

TO: Chair and Members of the Board of Health

FROM: Christopher Mackie, Medical Officer of Health

DATE: 2013 May 16

HARVEST BUCKS: A FARMERS' MARKET VEGETABLE AND FRUIT PROGRAM

Recommendation

It is recommended that Report No. 065-13 re "Harvest Bucks: A Farmers' Market Vegetable and Fruit Program" be received for information.

Key Points

- In 2009, 63% of Middlesex-London residents aged 12 years and older reported eating less than the recommended daily amount of vegetables and fruit.
- The Harvest Bucks program pilot involved the production and distribution of food literacy resource kits and \$8000 worth of vegetable and fruit vouchers ('harvest bucks') to 411 individuals and families.
- Participants reported increased access to and consumption of fresh vegetables and fruit and increased food literacy. The program also resulted in increased exposure and revenue for local vegetable and fruit farmers.
- Program planning is underway for an ongoing Harvest Bucks program including expansion to additional markets and distributing organizations.

Background

Eating the recommended servings of vegetables and fruit each day is one part of a healthy diet that reduces the risk of cancer, heart disease and stroke. In 2009, 63% of Middlesex-London residents aged 12 years and older reported eating less than the recommended daily amount of vegetables and fruit. Increasing access to and consumption of vegetables and fruit for Middlesex-London residents is one of the three-year outcomes identified in the Health Unit Strategic Plan.

The Harvest Bucks Program was a collaborative pilot project with the Health Unit and other members of London's Child and Youth Network. Harvest Bucks involved the production and distribution of food literacy resource kits and vegetable and fruit vouchers (\$2 each) redeemable at the Western Fair Farmers' and Artisans' Market.

From November 2012 to January 2013, resource kits and \$8000 in harvest bucks were distributed to 411 individuals and families. Materials were distributed to participants through various community organizations targeting those involved in food programming. Participating organizations were Youth Opportunities Unlimited, Mommy and Me (a Childreach Program), London Intercommunity Health Centre, Growing Chefs, the Health Unit's Smart Start for Babies Program and Family Home Visitors, Southern Ontario Aboriginal Health Access Centre, and Crouch Neighbourhood Resource Centre.

Distribution strategies varied by organization, including one-to-one client settings and group classes. Harvest buck recipients received between \$10 to \$50 of vouchers, varying by distributing organization, and a food literacy resource kit including information about meal planning, vegetable and fruit preparation and food-related community supports.

Evaluation Summary

The feedback from participants, distributing organizations and the Market was very positive. Some evaluation data is presented below organized by the original program objectives.

Increased Access to and Consumption of Fresh Vegetables and Fruit

- The voucher redemption rate was 63% (\$5022), ranging from 32 to 93% for individual organizations.
- 83% of participants surveyed reported that the program helped them buy healthy and fresh food.
- 54% reported being able to buy vegetables or fruit they can't usually afford.
- 33% reported buying vegetables and fruit they can't find within their neighbourhood.
- 77% reported eating all vegetables and fruit that were purchased.
- 24% reported trying vegetables or fruit they hadn't tried before.
- 49% reported changing their eating habits (e.g., eating more vegetables and fruit and/or healthy food).

Increased Food Literacy

- 20% of participants surveyed reported learning new ways to cook or store food from the program.
- 49% reported the program changed their eating habits (e.g., getting more ideas for healthy eating, starting to write meal plans, intentionally planning and including healthier snack and meal options).

The primary influencer of participants' food literacy was the distributing organization's process. Increased food literacy was observed when the distributing organizations imbedded the Harvest Bucks program within their own food programming (e.g., using resources from the kit, preparing the recipes provided). For those clients who received the kit with limited program use of the kit's contents, the food literacy impact appeared to be limited.

Increased Exposure and Revenue for Local Vegetable and Fruit Farmers

- 61% of participants surveyed reported spending their own money at the Market in addition to the harvest bucks.
- 37% reported spending \$1-19, 22% reported spending \$20-39, and 2% reported spending \$40 or more, of their own money.

Increased Familiarity with and Comfort Shopping at a Farmer's Market

- 91% of participants surveyed said they would return to the Market.
- 41% reported learning that fresh fruit and vegetables cost less at the Market than they thought.
- 31% reported feeling more comfortable going to the Market.

An unintended positive outcome was an increased sense of community connection; 34% of participants surveyed reported feeling more connected to their community. Distributing organizations noted this was especially evident for some of their most vulnerable clients.

Conclusion

The Harvest Bucks program increased access to and consumption of fresh vegetables and fruit. Distributing organizations were a critical influencer on participant's food literacy, highlighting the importance of engaging those organizations involved in food programming as distributing organizations.

Based on the positive evaluation data, program planning is underway for an ongoing Harvest Bucks program, including expansion to additional markets and distributing organizations. The partnership is exploring alternative program funding through grants and corporate/agency sponsorship. The opportunity for additional distributing organizations to purchase vouchers for client use is also being investigated.

This report was prepared by Ms. Kim Leacy, Registered Dietitian, and Ms. Linda Stobo, Manager, Chronic Disease Prevention & Tobacco Control Team.

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<p>This report addresses the following requirements of the Ontario Public Health Standards (2008): Foundational Standard 4, 11, 12; Chronic Disease Prevention 7, 8, 11, 12</p>
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