

Marion County

Downtown Market Improves Access to Healthy Food Options Center Street Market Begins Accepting WIC Benefits.

Challenge

According to Feeding America, households living with children are more likely to be food insecure (20%) than households with no children (11.9%). In Marion County, the U.S. Census 2021 American Community Survey 1-Year Estimates reports that poverty rates have increased to 15.9%, and unemployment to 5.8%. According to the USDA Food Atlas report, the downtown area in the city of Marion has been identified as a food desert. However, there is strong evidence that food assistance programs, like the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC), improve poor and inadequate diets and give newborns and young children a healthy start to life. Half of infants born in Marion County are enrolled in the WIC program. Ongoing nutrition education coupled with nutritious offerings helps to improve the health status and prevent health problems of over 1,400 families receiving this food assistance. Geographic availability, affordability, and transportation options are all factors influencing food choices among individuals and their families.

Approach

The Center Street Market is located 0.10 miles from the WIC office, as well as 0.10 miles from the transit hub. This geographic proximity potentially impacts young families receiving WIC benefits, including residents who have limited access to healthy food options and face transportation barriers. This factor, supported by local data, guided the selection of the Center Street Market in becoming an authorized WIC vendor. Over the past year, health department staff, store managers, and WIC staff began improving availability of nutritious offerings, implementing WIC benefits, and increasing marketing on the new healthy options available in this once food barren area.

Results

On July 1, 2022, Center Street market officially began accepting WIC benefits in their store. To increase awareness of this new vendor, WIC hosted two consecutive kick-off events at the market. These dates were in collaboration with the downtown farmers' market and open streets community events. Over 132 families participated in this launch. Each family in attendance experienced a personalized market tour, received additional WIC farmers' market vouchers, and left with a nutritious snack and health education. In the future, CHC and other coalition partners plan to increase awareness and marketing of store offerings and support the establishment of onsite cooking demonstrations and nutrition education.



At A Glance

In 2022, Creating Healthy Communities Coordinators identified a lack of access to affordable foods for WIC participants in the downtown area of Marion. Given the proximity of the Center Street Market to the WIC office and a transit hub, prioritizing the store to become a WIC vendor was imperative. In July, the market officially began accepting WIC benefits and hosted two kick-off events where families were able to tour the market and utilize their WIC vouchers. Future plans include continued marketing of the store's WIC acceptance and on-site cooking demos.



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