



# MARKET DAYS FOR OLDER ADULTS: ADDRESSING SOCIAL ISOLATION AND FOOD INSECURITY AT THE LARIMER COUNTY FARMERS' MARKET



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## BACKGROUND

In 2019, 703 million individuals across the globe were aged 65 years or over (United Nations, 2019). This is projected to grow to 1.5 billion in 2050 due to the increases in life expectancy seen across the world (United Nations, 2019). Aging is commonly associated with deteriorations in health and mobility, and increased frailty and disability (Steed et al. 2007). Over 16.5 million Americans age 65+ are economically insecure—living at or below 200% of the federal poverty level (NCOA 2023). Moreover, more 43 million older adults experience chronic loneliness (Wilson & Moulton, 2010). Older adults who are economically and socially vulnerable are at an increased risk for health issues, declined quality of life, and decrease in lifespan (Holt-Lunstad et al., 2010). Economic and social vulnerability also compounds food insecurity, which disproportionately affects older adults living alone, on a fixed income (Chang & Hickman, 2017) and with chronic illness (Jih et al., 2018).

Market Days is an interdisciplinary collaboration between Colorado State University, the Larimer County Office of Colorado State University Extension, the Larimer County Farmers' market, and community partners aimed at addressing **social isolation** and **food insecurity**.

### Social Isolation and Older Adults

- In the United States, **28%** of older adults live alone. Low-income nonmarried/partnered older female adults who live alone, are not working, and have a low self-rated social network quality, self-perceived health, or functional status have an increased risk of loneliness (Cohen-Mansfield et al., 2016; Dahlberg et al., 2022).

- Greater social connection is associated with a 50% reduced risk of early death** (Holt-Lunstad et al., 2010).

- Lacking social connection carries a comparable risk, and frequently, exceeds that of other risk factors, including smoking up to 15 cigarettes per day, obesity, physical inactivity, and air pollution (Holt-Lunstad et al., 2010). **Those who are isolated are at increased risk for depression, cognitive decline, and dementia** (Cacioppo & Cacioppo, 2014; Global Council on Brain Health, 2017).

- A lack of social support is a risk factor for food insecurity** (Burrus et al., 2019).

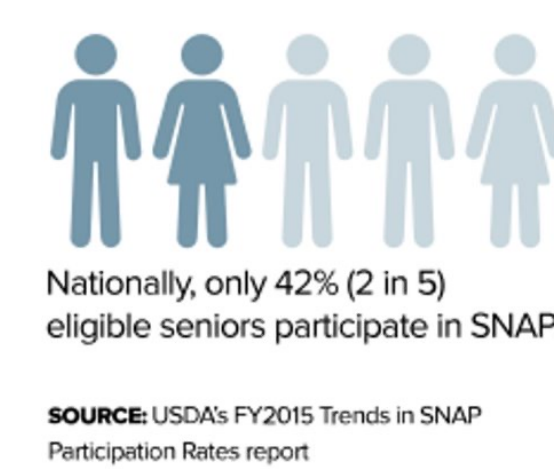
### Food Insecurity

- Food insecurity is defined as limited access to sufficient food needed to live a healthy life** (Kim-Mozeleski et al., 2023). Approximately **7-9%** of households with older adults experience food insecurity, both nationally (U.S. Department of Agriculture, 2019) and locally (Food Bank for Larimer County, n.d.).

- Food insecurity contributes to poor physical and mental health outcomes, including increased rates of chronic illness and poor mental health** (Gundersen & Ziliak, 2015) as well as poorer diet quality (Leung & Woldson, 2021) and lower quality of life (Russell et al., 2016).

- Colorado is one of three states without a senior nutrition program.**

Existing gaps in senior nutrition programs and low SNAP enrollment highlights the importance of food programs to addressing food insecurity and social isolation in older adults.



Social isolation and food insecurity pose risk to the health and wellbeing of older adults.

## MARKET DAYS

Market Days has three central goals:

- Increase access to fruits and vegetables
- Enhance community connectedness and reduce feelings of social isolation
- Promote healthy aging in an at-risk population

The program has a hybrid model of delivery and produce pick-up. Throughout the market season (June-Oct), participants receive fresh produce from the Farmers' Market bimonthly, recipe cards (in English & Spanish), nutrition information and resource handouts, and can connect with volunteers and staff. In 2023, volunteers contributed to 50 hours of work each month and play a key role in the program's success.

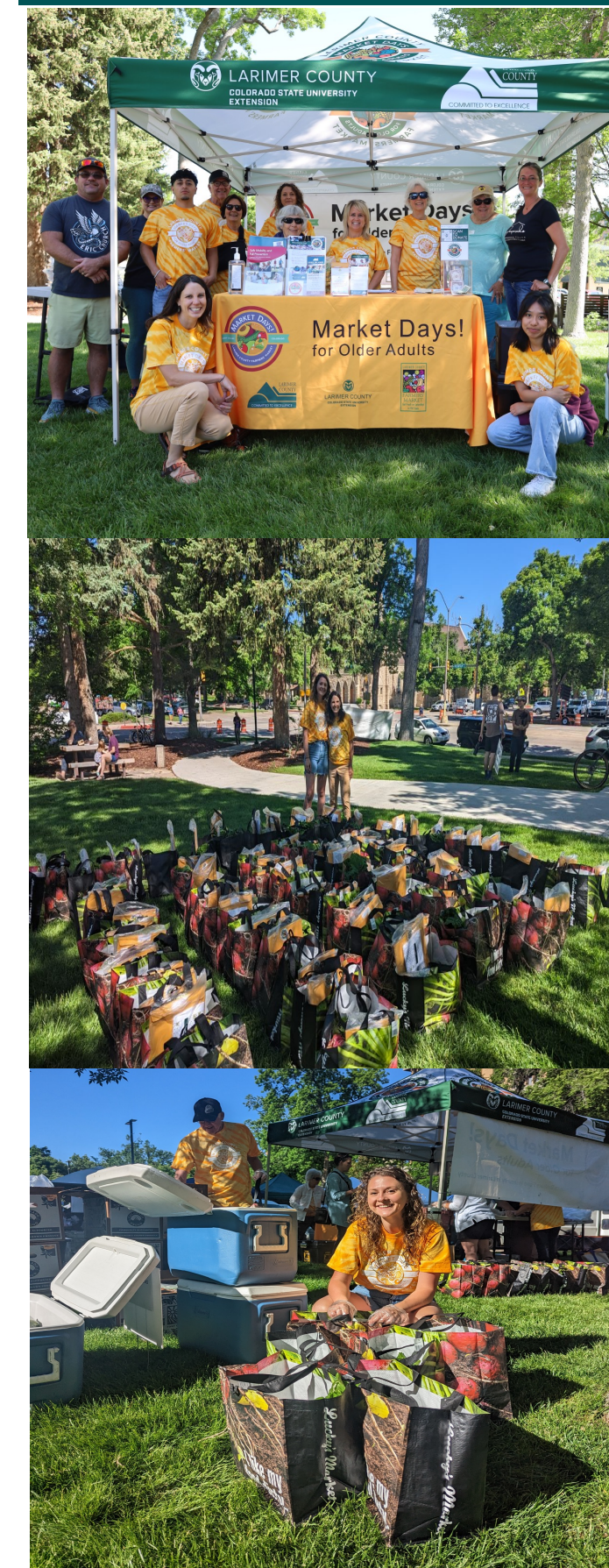
In the 2023 season, 250 participants were enrolled in the program and the program currently has a wait list. **The majority of participants are white, low-income, single (widowed, divorced, nonmarried) women who live alone. 64% of participants are on SNAP and more than half of participants reported not having enough money for food.** Risk factors associated with social isolation and food insecurity highlight the importance of programs such as Market Days.



Scan here for references!



## METHODS & ACTIVITIES



### Program Evaluation

To learn more about program impact including perceptions of social connectedness, produce consumption, community resource awareness and other psychosocial aspects of healthy aging, we are conducting a pre/post survey and phone interviews with participants.

- 96 participants completed the survey, 38% response rate.
- Assisted with survey development and data management
- Led qualitative data collection & analysis
- Post surveys will be completed at the end of the market season (Oct)
- Collaborated to write manuscript and presentation to academic and community audiences

### Market Presence

- Attended market every Saturday
- Worked with team of volunteers to fill 120+ bags per week
- Interacted with participants and built connections
- Helped manage safety risks for falls and mobility
- Assisted program coordinator with all tasks

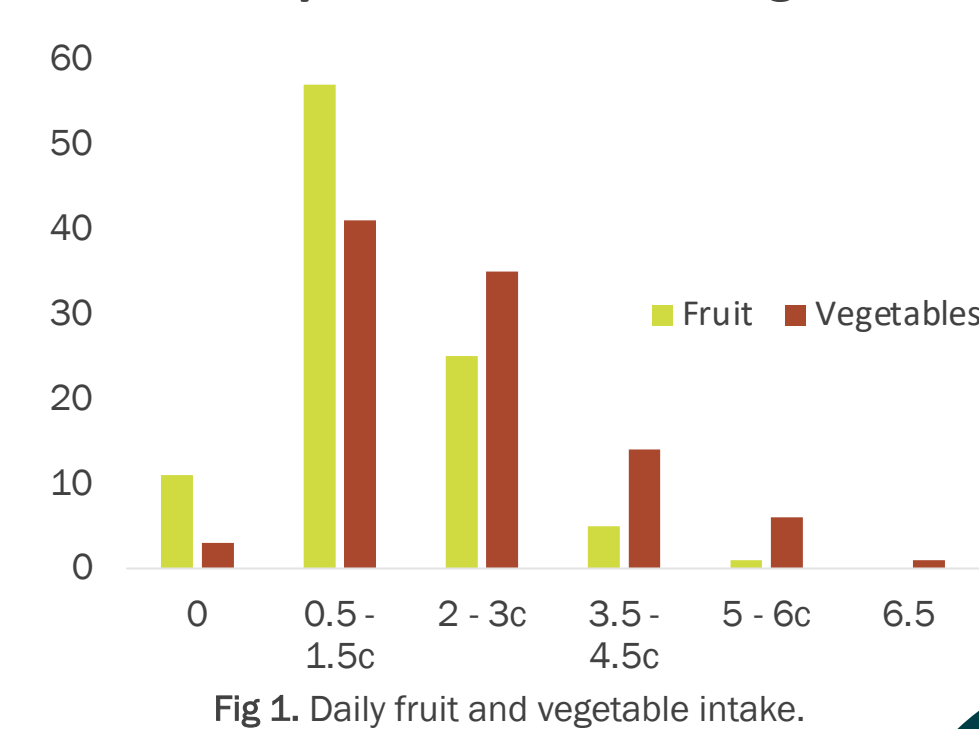
### Buddy Program

- Helped design new Buddy Program to add an intergenerational component and improve accessibility for participants to attend the market

## PRE-SURVEY FINDINGS

### Food Insecurity and Health

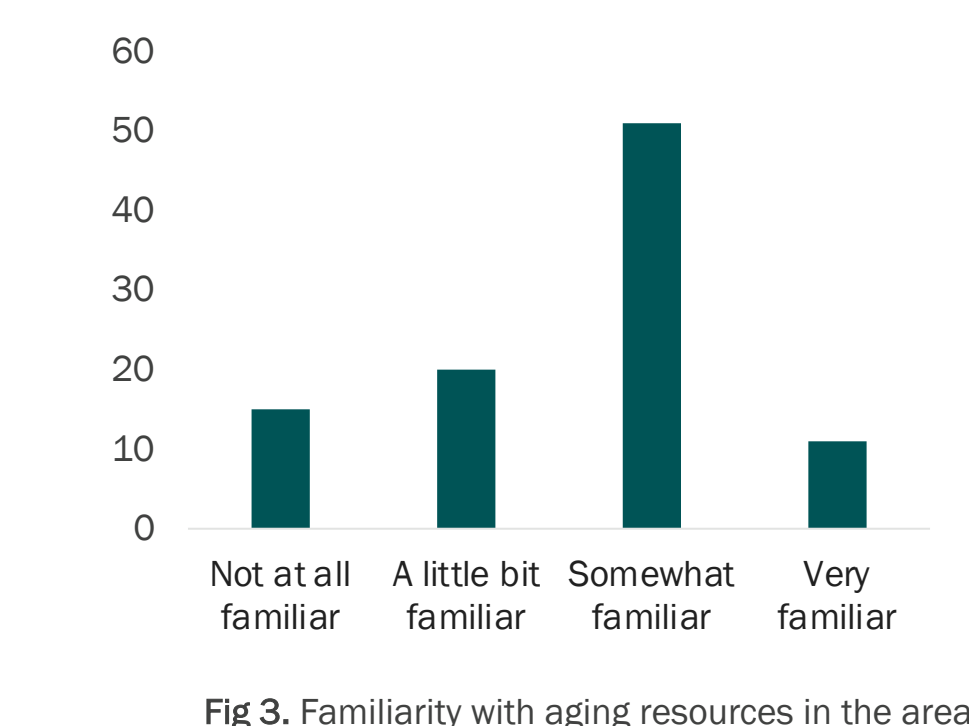
The majority of survey respondents ate **less than 3 cups** of fruits and vegetables daily.



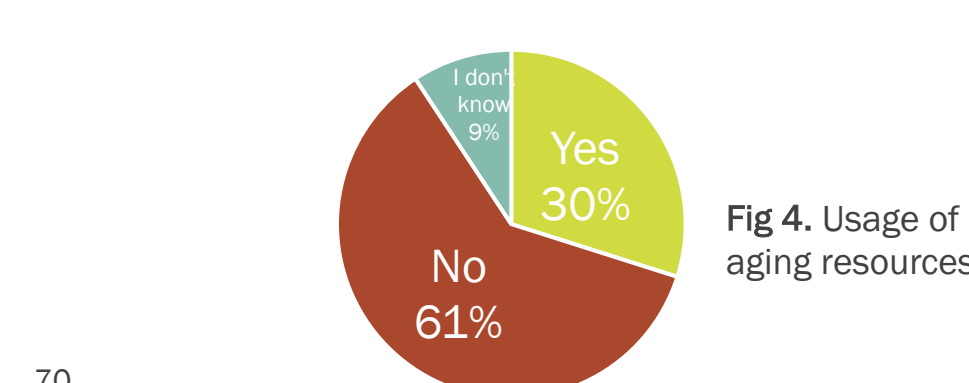
91% reported being diagnosed with at least 1 medical condition.

### Healthy Aging

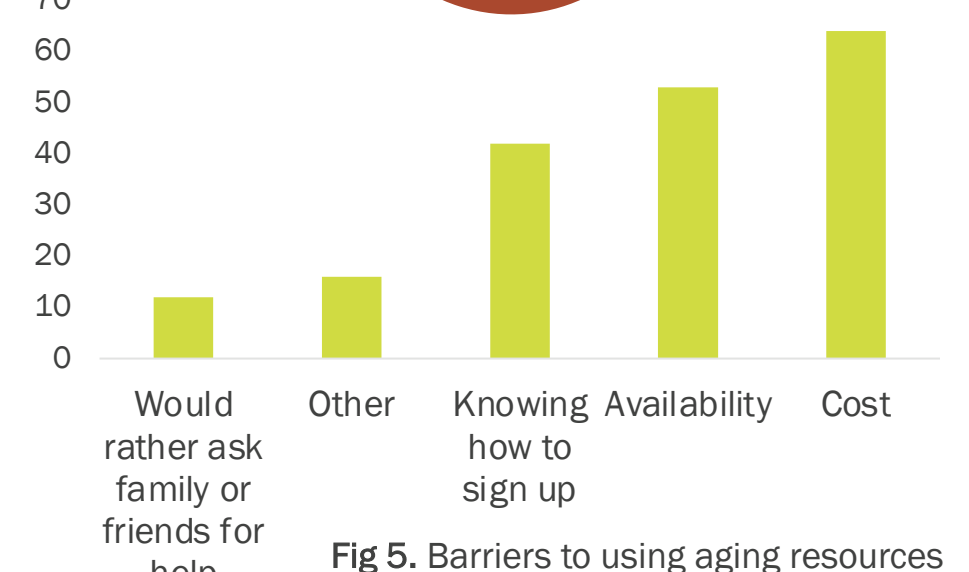
More than a third (37%) were "not at all familiar" or "a little bit familiar" with aging resources in the area.



61% did not use aging resources.

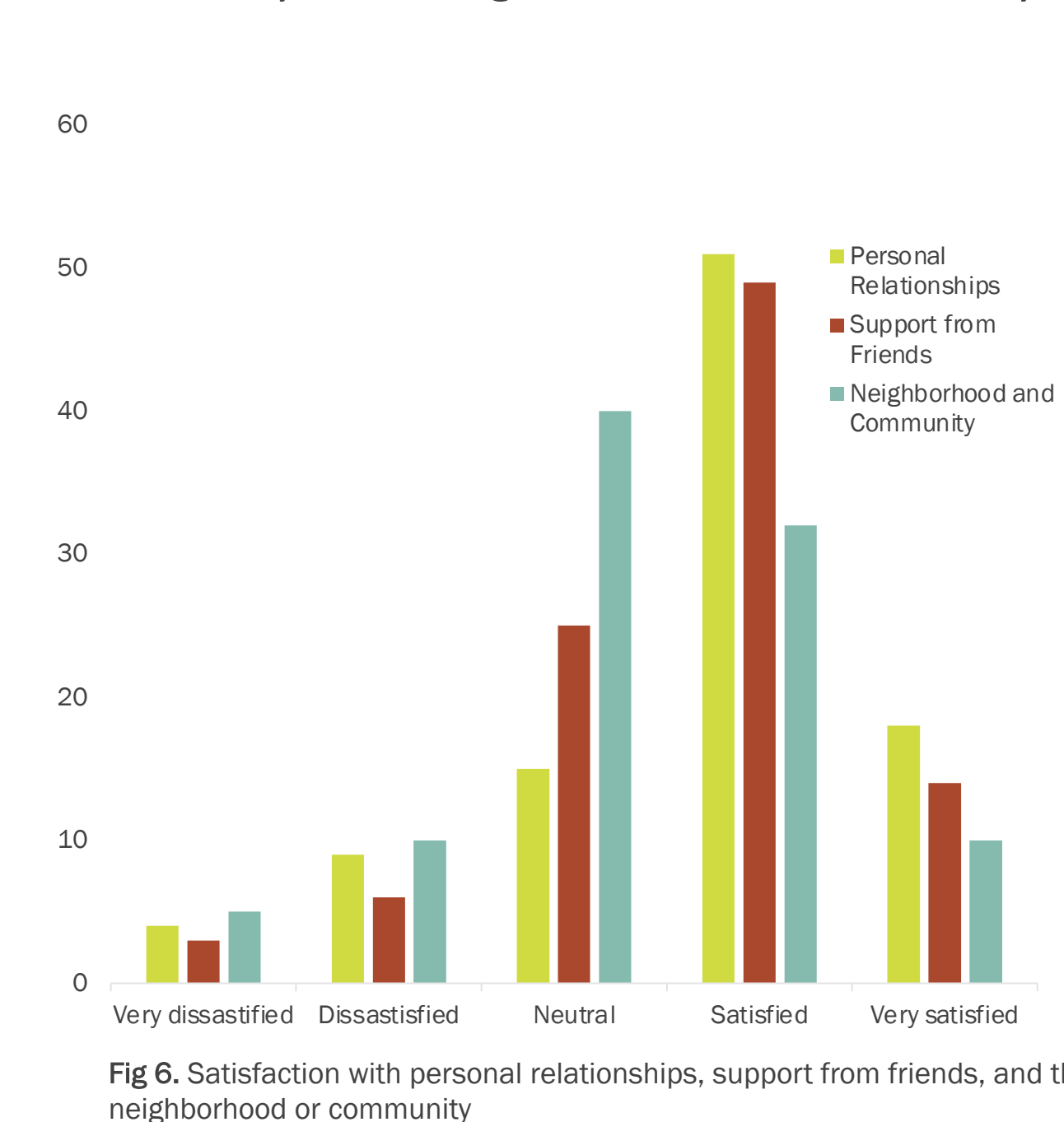


Cost is the largest barrier to using aging resources



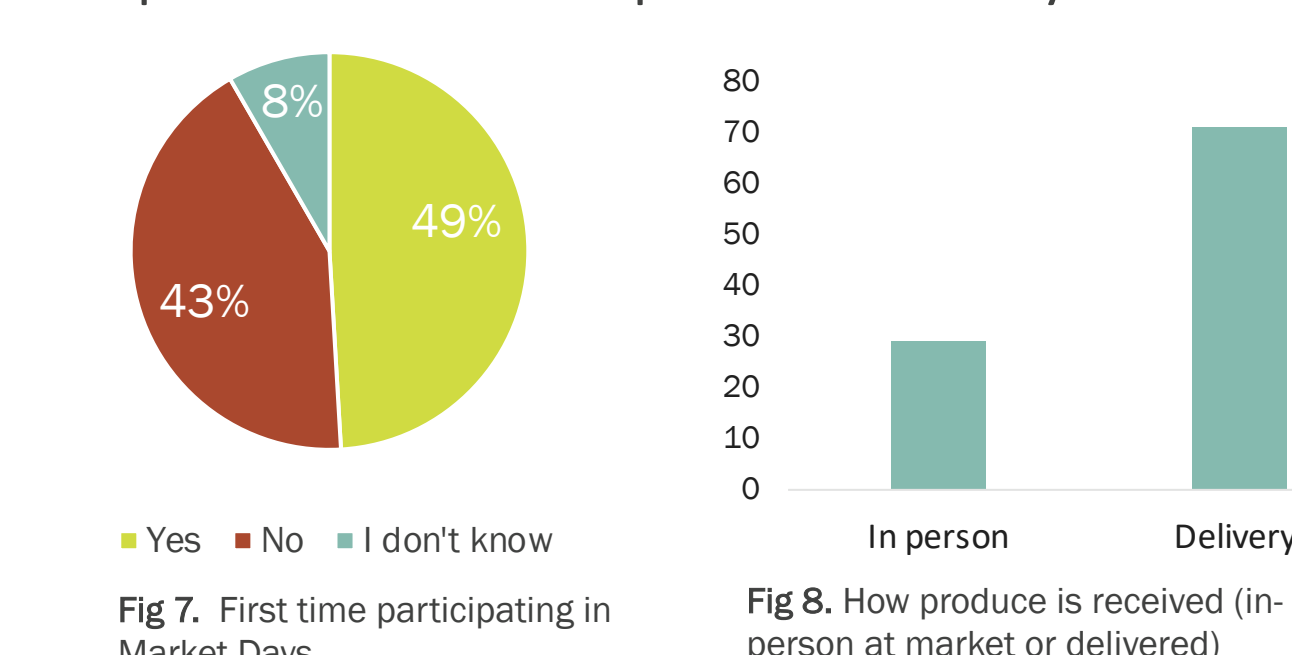
### Social Isolation and Support

Less than half (44%) were "satisfied" or "very satisfied" by their neighborhood or community.

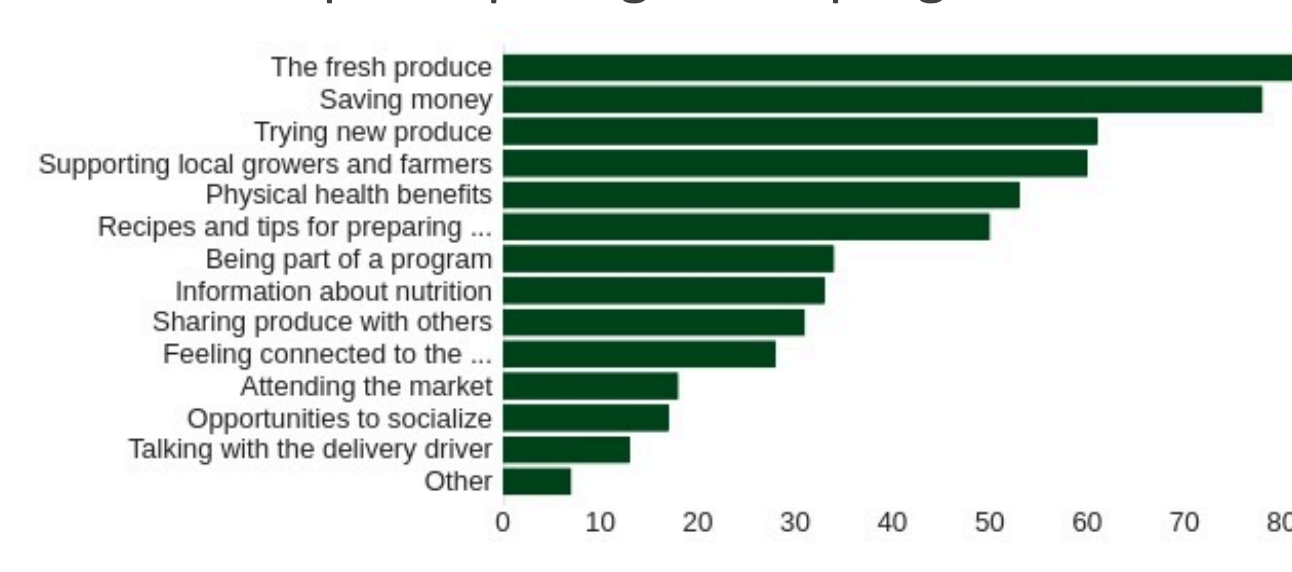


### Program Usage

49% of survey respondents were participating in Market Days for the first time. 74% of respondents received produce delivery.



The **fresh produce** is one of the favorite parts of participating in the program.



## PARTICIPANT STORIES



"Groceries are so expensive that any little bit of help I can get matters... I am on a fixed income and it is really hard. I have been to the farmer's market and it is pretty expensive. This program has been a blessing."

"The variety of the produce is amazing. I used to garden, I can't do it anymore because I am in a wheelchair. My nutrition and eating improves during the season and it's fresher than the grocery stores. The program saves me money, too."

"For one thing, I try new vegetables that I've never tried before. Bok choy, I've never tried that. I'm getting a chance to try new things I've never tried before and now I know I like them. I might otherwise never have known it existed."

"I like the recipes. In fact, I live in a complex and we exchange recipes. If I'm not sure what to make with something, I can always ask someone. I have a better connection to my community."



## DISCUSSION

Pre-survey findings and qualitative data highlight the importance of Market Days. This program serves an at-risk population of older adults and provides fresh produce at no cost. As older adults who are socially isolated and food insecure are at increased risk for physical and mental health issues, programs aimed providing healthy food and fostering social connections are critical.

At the time of the pre-survey, participants:

- Were eating less than the recommended daily value of fruits and vegetables.
- Had low satisfaction with their neighborhood and community.
- Under utilizing aging resources in the area due to cost and availability

Post survey data will provide further details on the impact of Market Days on participants.

As social connections are at the heart of healthy aging, programs which enhance community connectedness are critical to supporting older adults. Further investment in aging programs is needed to increase the ability for older adults to access services that assist in maintaining quality of life, health, and independence.

**Market Days increases access to fruits and vegetables, promotes healthy aging, and enhances community connectedness. Produce programs such as Market Days play an important role in supporting older adults and the broader community.**

## NEXT STEPS

Program evaluation is on-going.

- Data will be collected at the end of the season (October) to evaluate the program's impact on food insecurity and health, social isolation and support, community resource awareness, and other psychosocial aspects of healthy aging.
- In September, the Market Days Buddy Program is being launched to incentivize attending the market in person and foster increased social connectedness and intergenerational connections.
- Incentivizing market attendance is a high priority to enhance the social benefits of the program.
- Program evaluation findings will be used to seek additional funding and sources of support.

THANK YOU TO OUR PROGRAM PARTNERS, VOLUNTEERS, AND SPONSORS!

