



LARIMER COUNTY FARMERS' MARKET: SUPPORTING INCLUSIVE COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT LARIMER COUNTY

Alison O'Connor (Horticulture Extension Specialist)
Maggie Switzer (Farmers Market and Food Systems Coordinator)
Allyson Brothers (Associate Professor of Human Development and Family Studies)
Christa Timmerman (Health and Well-Being Extension Specialist)
Analecia Vasquez (Retail Food Safety Coordinator)

Project Introduction

Started in 1976 by volunteer Colorado Master Gardeners, the Larimer County Farmers' Market is the oldest farmers' market in Northern Colorado. Today the market includes over 100 small business vendors per season and is visited by approximately 4,000 attendees per week.

The market takes many steps to be inclusive for all attendees, including accepting and implementing nutritional assistance currencies of SNAP, Double Up Food Bucks, Produce Bonus, Market Days for Older Adults vouchers, and Food Bank Bucks.

The market team also hosts special events and community guests, including Soil Health Day, National Farmers Market Week, and regular story time. This summer the market also hosted United States District 2 Representative Joe Neguse.



Picture 2: Taste the Difference Event comparing local vs. store bought peaches

Picture 1: Storytime at the market with local author Michelle Schaub

Market Visitor Survey

During my internship I created and implemented a Market Visitor Survey. The goal of the survey was to better understand the clientele of the market, learn how to improve the market for the future, and receive data for communicating the impact of the market in future grants or promotional materials. A few insights about the market we learned:

"It is the one event where I can relax, learn, meet good people, shop, and get the healthiest groceries."
"I know I get the freshest produce from supporting local farmers and supporting small businesses."

Summer Projects

The market team ensures the market impacts the most amount of people in many ways, shown through the areas I worked in this summer.

Market Days for Older Adults Survey and Outreach

- Collected survey data from Market Days participants
- Cleaned data and compiled a survey report that will help leverage the program to potential donors.
- Began a peer-reviewed manuscript draft that will share the benefits of the program to a larger audience.
- Created resources and shared recipes to MD participants at monthly distributions.

Special Event Planning

- Organized and ran story time at the market with two local authors.
- Helped run the "Taste the Difference" event, comparing local vs. store-bought products.
- Facilitated National Farmers Market Week activities, including zucchini races at the market.

Outreach and Community Impact

- Helped create a series of videos spotlighting local farms and farmers.
- Explained and facilitated conversation at the market about the Produce Bonus program.
- Distributed market food access information at community events like the Larimer County Food Bank's Lunch Lab.
- Helped track data of market impact, including economic trends and visitor demographics.



Picture 3: Example of food access literature



Picture 4: The market team with CSU President Amy Parsons on opening day

Market Days for Older Adults

The Market Days for Older Adults program fills an important gap in food access, low-income adults over the age of 60. The market self-funds the program and give participants \$40 each month for fresh produce.

All participants were given a survey at the beginning of the market survey where we learned:

- The typical MD client is an older women who lives alone and would not be able to shop at the market without the MD program.
- MD not only connects participants with fresh produce, but also resources on aging.
- 93% of participants agree that purchasing local food is important to them; 67% of participants wish to support local farmers through the MD program
- Participants possibly need help with produce preparation, which could be solved with volunteers helping cut and prepare produce at the market.

In 2024, Market Days provided over \$16,000 for local growers



Picture 5: Market Team of Alison, Amber, and Maggie



Picture 6: Congressman Joe Neguse tasting peaches at the market

Next Steps

From my internship I will take an even deeper appreciation for local food, a great understanding of the hard work of Extension professionals, including Master Gardener volunteers, and increased skills in adapting resources for a variety of audiences, including children and older adults. I will also take away so many fun memories of the Northern Colorado food system, including fun activities at the market and touring local farms.