



## **Farmers' Market Nutrition and Coupon Pilot (FMNCP) Project**

### **Summary of Project and Evaluation Results**

#### **Project Overview**

The purpose of this project is to:

- Increase access to fresh BC-produced farm products to low-income pregnant women and low income families with children.
- Compliment existing cooking and skill building programs.
- Expand the awareness, use of and sales at farmers' markets.

The FMNCP is a pilot project funded by the provincial government for 2007. There was one FMNCP Project site in each of the 5 health regions in British Columbia: Kelowna Farmers' Market; Prince George Farmers' Market; Comox Valley Farmers' Market; Coquitlam Farmers' Market; and Your Local Farmers' Market Society sites in Vancouver – East Vancouver Farmers' Market, Riley Park Farmers' Market, West End Farmers' Market and Kitsilano Farmers' Market.

The FMNCP provided a coupon booklet worth \$15 per cooking and skill building program participant from July 7 through October 14. The coupons were redeemed at farmers' markets for fresh BC vegetables, fruit, and other fresh unprepared BC farm products. Cooking and skill building programs provided nutrition education related to purchasing and using vegetables, fruit and other fresh farm products.

This project has operated in five communities across the province and has served a range of populations, most significantly Aboriginal and immigrant/refugee families. In this time we have seen families living on limited incomes access BC grown fruits and vegetables and other nutritious BC farm products while receiving nutrition and cooking skills education.

Families accessed coupons successfully and used them in their local markets, achieving a high redemption rate of 88%. A wide range of food was purchased, with many families accessing foods they had never tried or felt able to afford. On average every week, the program served at least 253 children.

The evaluation found that the project was extremely successful in increasing access to local nutritious farm products for low income British Columbians participating in the program and, in many cases, their extended networks. In particular, there is an overall perception that this project increased access to

fresh local farm products and had a positive impact on the nutritional knowledge and skills of coupon recipients.

All participating farmers' market managers agreed that this project increased awareness of BC farmers' markets in their community. The majority of participating vendors experienced an increase in sales as a result of the project. One hundred percent of farmers' market and cooking and skill building program managers agreed that the project was important in their community. And all would recommend having this project in other communities in the future.

All pilot project sites have waiting lists for people on a limited income wishing to participate in this project in the future. We also have a long list of community agencies, farmers' markets and individuals who would like to participate in an expanded version of this project.

In closing, this pilot project has proved to be an overwhelming success, and has shown tangible benefits to low-income families, BC farmers, and the communities at large. Visits to farmers' markets in our pilot communities have come to be seen by project participants as part of a healthy lifestyle and a place where community members come together, regardless of income.

## **Key Evaluation Findings**

- When asked if eating fresh food was important to them, 91% of respondent coupon recipients agreed or strongly agreed. Eighty percent agreed or strongly agreed that eating food grown or produced locally was important to them.
- Eighty-four percent of recipients reported changes in the way they eat and 68 percent said they were trying new foods.
- Vendors responding to the evaluation survey recommended that the project be expanded both within their own locations and to other markets across the province.

*Expand the program. It is a great way to improve eating habits, get people out for a social experience and fight obesity, all at once!*

*I think a lot more low income people have an awareness that the market is not something that's completely out of reach for them*

- Coupon recipients articulated a strong sense of awareness about the value of fresh local food, as it impacts on their health and the health of their community.

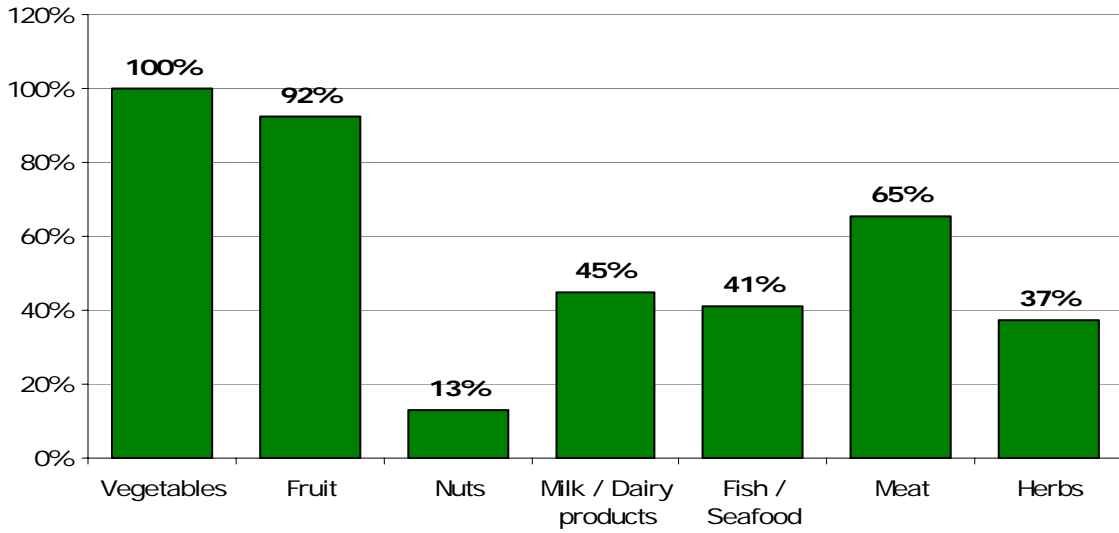
*It was actually a really good feeling to support people in your own community, to know directly where your food is coming from and to be able to ask questions about your food...*

*There is a new awareness of community coming together to be healthy and supporting local.*

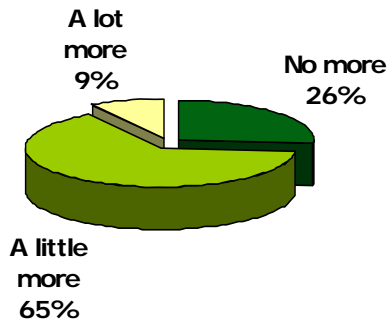
### **Examples of food purchased by coupon recipients**

<b>Category</b>	<b>Item</b>
<b>Fruit</b>	Cherries, plums, mini smooth-skinned kiwi
<b>Vegetables</b>	Tomatoes, kale, eggplant, purple beans, beets, cucumber/squash, zucchini, festive squash, tomatillas (red/green), summer squash, leek, different types of lettuce, mushrooms, spaghetti squash
<b>Meat</b>	Beef jerky, buffalo/bison, venison, venison pepperoni, game hens, Mennonite sausages, lamb, ostrich eggs, fresh tuna
<b>Herbs</b>	Green mustard, organic garlic, lemon basil, wasabi leaves

### Food groups purchased by coupon recipients

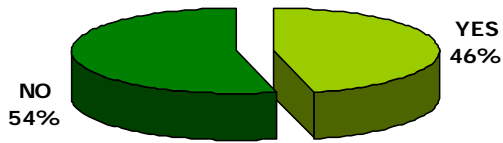


### Coupon recipients reporting own money spent



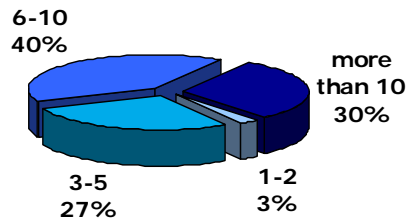
- Vendors at participating markets perceived a moderate increase in the sales of their products and generally experienced their role in the community in new and positive ways. Vendors were active in their support of the project and extremely positive about the positive impacts of their participation, for themselves and their communities.

### Percentage of recipients who have not been to a farmers' market before



- 54% of coupon recipients had not been to a farmers' market before. Following participation in this project, 60% of coupon recipients responding to the written survey and focus groups said they would continue to attend farmers' markets in the future.

### Number of times recipients shopped at the Farmer's Market this year



## **Farmers' Market Nutrition and Coupon Pilot (FMNCP) Project Highlights**

In Courtenay, the Wachiay Native Friendship Centre has developed partnerships with vendors and the business community to offer workshops on preparing simple and healthy meals with products available at the farmers' market. The market manager of the Comox Valley Farmers' Market has reported seeing nearly twice as many young families at the market since this project has started, and believes that this project is supporting the development of "future marketeers".

In Vancouver, residents of the downtown eastside go on field trips organized by the Downtown Neighbourhood House to the West End Farmers' Market. They are able to purchase fresh, healthy farm products that otherwise would be out of reach for them because of their limited budget. They are also learning that purchasing produce in season from the market is actually less expensive than what they would get at the supermarket. A number of vendors have provided additional support to these families through offering double the value on the coupons. A refugee family from the Renfrew-Collingwood Neighbourhood House has reported that they plan weekly outings to the farmers' market now, and on several occasions, their children get to use the coupons to purchase vegetables and fruits for the family's meals.

In Kelowna, coupon recipients are enjoying their outings to the market so much that they are encouraging friends that are not part of the project to come with them. Vendors have noted that the coupon recipients are very aware of what they are buying, and seem to have planned out their purchases before attending the market. Vendors also have said that this project has introduced new customers to their stands, and that they enjoy speaking with the coupon recipients and sharing their knowledge of how to use the products they will be bringing home.

In Coquitlam, our partners in Fraser Health have been working with a large multicultural population. Not only are these families accessing fresh BC farm products, but the coupons are acting as an additional incentive for on-going participation in the prenatal and postpartum classes. The vendors are enjoying the project and many have reported that the FMNCP is a very important project to support healthy eating for low income families in their community.

In Prince George, vendors have been giving tours to the coupon recipients to introduce them to the market and the variety of farm products available. The Northern Family Health Society is providing invaluable coaching to coupon recipients on the purchase and use of healthy foods from the market. As the project is nearing the end, coupon recipients have requested canning and preserving workshops, so they can enjoy what they have bought at the market into the winter season.