

Improving Access to Healthy Food by Reducing Financial Barriers

At A Glance

With funding from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's (CDC) Racial and Ethnic Approaches to Community Health (REACH) grant, [Partnership for a Healthy Lincoln](#), a non-profit that focuses on improving community health and addressing health disparities, partnered with the Nebraska Extension to successfully increase access to and consumption of fresh produce in local low income and minority communities through the [Double Up Food Bucks \(DUFB\) program](#). Nebraska Extension Nutrition Education Program, part of the University of Nebraska, helps families on a limited budget make healthier food choices and choose physically active lifestyles. Partnership for a Healthy Lincoln provided funding for program personal, marketing support, and an electronic card system for customer ease and to capture purchase data from a Lincoln cultural market.

Public Health Challenge

Diets poor in healthy foods, especially fresh produce, contribute to obesity, particularly among those with lower income status where people of color are over-presented. Obesity is a key cause of chronic diseases like diabetes, hypertension, and heart disease, resulting in billions of dollars in additional medical costs in the U.S. According to [public health experts and research](#), systemic inequities and socioeconomic factors contribute to higher rates of obesity among certain racial and ethnic populations. According to the latest available national data – from the 2017 – 2018 National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey (NHANES), Black adults had the highest level of adult obesity nationally at 49.6% and Hispanic adults have an obesity rate of 44.8% compared to White adults with an obesity rate of 42.2%.

In Lincoln, low healthy food access was identified in locations where the Black and Indigenous People of Color (BIPOC) population is about 1.28 times larger than Lincoln's general population. While about 15% of Lincoln's population are BIPOC, 30% of Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) Nebraska recipients are in BIPOC households. Proximity to culturally relevant stores that supply affordable and healthy food was also identified as a food access barrier in Lincoln.

Approach

The overarching goal of the DUFB program is to reduce financial barriers and improve the diet quality and health of Nebraska SNAP recipients through providing point-of-purchase incentives and nutrition education. Nebraska DUFB allows grocers and farmers to get a fair price for their produce and SNAP recipients to stretch their food dollar and eat healthy.

Another REACH partner, Community CROPS, a non-profit that supports urban agriculture to address food insecurity and promote healthy nutrition, participated in the program, enlisting their local farm partners in the program. DUFB helps participating SNAP farmers' markets, community supported agriculture, and grocery and convenience stores reduce financial barriers for those with limited resources to increase consumption of fresh fruits and vegetables and provides nutrition education to help people find, afford, and incorporate fresh produce into their diets.

DUFB provides the following for participating SNAP retail sites and SNAP recipients:

- 1) formal support to sites to stock fresh produce and help recipients buy local produce
- 2) dollar-for-dollar match on qualifying purchases to help recipients afford fresh produce
- 3) supports and creates culturally appropriate environments to help recipients choose fresh produce, and
- 4) tools and resources for DUFB sites to offer in-store nutrition education, food demonstrations, promotion and marketing, training, and assessment to help recipients use fresh produce. DUFB also supports local businesses and farmers through increased purchases of fresh produce.



DUFB at a Lincoln farmers' market



A DUFB user card (licensed through Epic Technology Systems) that works like an electric bank card provided data that 514 families/users utilized the DUFB program in the [Lincoln Mediterranean Market](#). The market is centrally located in one of the lowest income and under-resourced areas of Lincoln, serving primarily BIPOC and Middle East and Northern African (MENA) populations. The Epic card system was funded by Partnership for a Healthy Lincoln through the REACH grant.

The Lincoln Mediterranean Market is Lincoln's first MENA-owned market.

Results

The largest increase in DUFB program usage has been at stores that primarily serve marginalized BIPOC and MENA communities. According to the latest Nebraska statewide data, from September 2020 through March 2022, over 5,000 families have spent more than \$300,000 on fresh fruits and vegetables through the program. Of that, \$128,433 was spent by Lincoln families with \$95,000 of that total at Lincoln Mediterranean Market, who implemented the program in September 2021. In the first quarter of 2022, this one small market in Lincoln was responsible for 72% of total DUFB redeemed in the entire state.

Additionally, the use of the Epic card system showed increased utilization of DUFB incentives with the redemption rate of sites using that technology at 87% in the first year. In comparison, those that used the paper coupon redemption system had a utilization rate of 40-50%.



Produce from local farms at Lincoln Mediterranean Market

The data provided by piloting this technology and the overwhelming response to DUFB in Lincoln has shown that there is interest and need to maintain and expand the DUFB program to more ethnic markets to increase access to healthy food for all.

Contact

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