

Michigan's Bay Mills Indian Community Restoring Health with New Farmers' Market

Cathy Edgerly

At A Glance

At least 2,057 members of the Bay Mills Indian Community (BMIC) in northern Michigan can shop and eat healthier thanks to a new farmers' market that opened in July 2015. Tribal communities have long struggled with obesity and other health issues because of limited access to healthy, local food options. The Inter-Tribal Council of Michigan used support from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) to help the BMIC offer fresh produce to residents. The market's first season ran for 10 weeks and attracted more than 900 visitors.



Public Health Challenge

Lack of access to healthy food options has significantly affected the health and well-being of Native Americans. A 2010 CDC survey of 3 tribal communities, including the BMIC, found that 68% of adults were overweight or obese and 2 in 3 adults did not eat the recommended number of servings of fruits or vegetables each day. In Chippewa County, where the majority of the BMIC is located, only 1% of residents live within half a mile of a park. This lack of

access to opportunities for physical activity only worsens the health crisis facing the BMIC. According to the CDC, Native Americans have a higher chance of dying from diet- and inactivity-related diseases such as type 2 diabetes, stroke, and heart disease than other population groups in Michigan and across the nation. For BMIC members to be healthier, they must have access to quality, affordable food where they live.

Find Out More

Native Americans are more likely to die from diet-related diseases than other Americans. Improving access to healthy, affordable foods within tribal communities is an important step toward giving everyone an equal opportunity to be healthy. Farmers' markets can be a strategic way to offer more nutritious options to residents while also helping the local economy and restoring respect for food traditions and the land. This project is supported by CDC's Racial and Ethnic Approaches to Community Health (REACH) cooperative agreement.

The farmers' market gives the community access to a variety of fresh produce at affordable prices. I also believe it influences members to explore gardening on their own.

- Bay Mills, community member

Contact

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Approach

The Inter-Tribal Council of Michigan identified starting a farmers' market as a strategic way to improve the health of residents in the BMIC and boost the local economy. The Council leveraged funding from CDC's Racial and Ethnic Approaches to Community Health (REACH) program to convene 28 members from the BMIC for planning efforts. From there, a REACH tribal coordinator visited nearby markets to learn best practices. Community leaders also worked with a BMIC food sovereignty committee to ensure the farmers' market reflected tribe values and food traditions. Potential vendors were recruited using local newspaper ads and the Michigan State University Extension's market maker website.

Results

The BMIC farmers' market began on July 30, 2015, and ran for 10 weeks in the parking lot of the Bay Mills Resort. By the end of the first season, the new resource had attracted more than 900 visitors because of its convenient location and schedule. An average of 10 vendors per week sold healthy, local produce as well as Native American art. Strategically, the market was held on Thursdays—a payday for many local businesses. Additionally, the farmers' market hours were from 4 p.m. to 7 p.m., making it more accessible to residents who worked during the day. Another helpful factor included accepting multiple forms of payment, such as Senior Project Fresh coupons and Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) vouchers. The BMIC promoted the market through local newspapers, social media, and flyers in stores, banks, and other popular community locations.

What's Next

Careful planning and implementation by community leaders ensure the market will support long-term access to healthy food and, ultimately, better health outcomes for residents of the BMIC. This market season, they plan to increase the number of vendors from 10 to 14. To better serve and benefit all members of the tribal community, the market plans to expand forms of payment to include Electronic Benefit Transfer cards and Michigan Bridge Cards for low-income families and individuals. Excitement around the new market has even prompted community members to start their own gardens so they can share and sell vegetables next market season.