

Highlights from the Farmers Markets as Food Justice Event

On Thursday, November 30, 2017 Fondy Food Center, the Medical College of Wisconsin's Center for Healthy Communities and Research, and the Milwaukee Farmers Market Coalition hosted a community conversation around how farmers markets can be spaces for food and economic justice. Thank you to Venice Williams, Executive Director of Alice's Garden and The Table, and Bevan Baker, City of Milwaukee's Commissioner of Health, for delivering keynotes. **More info at fondymarket.org/ebt**



BACKGROUND Farmers market are promising venues for both improving healthy food access and the local economy, yet research shows that farmers markets disproportionately serve white, middle to upper middle class, educated, women. At the same time, people of color are disproportionately harmed by the industrial food system – experiencing more hunger, diet related diseases, economic insecurity and low wages.

The Milwaukee Farmers Market Coalition (MFMC) is working with farmers markets, health organizations, governmental and private partners to create more access to, and utilization of, farmers markets for *all* Milwaukeeans. In addition to efforts such as increasing SNAP/EBT acceptance at markets, creating multiple language materials, and creating space for ongoing discussions, the MFMC is exploring what we can do to overcome cultural barriers.

HIGHLIGHTS FROM BREAKOUT CONVERSATIONS

Three breakouts explored the following question, “How do we make Milwaukee area farmers markets more welcoming and accessible to low income families and communities of color?” through dialogue.

Highlights from: *Barriers to Entry for Food Producers* - *Barriers such as navigating licensing, access to commercial kitchens, and access to capital present hurdles for start-up food entrepreneurs. What can we do to create pathways to local food enterprises?* With Trueman McGee

- **Challenges:** Receiving conflicting information from State sources like DATCP versus local sources like the City of Milwaukee regarding food processing license requirements; Having access to mentors and knowledge on how to start and run a business; Commercial kitchen access is possible in Milwaukee, although they are often scheduled and booked up, thus unavailable
- **Opportunities:** Develop mentor/mentee relationships and have those experienced in small food start-ups become “navigators” that are accessible to newer start-ups; Create a local food hub space that hosts a large, open and available commercial kitchen for start-up food producers (similar to the model of [The Cookery](#) in North Carolina)

Highlights from: *Fair Food for Producers and Eaters* - *The industrial food system hurts those most vulnerable on either end of the food system. In addition to farmers market incentive programs, what can we do to make good food affordable while ensuring farmers, farm laborers, and local food producers are paid a fair wage?* With Jen Casey

- **Challenges:** Funding not secured for expanding farmers market incentive program; Increased competition of groceries, online shopping, as well as direct markets like CSAs and farmers markets, are financially impacting local producers – many report having to work harder (e.g., attend more markets) to clear the same sales; “Greenwashing” – advertising by large food companies can mislead consumers into thinking they are supporting local producers, when they are not; SNAP users are not aware that a growing number of FMs accept SNAP
- **Opportunities:** Grant submitted for a city-wide farmers market incentive program; Coalition considering more joint marketing campaigns aimed at several different market segments; Increase awareness of FMs accepting SNAP

Highlights from: A Market For All? What does authentic hospitality look, feel, taste, and smell like for vendors and shoppers? With Venice Williams

- Challenges: Some vendors stereotyping SNAP users & people of color; Lack of familiarity with how to use SNAP benefits at markets; Practices that happen in a public marketplace that may differ across various cultures/ethnicities, including haggling, could cause uncomfortable confrontations; Challenge of bridging these kinds of cultural divides (including dispelling myths folks may have about different ethnicities)
- Opportunities: Consider volunteer position to specifically welcome SNAP users, or “farmers market concierge”; Fondy Food Center will explore options for undoing racism trainings geared towards market managers, vendors, and coalition partners; Vendors who participate in this cultural competence training could display a certificate of completion at their booth across Milwaukee markets; Suggestion box so that folks can share their stories anonymously, including any negative experiences related to their race or using SNAP benefits; Farmers markets can be the bridge in cultural gaps in our city

*The **Milwaukee Farmers Market Coalition** was launched in 2015 by Fondy Food Center and the Medical College of Wisconsin’s Center for Healthy Communities and Research, and is made up of a diverse group of stakeholders including farmers market managers and volunteers, community partners, health care organizations, and interested individuals who have the shared goal of making more markets accessible to more low-income and diverse clientele. Connecting more Milwaukeeans to more healthy, local food helps to improve both public health and the local economy. Please visit fondymarket.org/ebt for more information and to sign up for our listserv.*