For seniors, eating adequate amounts of fruits and vegetables can help prevent or manage chronic disease and promote quality of life. The Senior Farmers Market Nutrition Program (SFMNP) is a federal nutrition assistance program that aims to increase the affordability of fresh, local produce for low-income seniors. However, seniors often have to travel to public places like senior centers to enroll in the program. Because of this, homebound seniors are underserved by the SFMNP program and are similarly challenged to access fresh fruit and vegetables. For example, recent research has found that 83% of seniors who applied for meals on wheels (MOW) are unable to shop for groceries, and that in MOW clients’ homes, fruits and vegetables make up only 12% of non-MOW calories in the home (Hallman et al., 2015).

To address this, two interventions were conducted with MOW clients:

1. SFMNP enrollment for income-eligible clients, and
2. Four bi-weekly deliveries of fresh fruit and vegetables in July and August, 2014.

Methods

In partnership with Meals on Wheels in Greater New Brunswick (MOWGNB), 19 income-eligible clients were identified and offered in-home enrollment for SFMNP. The fresh produce was purchased from the New Brunswick Community Farmers’ Market (NBCFM), using SFMNP vouchers and funds donated from NBCFM. Bags of fresh produce were delivered to all 60 clients via the MOWGNB volunteer delivery network.

SFMNP participants

“I go to the senior center, and they give out the vouchers… I haven’t been going there for a while… because I got sick, and I couldn’t get to the building.”

- 82% report having gone to a farmers’ market in the past, but many of them can no longer travel to the market.
- 27% were aware of the SFMNP program, but only one (7%) had ever participated in the program.
- Of approximately 19 potentially income-eligible MOWGNB recipients approached, 13 agreed to enroll in SFMNP.

Desire to participate next year

“[It] helped me out food-wise too as far as blending things in that helped me extend my food situation out. It helped me out a lot there… I’ll manage but I am going to miss it.”

- 56% reported a change in vegetable consumption
- 65% reported a change in fruit consumption
- 100% of respondents said that they would participate if the program were to be offered again.