At a Glance

The Ohio State University (OSU) Extension worked with the Washington County Creating Healthy Communities (CHC) program to create a Junior Farmers’ Market for students at six school districts within the county. The Junior Farmers’ Market provided fresh fruits and vegetables and educational demonstrations. Families were encouraged to visit the market to support the local food economy with the goal of changing nutrition behaviors and combatting obesity. Students were amazed to taste the difference in freshly picked produce at the farmers’ market, which they found to be a fun and exciting social event that differs greatly from the grocery store. Now, 313 4th-grade students have a better understanding of where their produce comes from and are increasing their consumption of fruits and vegetables.

Public Health Challenge

Today, many children do not get enough exercise or consume the recommended amount of fruits and vegetables; as a result, childhood obesity is at an all-time high. Nationally, Ohio ranks 6th in childhood obesity (18.6 percent) and 11th in adult obesity (33.8 percent). According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), children who are obese are more likely to become obese adults. Improving the eating and exercise habits of the family is one way to reduce childhood obesity. But, many families find it difficult to eat healthy and be physically active because their environments do not provide accessible options. Being able to visit a local farmers’ market is a good way to support the local economy, be physically active, and increase consumption of fresh produce. This can be important when, according to the CDC, nearly 40 percent of Ohio adolescents report consuming fruits and vegetables less than one time a day.

Approach

To help increase access to fresh produce among children, OSU Extension partnered with several local organizations to implement a Junior Farmers’ Market. These partners include GoPaks, OSU Extension Master Gardeners, River City Farmers’ Market, Sisters Health Foundation, Washington County CHC program, Washington County Soil and Water Conservation District, West Virginia University Extension SNAP-Ed, and many volunteers.

There are six school districts in Washington County, and the Junior Farmers’ Market was implemented at...
one school site in each district. Schools with greater than 50 percent free and reduced lunch were prioritized for participation.

The classes study currency as a part of math, so the market would serve as a “hands-on” application of the concept. Each student received five $1 “market tokens” to exchange for fresh fruits and vegetables at the school-based farmers’ market. While the students made their choices, they had the opportunity to interact and ask questions about the produce to the farmer and Master Gardener volunteers. Students received reusable market bags with educational messages to take their produce home and an apron to increase interest in cooking at home. The students were also encouraged to share the produce with their household and to buy from local farmers.

Results
In all, 313 fourth grade students and 21 teachers from the six school districts in Washington County participated in the Junior Farmers’ Market. Surveys were generated for the students to take home and complete with their parents to describe their experience. Out of 313 possible survey replies, 187 were returned (59.7 percent return rate). Ninety-nine percent of students indicated that they were excited and enjoyed the market. Seventy-nine percent of parents indicated that their child was more motivated about eating fruits and vegetables and 93 percent said their child ate the produce they purchased with the tokens. Since participating in the market, 84.4 percent of parents indicated that their child could identify more fruits and vegetables and 81.3 percent of households reported they plan to visit the farmers’ market or purchase fruits and vegetables from farmers directly.

There was a total of $1,750 in market tokens spent, all of which went directly to local farmers. The president of the farmers’ market observed a significant increase in students visiting the regular farmers’ market following the program, indicating it successfully did impact shopping behavior.

What’s Next
To build upon the program’s success, the team plans to visit more elementary schools throughout the county that did not receive a market in 2018. Schools that have already hosted one have agreed to invite the Junior Farmers’ Market back to school functions such as Back-to-School Day. All school districts want to implement the market at every elementary school. To sustain and grow success, options being explored include approaching local businesses and organizations to sponsor a school Junior Farmers’ Market or funding the farmers to grow produce for the farmers’ market early in the season.

“For three weeks straight after the market, there was a significant uptick of kids with their parents. They would come up to the booth and talk to me about it. Sometimes the parents would walk away and the kids would stay at the booth to talk.”
— Tom Fagan, President of the Rivers City Farmers Market and farmer

Find Out More
Help increase access to affordable, fresh, local foods. Support your local farmers. Encourage your school to offer a Junior Farmers’ Market. Get involved with Washington County CHC Coalition to make the healthy choice the easy choice.

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