



NRPA's mission is to advance parks, recreation, and environmental conservation efforts that enhance the quality of life for all people.

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## Park Vending and Farmer's Markets: Increasing Healthy Food Choices for Underserved Communities



### INTRODUCTION

As America grapples with the epidemic of obesity, ready access to fresh, reasonably priced and wholesome foods has become increasingly important as a key tactic in

addressing this growing problem. Major trends in the U.S. food environment are partly to blame for the overweight and obesity problem, including the almost unlimited access to fast food restaurants, the wide availability of high-calorie, high-fat foods and the fact that more than 23 million Americans, including 6.5 million children, live in low-income urban and rural neighborhoods more than a mile away from a supermarket.

As cities, towns, and suburbs continue to increase efforts to improve access to fresh, nutritious and

affordable foods, park and recreation agencies can take a leading role in positively affecting those efforts. Since park and recreation agencies are the second highest provider of meals to children in the U.S. (second only to

schools), they can better serve their constituents by creating, managing and organizing successful public markets and healthy food vending programs.

Two areas of focus that can play a role in the delivery of wholesome and nutritious foods are farmer's markets and vending programs. Farmer's markets are undergoing a renaissance as consumers strive to rebuild local economies and keep human connections flourishing. Vending machines, long perceived as a place to buy snack foods, are increasingly providing nutritious alternatives to unhealthy foods.



### FARMER'S MARKETS: ADDRESSING THE GROWING TREND IN FOOD PREFERENCES

According to the United States Department of Agriculture's Agricultural Marketing Service, farmer's markets are an integral part of the urban/farm linkage and have continued to rise in popularity. As of mid-2011, there were 7,175 farmer's markets operating throughout the U.S., a 17 percent increase from 2010.



Today's farmers are taking advantage of the swelling demand for locally-grown food by adopting a broad range of alternative production and marketing methods to capture this expanding market. Overall, farmer's markets are, or can be, neighborhood destinations and public-gathering places where community members are provided with a mechanism with which to participate in collective action towards strengthening social networks and enhancing civic engagement.

### THE BENEFITS OF FARMER'S MARKETS

Public markets are not just places of commerce; successful markets help grow and connect urban and rural economies. They encourage development, enhance real estate values and the tax base, and keep money in the local neighborhood. From increasing access to fresh, healthy food to providing important revenue streams, markets positively impact local businesses, governments and residents. *continued >*



## GUIDELINES FOR SUCCESSFUL FARMER'S MARKETS

Public markets are undergoing a sweeping renaissance as people around the world strive to rebuild local economies and keep human connections flourishing.

People love markets for so many reasons, yet in surveys asking people why they use markets, the reason that always rises to the top is the experience: seeing other people, opportunities for impromptu conversations, and the unexpected sensory delights. A great market must be carefully planned as a public gathering place and managed within a sustainable business structure.

### Public markets must have public goals

How does the farmer's market contribute to the community? While the market can be privately owned, customers should not be required to pay to participate and it must serve locally owned and operated businesses.

Public markets:

- Bring together diverse people
- Create active public spaces
- Link urban and rural economies
- Promote public health
- Provide economic opportunity for vendors
- Catalyze the renewal of downtowns and neighborhoods

### Parks and recreation play an important role in farmer's markets

The busiest, most successful markets are places where people want to spend time together;

They can be more than fun: by strategically clustering public services and activities, markets can actually contribute to community health.

The involvement of park and recreation agencies is key to the successful development and success of farmer's markets. They are uniquely qualified to assist not only in the development and organizational tasks required to start a farmer's market, but also in incorporating recreational aspects as an important part of the farmer's market experience. Recreation occurring at the farmer's market will strengthen community bonds and plays a significant role in attracting consumers to markets.

## DEVELOPING A FARMER'S MARKET

In order to develop and maintain a viable farmer's market, an organized and well thought out process needs to be implemented. The following are basic areas of focus that will assist in the effective development of a farmer's market.

### Market Development

Market development projects help markets to expand their facilities, enhance their buildings, increase sales, conduct feasibility studies, and recruit and train market managers and vendors.

Types of market development projects include:

- Site development
- Facility design
- Logistics within the market (loading and unloading, parking)
- Transportation (ingress and egress to and from the market)

Some of the important features in farmer's market development include:

- Qualified and motivated staff
- Well-designed policy manual for vendors addressing regulations and operations of the facility
- Streamlined management structure, minimizing bureaucracy
- Flexible and energy-efficient design
- Incorporation of common area maintenance fee to help offset cost of utilities and services for tenants
- Planning for future market expansion

### Consumer Education and Access

Consumer education and access projects inform the consumer about services available at farmer's markets. Types of consumer education and access projects include:

- Surveys
- Nutrition
- Public safety
- Electronic Benefits Transfer
- Special nutrition programs for women, infants, children and seniors

### Promotion

Market masters should determine how they make the surrounding communities aware of the market's existence. Initial promotion and advertising are required to help create awareness of when the farmer's market will be operating for the season. Promotional activities should focus on creating a positive image as well as providing details about when and where the market will occur. Market organizers should describe consumer benefits such as fresher products, producer/consumer interaction, and supporting local farmers.

### Rules

Establish a regulatory structure for market operations by drafting a set of bylaws. Market managers are responsible for deciding on rules and enforcement practices before the opening day of the season and should also outline the enforcement policy and identify the person responsible for enforcing it. A proper set of rules can alleviate problems that may arise in the future.

## HEALTHY VENDING PROGRAMS: CONVERTING OLD SNACK HABITS TO NUTRITIOUS ONES

According to the 2010 Vending Times Industry Census, the vending industry generated over \$41.5 billion in food and beverage sales. Although vending machines are a popular channel for convenient snack foods and beverages, they are often a source of less-than-healthy products. A great majority of options offered are high in calories, fat, and added sugars, and low in nutrients. The prevalence of junk food and sugar-sweetened beverages in vending machines does not support healthy nutritional choices and promotes the consumption of energy-dense foods and beverages, which has been linked to weight gain.



## Best practices for implementing healthy vending guidelines

Using a team-based approach to establish a healthy vending program will help your organization to increase buy-in and to identify the right strategy to use. Here are some suggested components of this approach:

- Select a leader to champion the program
- Engage with stakeholders such as administrators, staff, food and nutrition service providers, students, parents, and others in the planning process
- Implement a plan with goals, strategies and time line
- Pilot test to allow staff to identify healthy, tasty choices and adjust to new options
- Assess the environment: Determine where vending machines are located, what products are offered, and whether there are existing vending policies. Find out what the current perceptions are among staff and other stakeholders.
- Conduct an annual review to evaluate and revise your vending guidelines as needed

## Approaches for healthy vending policies

### 1. Make healthy choices available

Most vending machines do not currently offer healthy options. Offering healthy food and beverages gives residents the ability to make healthier choices.

### 2. Make the healthy choice the easy choice through pricing, marketing and education

Often the least healthy options in vending machines have the lowest price and most compelling marketing. These same strategies can be used to promote healthy options by lowering the price, increasing the visibility and highlighting the healthiest options.

- Use education and marketing to promote healthy products · Work with your vendor(s) to price healthier food and beverages at the lowest cost and less healthy products at the highest cost
- Place healthier foods at eye level
- Use signage to identify which products are healthier
- Limit advertising on vending machines to healthier choices
- Ensure vending machines post calories next to each item in accordance with FDA requirements

### 3. Offer only healthy food and beverages

If you want to implement the healthiest approach, stocking only healthy foods is the best choice. Consider working toward 100% healthy vending over a three year period and ultimately eliminate unhealthy products completely. Suggested healthy food and beverage criteria might include the following for product selection:

- Five grams or less of total fat
- Two grams or less of saturated fat
- Thirty grams or less of sugar

*Note: Nuts, seeds and 100 percent juices do not have to meet the above criteria because they offer unique nutritional benefits*

## HUMBOLT & WEST HUMBOLT PARKS

**Location:** Chicago, Illinois

**Description:** Located on the northwest side of Chicago, Humboldt Park and West Humboldt Park are two of Chicago's 77 officially designated neighborhoods. In the 1970s, Humboldt Park became dangerous with high levels of gang activity, crime, and violence. The neighborhood is economically depressed, with housing values below the city-wide average. Overcrowding, obesity and diabetes remain serious problems, as does gang activity and violent crime.



**Challenges:** Since many residents had not been exposed to healthy food options, park staff were challenged to develop nutrition education programs and efforts to build trust and recognize the cultural norms within the tightly knit Humboldt community.

**Outcomes:** The Humboldt Park and West Humboldt Park Community Health Action Response Team (CHART) launched an effort to combat obesity and diabetes by setting a goal of offering 100-percent healthy choices in the vending machines at all Chicago Park District facilities. They contended that healthy vending could be profitable as well as beneficial to the community's health and wellness. The CHART was able to take advantage of the expiration of an existing Chicago city vending contract by adding a new contract requirement to provide only healthy food selections.

**Lessons Learned:** A permitting issue arose that required that new city contracts apply to all of Chicago's 556 park facilities. This necessitated certain modifications to the CHART's proposed policy terms. The park staff has realized that they need to do more nutrition education in the community, because many residents had never been exposed to healthy food options. Also, residents needed to be convinced that behavior changes are essential for better health. Further, planners learned that efforts to promote healthier food choices are more effective if community leaders lend their support, that they become familiar with the traditional foods and customs of residents, and do outreach through advisory councils and other neighborhood organizations.

## ANN ARBOR FARMER'S MARKET

**Location:** Ann Arbor, Michigan

**Description:** The Ann Arbor Farmer's Market has a rich history as one of the largest and oldest markets in the country. The city has been running the market since it was established in 1919, is a focal point of the community and is a place where residents have been able to purchase fresh locally grown foods for generations. The market is managed by a full-time staff person within the Park and Recreation Department and is set up in a former lumberyard in the Kerrytown District, one of four downtown neighborhoods.

**Challenges:** The popularity of the market dwindled in the 1970's and 1980's, leading to changes that have sparked a revival. The city is trying to expand it because there are many more vendors than there are spots available in the permanent sheds.

**Outcomes:** In two major initiatives, Ann Arbor relied on public participation to help shape the future direction of the farmer's market. First, the city developed a Farmer's Market Commission, composed of Ann Arbor citizens and vendor representatives. Second, the city is creating a farmer's market master plan, which is being shaped by community input. The Farmer's Market master plan has been under development since 2003. Ann Arbor has embarked on an expansion project to improve existing market facilities and diversify the use of the market space.

**Lessons Learned:** The city followed a community-based planning approach to evaluate the future direction of the farmer's market and is using feedback from residents as it develops the master plan. Administrators believe that professional management is an important component of the market's success and passed an ordinance that protects farmland from development and helps keep agricultural land affordable which is expected to have a positive impact on the Ann Arbor Farmer's Market, by requiring that all vendors sell locally grown foods.

## Assessment

In order to develop and implement your healthy vending policy successfully, the following must be assessed:

- The current status of vending machines; and
- The opinion, perceptions and receptivity of vending machine users to healthy vending changes.

## Implementation

Communication is the key in ensuring the successful implementation of your vending policy. Regular communication with vendors can help ensure that vending machines are being stocked with the foods requested. Communication with vending machine users can be a means of outreach and education by encouraging the selection of healthy foods.

Additional implementation considerations for vendors may include:

- Conduct the vending program in accordance with all federal, state, and local laws
- Identify vendors through a competitive procurement process
- Negotiate and enter into only those vending contracts that help achieve established wellness policy objectives
- Ensure vending contracts contain language that permits the enforcement of the Wellness Policy objectives to the maximum extent permitted by law
- Enter into only those vending contracts that maximize revenues
- Provide for accurate and timely revenue reports
- Select all products to be vended and ensure that all products are consistent with the wellness policy
- Establish the hours vending machines can be operated

## Monitoring and Evaluation

Periodic process monitoring and evaluation is crucial in ensuring that you are obtaining regular feedback on how your healthy vending policy is working. From your evaluations you will be able to adjust and refine the vending policy to better suit preferences.

## CONCLUSION

As America's obesity epidemic continues to pose a complex public health challenge, local governments need to address it by creating policies and implementing changes in their communities. The solutions include such tried-and-true initiatives as farmer's markets and healthy vending policies and programs, and a growing number of jurisdictions are finding new ways to support such efforts.

### RESOURCES

#### Farmer's Markets

*Apply to Make a Difference: Farmers Market Promotion Program Grants Available, Let's Move Blog, Funding Available to Help End Food Deserts and Improve Local Economies Healthy Communities, Let's Move Campaign, www.letsmove.gov*

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San Diego Department of Parks and Recreation, 2007 *Developing a Healthy Beverage Vending Agreement*, The National Policy & Legal Analysis Network to Prevent Childhood Obesity (NPLAN), October 2011, [www.nplan.org](http://www.nplan.org)

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Leslie S. Linton and Christine Edwards, *Healthy Choice Options in Vending Machines on County Property: An Audit of Selected Vending Machines and Review of Revenue Data*, San Diego County Childhood Obesity Initiative, 2011

Susan Klein and Carol Voss, Webinar: *State of Wellness: Healthy Vending Programs*, October 18, 2011

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Christa Hofmann and Jennifer Dennis, *Starting a Farmers' Market*, Department of Agricultural Economics, Purdue University, 2007

*Farmer's Markets and Local Food Marketing*, USDA Agricultural Marketing Service

*Grow Your Park Case Studies - Community Gardens in Parks: Opportunities for Health, Community, and Recreation*, National Recreation and Park Association, 2011

Kelly Verel, *4 Guidelines on Taking Public Markets to the Next Level*, Projects for Public Space, 2011

*Know Your Farmer, Know Your Food, Grant Loans and Support*, United States Department of Agriculture

*NOMAR International Public Market: Public Markets Case Studies*, Little Rock, Arkansas

*Resource Guide, Farmer's Market Consortium*, USDA, Agricultural Marketing Service, Updated November 2007



## RIVER MARKET

**Location:** Little Rock, Arkansas

**Description:** In the 1980s and 1990s, the area known now as the Little Rock River Market struggled. Like many cities around the country, Little Rock saw businesses and residents depart its central business district as its suburbs expanded.

**Challenges:** Currently, the market is reaching capacity and has nowhere to expand. In addition, there was no thought of dry storage space for either the tenants or the market management.

**Outcomes:** The River Market re-opened in 1996 as part of a \$300 million riverfront development project designed to utilize the scenic charm of the Arkansas River, the Riverfront Park and existing historical structures along the riverfront. From 1996 to 2006, the River Market District has seen almost \$780 million in development since its inception. The area surrounding the market is called the River Market District and is now home to many of Little Rock's cultural institutions. The River Market is managed by a small team within the Little Rock Parks and Recreation Department

**Lessons Learned:** Plan for growth and allow for dry storage and cold storage for each tenant; in addition to dry storage for the market management that would include space to store excess toiletries, maintenance equipment and supplies. Each tenant space should be metered so that tenants are responsible for their own utilities and assess a common area maintenance fee.



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