Do not know how to utilize EBT benefits at Farmers’ Markets (Leone 2012)  
- Do not know how to properly prepare fruits and vegetables for consumption (Leone 2012)

In a 2008 survey of EBT users in North Carolina, barriers to accessing farmers markets were lack of knowledge of location (35%) and hours (14%) (Leone 2012).

B. Perceived Cost of Products  
- Not being able to buy in bulk is a perceived cost to low-income families who purchase in bulk to save on expenses (Berney 2013)  
- Poor financial literacy (Freedman 2014)

In a 2008 survey of EBT users in North Carolina, 26% reported cost as a barrier to purchasing fruits and vegetables (Leone 2012). In a South Carolina survey of EBT users, 47% reported cost of food and 27% reported budgetary restrictions are barriers to purchasing fruits and vegetables at farmers’ markets (Freedman 2014). A farmers’ market customer in Nashville, Tennessee said, “I know the peaches are worth the price but I just don’t have the money to buy them.”

C. Transportation  
- Lack of access to public transport, bikes, cars, and inability to walk to farmers’ markets (Leone 2012)

In a 2008 Survey of EBT users in North Carolina, 10% reported lack of access to public transportation as a barrier to attend farmers’ markets (Leone 2012).

D. Convenience  
- Short, limited hours make farmers’ markets difficult to fit into the schedules of working families (Grace 2007; Leone 2012)  
- Families can not purchase all their necessities at farmers’ markets and find it more convenient to purchase groceries at a ‘one-stop-shop’ (Berney 2013)  
- Purchasing fruits and vegetables is inconvenient because they take longer to prepare, spoil quickly and take up too much storage space (Grace 2007)
- Cash-only farmers’ markets (inability to purchase goods with credit and debit cards) (Freedman 2016)
- Convenient location of the farmers’ market (ex. Located close to a bus stop) (Freedman 2016)

E. Product Availability
- Some individuals prefer to have the same selection of goods year-round which makes the variability of seasonal goods at farmers’ markets a drawback (Grace 2007)
- Belief that the food variety at farmers’ markets is limited and a desire for more ethnic food options, eggs, meat, dairy and non food products (Freedman 2016)

F. Stigma and Exclusivatory Culture
- The main demographic at farmers’ markets is highly-educated, affluent, white females which can be intimidating and exclusive for low-income individuals and minorities (Eastwood 1999)
- Employees at farmers’ markets reach out to low-income individuals and minorities less as customers than their high-income and white counterparts because there is a stigma that low-income individuals do not place the same value on local views. This creates an unwelcome atmosphere (Guthman 2008)
- Lack of racial/ethnic diversity in the market space (Freedman 2016)

III. Strategies to Remove Barriers to Farmers’ Market Access

A. Improve Marketing Techniques
- Changing messaging to improve perception of farmers’ markets. For example, studies found that low-income customers prefered marketing that emphasizes quality, freshness, healthfulness and taste of food (Freedman 2016)
  - One study found that there was negative connotation around the term ‘organic’ because of the perceived cost of organic products (Grace et al. 2007)
- Marketing that emphasizes financial literacy (ex. Comparing prices) and nutrition education
- Focused advertisements for low-income populations (ex. Public transportation, community centers, libraries, direct mailing to SNAP households)
- Advertising at the beginning of the month when SNAP beneficiaries will be receiving their benefits
- Marketing that debunks myths and increases SNAP awareness

B. Community Engagement
- Partnering with organizations that target low-income and minority populations (ex. Food banks, health centers and hospitals, WIC)
- Maintain and enhance connection between public transit and farmers markets
- Direct interaction with SNAP participants through one-on-one outreach (Fand 2013)
- Outreach to community leaders (ex. CBO leaders, religious leaders, elected officials) to distribute information and increase participation
- Outreach at parent-teacher associations, parenting classes, and local businesses (Parsons & Morales 2013)
- Outreach to youth (ex. schools) to attract a younger demographic and influence family purchasing decisions. One study found that an Agricultural Awareness Day at local
schools was able to increase participation at farmers’ markets because the children influenced their family’s consumer choices (Grace et al. 2007)

C. Educate & Raise Awareness

- Free hotline to answer questions and educate people on SNAP and/or farmers’ markets
- Cooking classes and recipe cards at farmers’ markets to increase interest and educate
- SNAP Ed booths at farmers’ markets
- Training farmers’ market employees to better engage and educate customers

D. Reduction of Stigma

- Cultural competency trainings for farmers’ market employees to improve their ability to communicate and interact with diverse customers
- Utilize community leaders and influencers to promote and destigmatize SNAP
- Increase diversity among vendors and customers

E. Increase Convenience

- Longer hours for working families (Colasanti et al. 2010)
- Partnering with child care services (Gorman et al. 2006)
- Establishing a produce delivery service that targets low-income neighborhoods (Gorman et al. 2006)
- Offer incentives to use SNAP at the farmers’ market
References


