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# THE MARYLAND MARKET MONEY PROGRAM IN FARMERS MARKETS: MARKET MANAGER AND FARMER PERSPECTIVES

## INTRODUCTION

Incentive programs in retail markets are effective for increasing fruit and vegetable consumption and addressing food access. Some farmers markets have implemented incentive programs for federal nutrition assistance participants to further increase access. The Maryland Market Money (MMM) program offers a \$5 per day incentive for customers who participate in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) or the Farmers Market Nutrition Program (FMNP) for WIC and seniors. While much research focuses on customers' perspectives of incentive programs, little is known about how managers of farmers markets and farmers view the implementation of incentive programs. Engagement and support from managers and farmers are critical to ensuring streamlined operations.

## STUDY SUMMARY

Researchers interviewed a total of 19 market managers and 19 farmers during the 2016 and 2017 market season. These interviews focused on perspectives of the MMM program along with strengths, barriers, and recommendations to improve the program.



*“I’m willing to do whatever it takes and work with [the markets] to accept that money. Because that’s increased revenue for us.”*

—Local farmer

## Key Findings

- ▶ Many market managers and farmers noted increased sales from attracting new members to the market and perceived there was increased access to healthy food for low-income communities.
- ▶ Many market managers and farmers indicated that the logistics of the MMM program were straightforward and easy to implement.

## Facilitators

- ▶ Private fundraising supplied additional funds needed to ensure the incentive program continued to run in some markets even after allocated funds ran out mid-season.
- ▶ Support from local champions committed to the program contributed to a smooth launch and helped maintain the program.
- ▶ Managers and farmers perceived the program to have a positive social and economic impact on the customers and themselves.
  - ▶ *“Well I think it’s a great incentive program, because the people really appreciate that dollar savings, you know, that—getting that bonus dollars is important for them. For them, it’s an important contribution to their budget.”* —Local farmer

## Barriers

- ▶ Some farmers and managers noticed that not all customers were aware that the program existed, or that some customers were unsure how it worked. But explaining the process was prohibitively time consuming.
- ▶ Some farmers and managers described challenges with funds running out before the end of the season for some markets.
  - ▶ *“It’s like, what is the dollar amount going to be for us this year? We don’t find out what money we’re going to have until later in the season or close. We ... need to be planning February, March, beginning of April.”*  
—Market Manager
- ▶ A small number of farmers described negative experiences with and views toward customers.

## Policy Recommendations

- ▶ Increase and sustain funding.
  - ▶ Advocate for state or county level funding to support incentivizing and ensure sustainable funding that lasts. Sustainable funding would also provide consistent sales for farmers throughout the season.
  - ▶ Increase the incentive amount to further benefit customers and farmers.

## Program Recommendations

- ▶ Implement training and educational programs for managers and farmers involved in incentive programs.
  - ▶ Offer racial equity or cultural sensitivity training to dismantle biases and explain the importance of programs such as MMM and federal nutrition assistance benefits as a whole.
  - ▶ Provide more information about market logistics and eligible foods to improve communication with customers and ease business transactions between farmers and customers.
  - ▶ Provide opportunities for managers to share their experiences with peer networks.
- ▶ Increase promotion by collaborating with other programs and agencies, such as senior centers, WIC clinics, healthcare providers, supermarkets, and government offices, to help educate and raise awareness of the program and participating markets.
- ▶ Simplify data collection on program participation to make it easier and more efficient for market managers.



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