Farm to Family: A partnership among local institutions to develop a fruit and vegetable buying program for families with preschool children

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background | why fruit + vegetable buying programs?

Low-income children and families

• higher rates of nutrition-related illness\(^1\)
• lower purchase and consumption of f+v\(^2\)
• reported increases in f+v consumption\(^3\)
background | opportunities

• institutions serving low-income families with young children
  ○ Head Start childcare centers

• government entitlement programs (i.e. SNAP)
Do parents’ have an interest in a center-based fruit and vegetable buying program?

If so, what are key program elements to consider for participation?
methods | setting

Map Source: Health of Boston 2010
Photo Source: Boston.com
The Food Project (TFP): youth development, local food systems, sustainable agriculture

Northeastern University (NEU), Institute on Urban Health Research: childhood obesity prevention and intervention research

Children’s Hospital Boston, Office of Child Advocacy: childhood obesity prevention and intervention programs

Action for Boston Community Development, Inc. (ABCD, Inc.) Head Start & Children’s Services: healthy childhood development and learning
Local partners | Shared goals

- Provide direct access to fresh f+v, and
- Increase f+v consumption among low-income preschool children and their families.
methods | timeline

methods | timeline

- **CFSC meeting**

- Oct 2010
- Nov 2010
- Dec-Mar 2011
- Mar-Nov 2011
methods | timeline

- CFSC meeting
  - Meeting convened w/ local partners
  - Timeline:
    - Oct 2010
    - Nov 2010
    - Dec-Mar 2011
    - Mar-Nov 2011
methods | timeline

- **Oct 2010**: CFSC meeting
- **Nov 2010**: Meeting convened w/ local partners
- **Dec - Mar 2011**: Assessing interest: intercept surveys
- **Mar - Nov 2011**:
methods | timeline

- **CFSC meeting**
  - Oct 2010

- **Meeting convened w/local partners**
  - Nov 2010

- **Assessing interest: intercept surveys**
  - Dec - Mar 2011

- **Developing model: focus groups**
  - Mar - Nov 2011
methods | timeline

- Oct 2010: CFSC meeting
- Nov 2010: Meeting convened w/ local partners
- Dec-Mar 2011: Assessing interest: intercept surveys
- Mar-Nov 2011: Pilot Model finalized & implemented
- Developing model: focus groups
methods | assessing interest

- intercept surveys
  - 5-item survey, convenience sample
  - to assess interest in buying f+v, preferred distribution model and f+v preferences
  - analysis using SPSS 12.0
methods | intercept survey findings

Respondent Interest in Receiving Vegetables Through Head Start* \( (N=139) \)

- Yes: 129
- No: 10

* Cross-site comparison \( p = .04 \)
methods | intercept survey findings

Preferred model (N=129)

- On-site Farmers’ Market: 58%
- Weekly Box (modified CSA-model): 51%
- Cooking class: 45%
- Buying Club: 15%
methods | intercept survey findings

Preferred model (N=129)  F+V preferences (N=129)

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- Weekly Box (modified CSA-model): 51%
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<table>
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<tr>
<th>Site</th>
<th>Beets*</th>
<th>Cilantro**</th>
<th>Melon*</th>
<th>Sweet Pepper**</th>
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</table>

*p ≤ 0.05; ** p < .01
methods | developing model

• focus groups
  o 4 groups, convenience sample
  o to understand model elements important for participation
  o hand coded for emerging themes
findings | focus groups

- distribution
- box cost + payment structure
- box size + contents
findings | box size + contents

- Distribution
- Box cost + payment structure
- Box size + contents
findings | box size + contents

box size + contents
“...the weight of just having one bag actually makes sense because usually when we come to pick up the kids it could be the dad it could be the mom but it’s usually one parent.” [FG Site 2]
“....most people are more concerned with what they get instead of how much. .... I think more of what’s inside of it, the variety instead of the quantity, I think that’s more what people are more concerned about.” [FG Site 2]
findings | box size + contents

manageable weight

variety + likeability

choice

“I was going to ask if it would switch up sometimes so you’re not feeding the same vegetables like every Monday it’s tomatoes.”

[FG Site 4]
“Don’t change it up and have us already paid before the month and then the third week we got just less. You know what I mean or light stuff; ....You got to have the weight.”  [FG Site 2]
findings | box cost + payment structure

- box size + contents
- distribution
- box cost + payment structure
findings | box cost + payment structure
“If you look at it you would go spend like $15, $20 at Stop and Shop and it’s not fresh, it’s been sitting there for days. So I could understand being that it’s Head Start and not everybody’s in a position to go pay $15, $16, I can see paying like $5, $6….” [FG Site 4]
“I might not be able to make that $20 payment, like she said so EBT would help because the money’s there.” [FG Site 2]
findings | box cost + payment structure

“If you’re saying everybody can make it at the first of the month, well his [disbursement] won’t be until the 14th. My question would be what date is your benefit date. That might make it easier for the individual.” [FG Site 2]
findings | box cost + payment structure

affordability
accept entitlements
timing
advance payment possible

“Pay a month in advance? Yeah, I don’t see a problem with that.” [FG Site 2]
findings | distribution

- distribution
- box size + contents
- box cost + payment structure
"I would probably think a Friday or a Monday so you could use them throughout the whole week into the weekend.” [FG Site 4]
findings | anticipated facilitators + barriers

facilitators
- reduced price
- EBT payment option
- location
- new exposure
- taste & freshness

participation

“....this is a chance to try new vegetables that we probably wouldn’t eat on a regular basis.” [FG Site 1]
findings | anticipated facilitators + barriers

facilitators
- reduced price
- EBT payment option
- location
- new exposure
- taste & freshness

barriers
- fixed/unknown produce
- advance payment
- food waste
- too much/little food
- vacation

“I’m not a big fan of squash and I know a lot of kids are picky with what they eat. So why would you want to get a bag every week with a thing of squash and cabbage if you don’t like squash and cabbage? It’s just going to go to waste.” [FG Site 1]
findings | anticipated facilitators + barriers

facilitators
- reduced price
- EBT payment option
- location
- new exposure
- taste & freshness

barriers
- fixed/unknown produce
- advance payment
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- vacation

participation
- provide harvest schedule
- visuals w/ recipes
- swap box
- option to buy 1+ bags
conclusions | pilot model

the supporters
the farmers
Weekly vegetable box w/ newsletter; Delivery; Farm visit

the conveners
Price subsidy $5/box-EBT, cash, check, money order
Liaison btwn farmer and centers

the vehicle
Designated coordinators: outreach, payment, distribution, swap box

the beneficiaries
Families at or below 100% federal poverty guidelines, staff

healthy KIDS, healthy FUTURES
conclusions | remaining questions

• What are low-income parent experiences with this type of f+v buying program model?

• How are parents’ suggestions related to their actual participation?

• How do anticipated facilitators and barriers correspond to non/participation during implementation?

• How do low-income parent experiences align with purported goals of f+v buying programs?
acknowledgments

• ABCD, Inc. Head Start staff and families
  – Yvette Rodriguez, Director of Programs
  – Sarah Montoya, Parker Hill Fenway Program Director
  – Flossy Calderon, Roxbury Head Start Program Director
  – Joyce Tanner, Jamaica Plain Head Start Program Director
  – Patricia Landry, Native American Head Start Program Director

• Tufts Friedman School of Nutrition Science and Policy Graduate Students

• Farm to Family partners
questions,
comments,
dialogue.......
considerations for models accepting SNAP benefits

• At least one partner has terminal infrastructure

• Subsidize model to fit two week grocery purchase requirement

• Staff time required for manual processing

• Need to ensure funds by removing close to disbursement date for electronic processing