

FRESHLINK AMBASSADORS

A peer-to-peer approach to promoting farmers' markets

May 2020

What is the FreshLink Ambassador approach?

The FreshLink Ambassador approach is the product of a five-year research project of the Prevention Research Center for Healthy Neighborhoods (PRCHN) at Case Western Reserve University, Cleveland, Ohio. The approach was developed using community-engaged research that was funded by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention from 2014-2019.

FreshLink Ambassadors are community members hired to be "boots on the ground" staff to spread the word about farmers' markets and explain how to use Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) and nutrition incentives at farmers' markets.

Who are FreshLink Ambassadors?

- Passionate and connected advocates for community wellbeing.
- Trained to effectively bridge residents to resources for community health.
- Spread the word about farmers' markets, SNAP, and SNAP incentives through outreach events in the community.
- Support residents as they "try out" farmers' markets using a new customer coupon.

What is the effectiveness of this approach?

In 2017 and 2018, FreshLink Ambassadors in Cleveland, Ohio reached 3,599 potential farmers' market customers. Outreach was targeted in neighborhoods where 30% or more of the residents received SNAP and that were located within one mile of a farmers' market. The peer-to-peer marketing approach effectively reached key target populations. Over half of the people reached by a FreshLink Ambassador had **never shopped at a farmers' market**, were **SNAP beneficiaries**, and had **children under 18 years old** in their household.



Number of Outreach Events by Type



FreshLink Ambassadors conducted three types of community outreach:

1. One-on-one interactions with family, friends, and neighbors.
2. Community events at food pantries, libraries, recreation centers, neighborhood meetings, etc.
3. Information booth at social service organizations where SNAP and other benefits are acquired.

How many new customer coupons were redeemed?

FreshLink Ambassadors provided a \$5 new customer coupon during outreach. Coupon redemption rates were between **12% and 14%** in 2017 and 2018. This is much higher than redemption of coupons provided through traditional methods like mailers, which have a redemption rate of 1% or less. People more likely to redeem the new customer coupons were: (1) living in a zip code with a farmers' market in the FreshLink program, (2) 50+ years old, (3) female, and (4) without children in the household.

Did FreshLink Ambassadors help increase SNAP sales at farmers' markets?

Overall, farmers' markets paired with a FreshLink Ambassador had greater improvements in SNAP sales compared to farmers' markets without a FreshLink Ambassador. On average, farmers' markets with a FreshLink Ambassador had a **6% increase in SNAP sales** in year-to-year comparisons. Implementation of this peer-to-peer outreach approach was feasible and coupon redemption rates exceeded industry standards indicating the "product" (i.e., farmers' markets, nutrition incentive programs) promoted by FreshLink Ambassadors was considered advantageous.

What was the impact of FreshLink Ambassadors at one farmers' market?



**\$270 INCREASE
IN SNAP SALES**

TOTAL OVER A 12 WEEK PERIOD

Learn more about the FreshLink Ambassador approach.



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Select publications.

Freedman et al. (2019) Evaluation of a Peer-to-Peer Approach to Improve the Reach of Farmers' Markets among Low-income Populations," Health Behavior Research: Vol. 2: No. 1. <https://doi.org/10.4148/2572-1836.1034>

Freedman et al (2016) Systematic Review of Factors Influencing Farmers' Market Use Overall and among Low-Income Populations. Journal of the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics: Vol. 116, pages 1136-1155. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.jand.2016.02.010>

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