

Differences in reported benefits in older adults after participation in a nutrition incentive program

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Background: A healthy food incentive program doubles the value of food stamp dollars at farmers' markets, addressing financial barriers to healthy eating for low-income Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), or food stamps, recipients. Older adults sometimes have more trouble purchasing and eating healthy food due to illness, a lack of social support, or mobility problems, in addition to financial reasons.

Methods: Surveys were administered to 87 SNAP recipients redeeming healthy food incentives at farmers' markets. Data were stratified by age in order to test benefits experienced from program participation and the program's efficacy in reducing barriers to healthy eating.

Results: Older program participants (aged 66+) were less likely to report experiencing community benefits from the program than younger participants (age 66+: 20.0% vs. age 18-65: 62.9%; $p=0.0292$). However, older participants were more likely to report experiencing other benefits (age 66+: 60% vs. age 18-65: 8.6%; $p=0.054$). Reported health benefits did not differ significantly by age group (age 66+: 40.0% vs. age 18-65: 54.3%; $p = 0.09502$). Additionally, no difference was detected between age groups reporting price as their biggest barrier to healthy eating ($p = 0.2569$). However, older program participants were less likely to report that the healthy food incentive program addressed their barrier (age 66+: 66.7% vs. age 18-65: 96.1%; $p=0.0092$).

Conclusions: Older program participants may be experiencing different benefits than younger ones, with younger participants reporting more community benefits such as feeling more connected to one's community or supporting local farmers more often and older program participants reporting other benefits more frequently.

Key words: SNAP, food stamps, nutrition incentive, older adults

<https://doi.org/10.21633/jgpha.7.150>

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