

Mobile Market Created in Albuquerque Food Deserts to Increase Healthy Eating

Leigh Caswell

At A Glance

In 2015, Healthy Here's Mobile Farmers' Market (MFM), a farmers' market on wheels, provided 659 residents of southeast Albuquerque, New Mexico, with fresh, affordable produce; free healthy food samples; and nutrition education. This effort is part of a community partnership that includes Presbyterian Healthcare Services, Bernalillo County Community Health Council, and Bernalillo County. MFM travels weekly to 6 locations in Albuquerque's International District and South Valley areas. Already this year, produce sales have more than doubled.



Public Health Challenge

New Mexico has the second highest rate of food insecurity in the country, according to the U.S. Department of Agriculture. The lack of fresh, healthy foods is most apparent in two of Albuquerque's most populated areas: urban International District and rural South Valley. A drive through major streets in both communities reveals the abundance of fast food restaurants and convenience stores, but a scarcity of healthy food options like farmers'

markets and supermarkets. South Valley residents face the added problem of poor public transit. In food deserts like these, it's not surprising to find high rates of diet-related diseases and obesity. Both communities have the highest mortality rates from heart disease and diabetes in Bernalillo County, as well as the highest rates of obesity among school-aged children and Native American, African American, and Hispanic/Latino residents.

Find Out More

We can help eliminate food deserts in the Albuquerque area by spreading the word about the Healthy Here MFM. Tell neighbors about the MFM using social and digital media. Also, support work to improve access to healthy foods. And become informed about food deserts and the health implications they create in our communities. For more information, visit bchealthcouncil.org/healthy-here. This project is supported by CDC's Racial and Ethnic Approaches to Community Health (REACH) cooperative agreement.

I really like that this is happening. We can have more access to local food. Honestly, I almost never get out to go to farmers' markets, so it's nice to have one close to home. In the future, I hope it's in even more locations.

- Veronica Salazar, MFM customer and South Valley resident

Contact

Leigh Caswell
Presbyterian Healthcare
Services
1100 Central Ave. SE

Albuquerque, NM 87125
Phone: 505-724-8865

Approach

The MFM program is impacting Albuquerque's food deserts by providing fresh produce from farms in the South Valley and other local areas, along with nutrition education and healthy food samples prepared by a food truck partner. The program presents an innovative system where local farmers are paid full price for their produce and sponsors offer subsidies so that prices are maintained at wholesale rates. The project also encourages use of farmers' markets in low-income areas; accepts electronic benefit transfer from Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) – including the double-up food bucks program, Women, Infants and Children (WIC), and senior checks; and supports local farmer co-ops.

Results

In 2015, Healthy Here's MFM sales totaled \$3,112, via distribution points at participating health clinics. As of September 2016, sales totaled \$8,595, which is a 276% increase over 2015. This increase could be attributed to healthcare providers talking to patients about the importance of healthy foods during their office visits. A survey showed that 23% of customers heard about MFM via their provider. Many customers purchased healthier foods using WIC (36.7%), SNAP (18%), and senior checks (20%). In addition, 78% of customers reported their ethnicity as Hispanic or American Indian, reaching the project's intended audience. This project is made possible with partial funding from Presbyterian Healthcare Services, Bernalillo County, and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

What's Next

Presbyterian Healthcare Services will continue to work with local farmers to increase access to affordable, nutritious foods for low-income residents in target areas. By growing MFM, more Albuquerque residents, in communities lacking access to healthier foods, are able to buy fresh fruits and vegetables in their neighborhood. In addition, Presbyterian will continue to strengthen links among farming, business, and public health sectors to create a vibrant local food economy. They will also seek sustainable funding, beyond current grants, to continue to improve the MFM model through a community governance board; refine partners and roles; and ask for and evaluate feedback from program participants.