



**FARMERS'
MARKETS**
of Nova Scotia



Eating Healthy. Buying Local. Building Community.

An Evaluative Summary of the Nourishing Communities: Food Coupon Pilot Program

Prepared by the Acadia Entrepreneurship Centre
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Table of Contents

1	Executive Summary.....	3
2	Acknowledgements.....	5
3	The Nourishing Communities Food Coupon Pilot Program: Background	6
4	Evaluation Methodology	7
5	Key Outcomes: By the Numbers.....	9
6	In Their Own Words: Key Outcomes According to Participants	11
7	Key Learnings and Opportunities for Enhancement.....	12
8	Next Steps: Program Sustainability and Future Funding Models.....	16
9	Conclusion: A Resounding Success.....	17
	Appendix A – Letter of Impact from Participant Teresa Neary	19
	Appendix B – Letter of Impact from Anonymous Participant.....	20
	Appendix C – All Participant Quotes and Statements	21
	Appendix D – Coupon Redemption by Market.....	23

1 Executive Summary

The Nourishing Communities Food Coupon Pilot Program launched in May 2019 (and ended in January 2020), as a means to achieve three objectives:

1. To provide financial support to those in need to access healthy food, recognizing that Nova Scotia has the highest rate of food insecurity in Canada.
2. To provide an experience that supported physical, mental, and community health;
3. To support local producers and farmers in developing a robust food system in Nova Scotia.

With funding support from the Nova Scotia government¹ – and in-kind/administrative support from many other partners – FMNS distributed \$42,000 worth of food coupons to 105 households across 6 markets: Avon Community (Windsor), Cape Breton, Lunenburg, New Glasgow, Truro, and Wolfville. It should be noted that while some of the households were comprised of individuals, many represented couples and families (including spouses and children), meaning that the overall impact of the program extended well beyond 105 individuals. Based on participant self-reporting, we estimate that this program directly increased food security for more than 150 individuals.

By nearly any measure, the Nourishing Communities Food Coupon Pilot Program was a resounding success, with many building blocks now in place to grow the program in Year 2 and beyond. Consider the following:

- Coupon redemption rates were extremely high, with 88.9% of all food coupons used. Several markets have granted permission for participants to redeem coupons after the program has officially ended, which is expected to drive the final redemption rate well over 90%.
- Despite having no restrictions on how their coupons could be redeemed, participants overwhelmingly made healthy spending decisions on locally-sourced food, demonstrating a clear need. More than 84% of all coupons redeemed were used directly towards the purchase of foods, including produce, prepared foods, and other agri-food products.
- More than 75% of all program participants completed a survey at both the beginning and end of the program, evaluating their experience (results included within the report).
- Program loyalty was high. In fact, only a single participant across all markets opted not to see the program through to its completion.
- On a scale of 1-10 (where 1 = not valuable and 10 = extremely valuable) participants across all markets gave the program an average score of 9.4/10. 72% of respondents rated it a perfect 10.
- Economic impact – though not directly measured – is presumed to be significant. All coupons were redeemed for locally produced foods and goods, resulting in minimal economic leakage.
- 57% of participants indicated they made at least one new friend or social contact
- 98% of participants purchased foods that were not part of their diet previously

¹ Including a \$63,100 investment from Communities, Culture, and Heritage Nova Scotia

- 78% of participants learned something new about food and nutrition
- 62% of participants expect to make long-term changes to their diet as a result of this program
- 90% of participants – as a result of this program – purchased previously unaffordable food(s)
- 85% of participants felt a greater sense of belonging to their community as a result of this program
- 87% of participants who ate healthier foods than usual during the program
- 85% of participants – as a result of this program – felt they had more money to meet their other (non-food/grocery) needs
- 92% of participants felt welcomed and comfortable attending the farmers' market
- 97% of participants believe they received good value for their food coupons, overall
- 90% of participants benefitted from the social and cultural aspects of the farmers' markets

In addition to these measures, participants from all 6 markets offered up glowing endorsements of the program.

"I feel blessed to be in this program. It really helps."

"I liked that I could buy meat and fish, that I can't get at the food bank."

"This program had a dramatic impact on our family. It provided us with an affordable family outing each week."

"I left the market feeling like a million dollars. The market isn't somewhere we would usually go, but – because of this program – we will go regularly. Our 3-year-old twins love it."

With Nova Scotia boasting the highest number of farmers' markets per capita in Canada, FMNS and its partners believe this program is easily scalable, and wish to begin this process immediately. In 2020, FMNS is seeking an additional \$100,000 investment[^] from the Province to run the program in 10-12 communities across the province this year. To make the program sustainable by 2021, FMNS and its partners will immediately begin developing a resilient funding model, which will include corporate and municipal sponsorships, crowdfunding, and individual family sponsorships.

[^] by comparison, the British Columbia Farmers' Market Nutrition Coupon Program received nearly \$2 million in 2019-2020.²

For more information about this program, please contact Justin Cantafio (Executive Director, Farmers' Markets of Nova Scotia) at 902.932.7282 or info@farmersmarketsnovascotia.ca.

² BC Ministry of Health [May 4, 2019]. *More people to benefit from farmers' market program*. The Government of British Columbia [Online]. Available: <https://news.gov.bc.ca/releases/2019HLTH0069-000873>

2 Acknowledgements

The Acadia Entrepreneurship Centre is pleased to have had the opportunity to prepare this evaluation summary. As a neutral third-party organization (unaffiliated with Farmers' Markets of Nova Scotia or its participating member markets), we are well positioned to evaluate the program objectively and without bias. We would be remiss, however, if we did not acknowledge the organizations and people who were instrumental in helping us collect the qualitative and quantitative data you are about to read. Perhaps above all, we are grateful to the program's participants for sharing their experiences, without which our ability to evaluate the program would be greatly diminished.

Acknowledgements
<i>Justin Cantafio</i> , Executive Director, Farmers' Markets of Nova Scotia
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<i>Margaret Ells-Congdon</i> , Market Manager, Truro Farmers' Market
<i>Karen Cooper</i> , Market Manager, Avon Community Farmers' Market
<i>Pauline Singer</i> , Market Manager, Cape Breton Farmers' Market
<i>Kristi Russell</i> , Market Manager, New Glasgow Farmers' Market
Lunenburg Food Bank, Program Partner
Second Story Women's Centre, Program Partner
Wolfville Area Food Bank, Program Partner
Maggie's Place Family Resource Centre, Program Partner
Canadian Mental Health Association (Colchester Branch), Program Partner
Family Resource Centre of West Hants, Program Partner
Hants County Senior Safety Association, Program Partner
Kids First New Glasgow Family Resource Centre, Program Partner
Whitney Pier Boys and Girls Club, Program Partner

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- *Jessica Wall*, former Acadia University Community Development Student, who first brought the Food Bucks program to Wolfville Farmers' Market in 2016
- *The British Columbia Association of Farmers' Markets*, which generously enabled us to follow their Nutrition Coupon Program. In particular, we would like to thank BCAFM staff, who have shared their time, knowledge, and experiences with us.

3 The Nourishing Communities Food Coupon Pilot Program: Background

The Nourishing Communities Food Coupon Pilot Program was an 8-month pilot program instituted at 6 different farmers' markets across Nova Scotia: Wolfville, Avon Community (Windsor), Lunenburg, New Glasgow, Truro, and Cape Breton. Led and overseen by Farmers' Markets of Nova Scotia Cooperative, the program had three main objectives.

1. To provide financial support to those in need to access healthy food;
2. To provide an experience that supported physical, mental, and community health;
3. To support local producers and farmers in developing a robust food system in Nova Scotia.

FMNS and its partners built the case for this pilot program around four realities:

- That Nova Scotia is the most food insecure province in Canada.³⁴
- That Nova Scotia has the most farmers' markets per capita in Canada; therefore, they were assumed to be well positioned to support Nova Scotians in need.
- That farmers' markets are social and economic hubs, and have been proven to play a key role in reducing both food insecurity and social isolation.
- That two markets (Wolfville and New Glasgow) had already undertaken smaller scale versions of this program, both of which met with success.

Beginning in April 2019, each market worked with a community agency to identify individuals and families who could benefit from the program. Once participants were identified and agreed to participate in the program, they were given a pre-determined number of food coupons per week (sometimes referred to as 'food bucks' or 'market money'), redeemable at their respective farmers' markets. On May 1 (and on various dates thereafter, depending on the market), the pilot program officially launched, as markets began distributing the food coupons to participants.

To ensure that participants could best meet their needs, they were given no conditions or restrictions about how the food coupons could be redeemed. Rather, they were given the opportunity to spend the food coupons on any product or product category available at the market (ranging from fruits and vegetables to wine, spirits, and crafts). The redemption rate by product category is seen later in this report.

As noted, this innovative program was not the first of its kind. In fact, it was based partially on British Columbia's longstanding *Farmers' Market Nutrition Coupon Program* (launched in 2007 and with a

³ CBC News [October 9, 2015]. *Food insecurity rates for Nova Scotia and Halifax worst in Canada*. CBC News [Online]. Available: <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/nova-scotia/food-insecurity-unemployment-1.3262622>

⁴ Vibert, Jim [February 20, 2020]. *Nova Scotia has highest rate of food insecurity*. Cape Breton Post [Online]. Available: <https://www.capebretonpost.com/opinion/regional-perspectives/jim-vibert-nova-scotia-has-highest-rate-of-food-insecurity-413280/>

current annual budget of more than \$1 million)), and also on similar projects undertaken by both the Wolfville and New Glasgow Farmers' Markets. The Wolfville Project – launched as a research project by Acadia University student Jessica Wall – supported 27 households and was widely considered a major success.

The aim of *this* program was to

- build on the positive outcomes of the previous projects
- experiment with some new processes and methodologies
- determine how well the program would be received throughout other regions of Nova Scotia.

The Nourishing Communities Food Coupon Pilot Program was also aimed at establishing a foundation upon which a sustainable, continuous program could be built.

4 Evaluation Methodology

Ideally, a program of this nature would be evaluated twice: once – immediately following the program's completion – to measure instant reaction, outputs, and reflections; and once again – much farther out from the program's completion – to determine whether the program had a sustained impact. This two-pronged evaluative approach helps us to see the full picture, ensuring fully informed decisions about how best to carry forward. Given that the program has just concluded, we are well positioned to evaluate its short-term outcomes. An evaluation of longer-term outcomes could be considered at a later date.

The Nourishing Communities Food Coupon program evaluation consisted of three steps:

1. **A pre-program questionnaire:** in April 2019, all participants were provided with a short (10-15 minute) questionnaire either in digital format or hard copy. This confidential questionnaire contained a series of questions aimed at helping us understand (a) the demographic characteristics of the participants and (b) their expectations about the program. To ensure a



The Nourishing Communities Food Coupon Pilot Program not only created opportunities for healthy and affordable eating, but also for memorable social experiences for families. (photo reprinted with permission)

high questionnaire completion rate, the vast majority of questions were multiple-choice. A copy of the questionnaire can be seen in Appendix A.

2. **A post-program questionnaire:** in January 2020, at the conclusion of the program, all participants were provided with a second questionnaire. This second questionnaire closely resembled the pre-program questionnaire, and was largely intended to determine whether the outcomes they experienced aligned with their expectations. This questionnaire also offered space for participants to share stories, testimonials, or anecdotes, some of which are seen later. A copy of the post-survey questionnaire can be seen in Appendix B.



3. **Coupon redemption data collection:** throughout the entire program, each farmers' market diligently tracked the redemption of all coupons. Although doing so required considerable administration, it was vital to ensuring that important data could be captured. Of particular interest was tracking (a) what percentage of coupons were redeemed and (b) on which product categories were the coupons redeemed. Much of this data is seen in Section 5.

5 Key Outcomes: By the Numbers

Investment, Participation, and Coupon Redemption

- Total value of food coupons distributed (all markets): \$42,000
- Total value of food coupons redeemed (all markets, as of February 28, 2020): \$37,367
- Overall food coupon redemption rate: 88.9%
- Total number of food coupon recipients (all markets): 105 households, directly impacting an estimated 150+ individuals
- Percentage of participants who started and completed the program: 99%
- Number of food coupon recipients by market:
 - Avon Community: 32
 - Cape Breton: 20
 - Lunenburg: 9
 - New Glasgow: 14
 - Truro: 15
 - Wolfville: 16

Demographic Characteristics of Participants

- **Gender:** 71% of food coupon recipients were female, while 25% were male. 2 respondents identified as non-binary, and 1 preferred not to answer.
- **Age:** Age distribution among food coupon recipients was relatively equal. 30% were between the ages of 18-39, 32% were aged 40-59, and 38% were aged 60 or above.
- **Population characteristics:** 26% of program participants self-identified as living with a disability. 5 respondents were from the LGBTQ+ community, 2 were Acadian/Francophone, 4 were Indigenous, and 3 were African Nova Scotian.
- **Children or dependents:** 52% of all food coupon recipients reported having 1 or more dependent children under age 18 living with them. Of those with children, 26% reported having 3 or more dependent children.
- **Spousal status:** 62% of food coupon recipients did not have a spouse or partner living at the same residence. 35% reported living with a spouse or common-law partner, while 3% preferred not to answer.
- **Employment:** 25% of all food coupon recipients reported being retired. 20% were employed full time (>20 hours/week), while 9% were employed part time (<20 hours). 33% of recipients were not employed, although slightly more than half of those were currently seeking employment.

Food Coupon Redemption by Category

Product category	Total amount redeemed (\$)	% of total food coupons	Highest redemption %	Lowest redemption %
Produce	\$10,614	28.4%	Wolfville (40%)	Cape Breton (9.3%)
Other agri. products	\$10,338	27.7%	Lunenburg (31%)	Cape Breton (9.5%)
Prepared foods	\$10,540	28.2%	Lunenburg (33%)	Avon Comm. (21%)
Beer, wine, and spirits	\$983	2.6%	Lunenburg (6.2%)	Cape Breton (0%)
Artisans/crafts	\$4,447	11.9%	Cape Breton (49%)	Lunenburg (0%)
Unclassified/other	\$444	1.2%	Avon Comm. (3%)	Cape Breton (0%)

Note: it is important to recall that – in order to maximize personal choice and individual decision-making – pilot program participants were issued no restrictions on how their coupons could be redeemed. Overwhelmingly, however, participants opted to spend their coupons on healthy food products. 84.3% of all coupons were redeemed for produce, prepared foods, and other agri-food products.

Overall Evaluation

- 72% of participants scored the program 10/10 for overall benefit. A further 17% scored the program either an 8 or 9 out of 10.
- 97% of participants believe they received good value for their food coupons.

Social, Family, and Community Outcomes

- 57% of participants indicated they made at least one new friend or social contact.
- 85% of participants feel a greater sense of belonging to their community as a result of this program.
- 92% of participants felt welcomed and comfortable attending the farmers' market.
- 90% of participants benefitted from the social and cultural aspects of the farmers' markets.
- 86% of participants with dependents indicated that one or more of those dependents accompanied them to the market either 'every time' or 'most times'.

Health, Wellness, Accessibility and Food Security Outcomes

- 98% of participants purchased foods that were not part of their diet previously.
- 78% of participants reported learning something new about food and nutrition.
- 62% of participants expect to make long-term changes to their diet as a result of this program.
- 90% of participants reported that – as a result of this program – they purchased food(s) they could not previously afford.
- 87% of participants ate healthier foods than usual during the program.

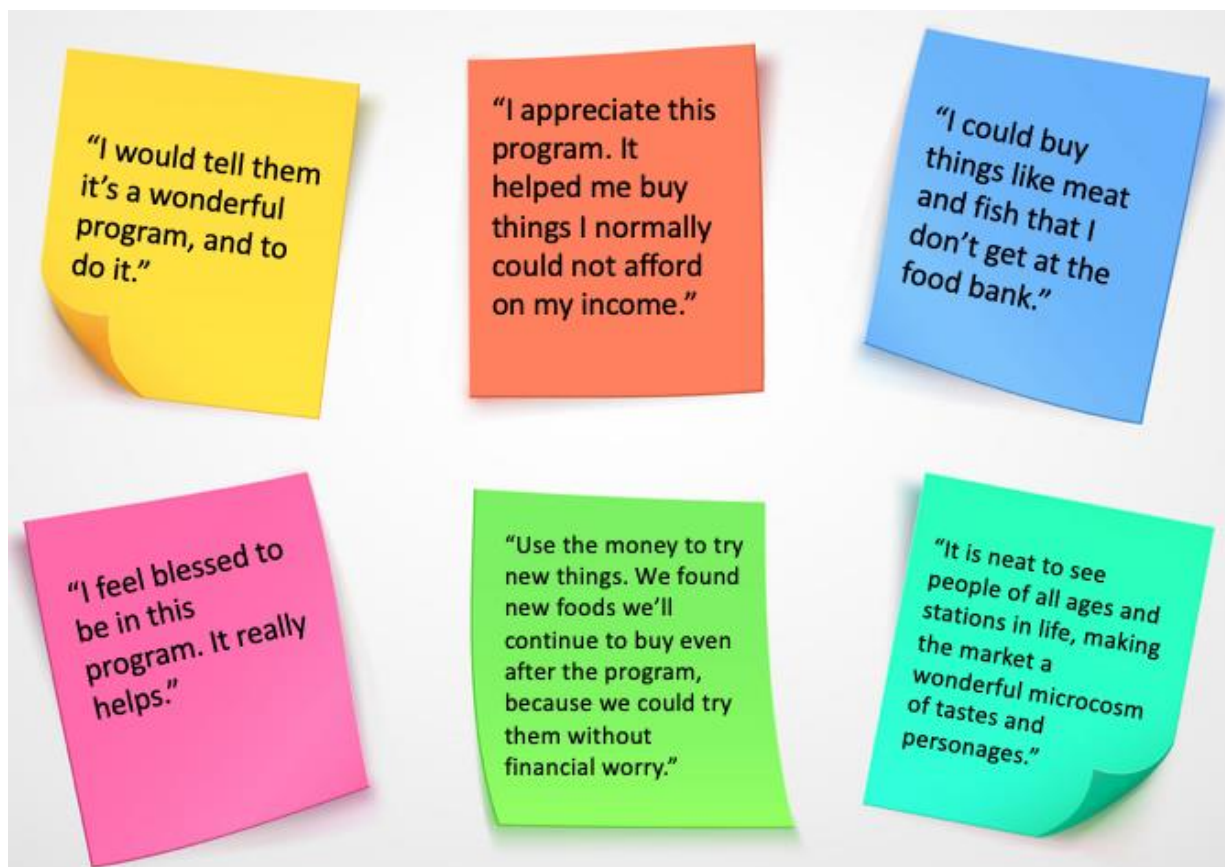
- 85% of participants – as a direct result of this program – felt they had more money to meet their other (non-food/grocery) needs.
- 63% of participants found farmers’ market prices to be higher than the grocery store.
- 17% of participants found it difficult to find transportation to and from their market.
- The top three farmers’ market characteristics that excited participants most were: ‘knowing the food I buy is grown or made locally’ (56%), ‘knowing I am supporting local businesses and vendors’ (51%), and ‘buying healthier foods’ (41%).
- 61% of participants – during the program – visited the market either ‘every week’ or ‘every week with 1-2 exceptions’. A further 22% visited the market every second week.

6 In Their Own Words: Key Outcomes According to Participants

At the end of the Nourishing Communities Food Coupon Pilot Program, we asked each participant:

If you were approached by someone who was about to participate in the Nourishing Communities Food Coupon Program, and they asked you for your opinion or advice, what would you tell them?

Here is how they responded.





7 Key Learnings and Opportunities for Enhancement

By all accounts, the Nourishing Communities Food Coupon Pilot Program was rolled out effectively across all six markets. Nevertheless, there are always some lessons learned along the way, as well as opportunities for improvement. We asked both the participants of the program and the market administrators what they learned and how they felt the program could be improved in the future, and here is a snapshot of their responses:

1. **Transportation not a major issue:** it is well documented that transportation can be a major impediment for vulnerable populations, particularly in rural Nova Scotia. It is with some surprise, then, that we report very few participants of the program cited 'transportation to and from the market' as a major challenge. In fact, only 17% indicated this. It should be noted, of course, that many participants were selected for the program *because* of their proximity to the market; it remains quite likely that many otherwise suitable participants for the program would not be able to find reliable transportation on a regular basis.
2. **Limited hours a barrier:** by design (and for good reason), most farmers markets are open for only a short window of time during the week. For example, the Wolfville Farmers' Market is open for 4.5 hours on Saturday and an additional 3 hours on Wednesday evening. This is not at

all unusual for farmers' markets, however a few participants did note that this presented a challenge for them due to a variety of foreseeable and unforeseeable obligations during those hours. Clearly, given the high redemption and participation rates, this barrier – though present – was not insurmountable.

3. **Personal relationships with the markets are key:** one participant summed this up succinctly when she said *"I appreciated when staff accompanied me to the market. The market is overwhelming at the beginning."* It was reported by both participants and markets that a key ingredient in the program's success was for each market to have an ambassador; that is, someone to befriend each participant, orient them to the program, show them around, and generally be a resource for them throughout the program.
4. **Product selection variance between markets a concern to some:** it will come as no surprise that each of the six participating markets varies in size, scope, and product availability. While some markets have dozens of vendors, others have fewer than ten. Naturally, this means that participants in this program likely had a different experience depending on which market they attended. Although all participants had access to healthy and local food choices, the *extent* of those choices was not equal. Although this is a larger, structural issue (not one that can be easily resolved), future iterations of the program may wish to look for creative ways to ensure the most consistent experience possible across markets.
5. **Acoustics present a barrier:** a few participants pointed out (as market-goers occasionally do) that hearing was a challenge for them. According to one participant, *"eating inside was annoying as I was unable to chat with anyone due to the music volume."* Although again this is a larger structural issue, it is one to take into consideration, as various hearing disabilities may prevent people from receiving the maximum benefit of the program. If they are to enjoy social interaction and learn about the products they are buying, they must be able to hear clearly.



Nutrition and food system education were just two of the important program outcomes. 78% of all participants reported learning something new (about food and nutrition) as a result of their participation (photo reprinted with permission)

6. **More coupon denominations = more purchasing flexibility:** a few participants noted that – ideally – they would have had access to a wider range of coupon denominations (in addition to the standard ones given out through the program). Although issuing more denominations would certainly increase the overall administrative requirement for the program, it may also encourage participants to spend their allotments more strategically, and to greater personal benefit.
7. **Vendor onboarding is key:** the Nourishing Communities Food Coupon program can only work if all market vendors (a) buy into the program and (b) understand exactly how to participate. Although feedback suggests that the vast majority of vendors were well acquainted with the program, there were a few noted instances where this was not the case. Ensuring that all vendors are well educated in the program's procedures will eliminate potentially difficult or embarrassing conversations for the program's participants.
8. **Consider connecting participants...to each other:** it was generally assumed at the outset that – for a variety of reasons – most participants of the program would prefer to remain relatively anonymous. And on the whole, this is probably correct. However, there were at least a few participants who suggested that they would have welcomed an opportunity to get to know some of the other participants, so that they could develop a friendship or share the market shopping experience together. This will be something to consider in future iterations.
9. **Consider carts for accessibility:** although this is certainly not a new concept for any farmers' market, a couple of participants – due to mobility concerns – indicated they would have preferred to have a shopping cart. While introducing carts may present various logistical challenges within already-crowded markets, it is important to recognize the accessibility needs of program participants.
10. **Monthly coupon distribution effective:** although each market distributed its coupons in slightly different ways, at least one market was very pleased with its decision to disburse food coupons on a monthly basis (in contrast to a weekly basis). This market felt there were three advantages to monthly lump-sum disbursements:
 - a. It reduced the administrative requirements of the program (one disbursement per month instead of four).
 - b. It gave program participants more flexibility in how and when they spent their coupons. For example, rather than spending the same amount each week, participants could purchase more one week and less the next (to better meet their needs).
 - c. It provided the market with a better opportunity to collect and add supplemental information to the participants' coupon envelopes.
11. **Partners willing, able to participate in coupon distribution:** some participating markets did not distribute their food coupons directly at all, opting instead to pass them along to social service agencies to do so. This decision worked well because (a) it ensured an added layer of

confidentiality or privacy to the participants (b) it encouraged the social service agencies to buy-in and assume a more active role in the program and (c) it lessened the administrative requirement for the farmers' markets (whose staff and volunteers are often at or near capacity)

12. **Food Coupon Pilot Program reduces food insecurity stigma:** although many food banks have made great efforts to reduce stigma and shame for their users, several people associated with this program remarked that the Nourishing Community Food Coupon program took stigma reduction to a new level. Simply put, there is no way for other farmers' market patrons – or vendors – to know who is using coupons associated with the pilot program. The unique coding process applied to the food coupons ensured that only the program administrators could track which coupons were part of the pilot program (and which were non-program coupons, which are also sold by various markets).
13. **More transparency helpful in selection process:** naturally – and especially as the program expands – there will be people who wonder how its participants are selected. Although the six markets worked very closely with their community partners to identify people who were well-positioned to benefit from the program, the lack of publicity around eligibility criteria has the potential to create challenges in the future. Although no major questions were raised during the pilot program, FMNS and its markets must continue to work together to strike an appropriate balance between participant confidentiality and program transparency.



8 Next Steps: Program Sustainability and Future Funding Models

“Where do we go from here?”. This is the most common – and usually most important – question to surface at the end of any successful pilot program, and the *Nourishing Communities Food Coupon Pilot Program* is no exception. Simply put, FMNS and its partners have spent the past year rolling out an exemplary and impactful program, and there is much enthusiasm for sustaining the momentum and building on this pilot’s clear success.

It is FMNS’ goal to immediately extend and expand this pilot program in 2020, building on the successes in existing regions while exploring the program’s feasibility in several other regions. After the 2020 expansion (April 1, 2020 to February 28, 2021), FMNS’ objective is to move towards a long-term resilient and diverse funding strategy to ensure that these programs are in place for the foreseeable future. To that end, FMNS proposes the following funding strategy for the 2020 pilot expansion and beyond:

1. A total investment of \$100,000 from the Province of Nova Scotia (including, but not necessarily limited to: Communities, Culture, and Heritage Nova Scotia, the Nova Scotia Department of Health and Wellness, the Nova Scotia Department of Agriculture, the Nova Scotia Department of Seniors, and the Nova Scotia Department of Business)

During the 2020 pilot expansion, FMNS will work with its project partners to create a long-term fundraising strategy built on a resilient and diverse funding model:

2. A total investment of 25% (minimum) of each market’s funding needs, from each relevant municipal unit (town, city, or county).
3. FMNS will take a lead role in training each of its participating markets on how to create their own fundraising models. Our objective is to give our member farmers’ markets the ability to fund at least 25% of their individual coupon program requirements on a year-to-year basis.
4. That FMNS and its partners raise at least \$25,000 per year from corporate donors and sponsors.
5. That FMNS and its partners raise at least \$30,000 per year from individual or private donors and sponsors, which will include the launch of a crowdfunding campaign in 2020.

Although FMNS expects that the Nourishing Communities Food Coupon program will always require some level of government investment, we recognize the need to find creative revenue models to minimize our reliance on government contributions while demonstrating continued community support. Having explored numerous options, we believe this multi-pronged funding approach is both progressive and attainable.

We also believe this multi-pronged funding approach will allow FMNS to continue to work effectively with government to ensure this program continues to grow and increase its impact. As we pursue this,

we are inspired by our partners at the British Columbia Association of Farmers' Markets, who have created a long-term, sustainably-funded program that has grown continually since 2007. Various departments of the Government of British Columbia now contribute over \$1 million per year to fund the BCAFM's *Nourishing Coupon Program*.

9 Conclusion: A Resounding Success

The Nourishing Communities Food Coupon Pilot Program set out to do three things:

1. Provide financial support to those in need to access healthy food;
2. Provide an experience that supported physical, mental, and community health;
3. Support local producers and farmers in developing a robust food system in Nova Scotia.

Having reviewed the totality of data and feedback collected before, during, and after the program, our assessment is as follows:

Objective: Provide financial support to those in need to access healthy food

Outcome: Achieved

FMNS and its 6 participating markets were very strategic in aligning with community agencies and social service groups. They did so very intentionally to ensure that those selected for the program (a) demonstrated a clear financial need and (b) were interested in and well positioned to benefit from the program. On both of these measures, the program was a success. In total, 105 households meeting these criteria were selected to participate in the pilot program, and 99 % of them completed the program. Although not *all* coupons were redeemed for items that would normally be considered 'healthy food', the data clearly show that the majority of redemptions fell into this category.

Objective: Provide an experience that supported physical, mental, and community health:

Outcome: Likely Achieved

Although this evaluation lacks sufficient depth to fully measure participants' physical, mental, and community health (resulting from the program), there is considerable evidence to suggest that success has been achieved in this area. This evidence is partly captured in Section 4, which shows how program participants responded (quantitatively) when asked how the program benefitted them. An even more persuasive selection of evidence is found in Section 6, where program participants verbally describe their experiences. Although some of this evidence may be considered anecdotal, there is no reason to believe that – given the anonymous nature of the evaluation process – respondents would be anything less than truthful in their feedback.

Objective: Support local producers and farmers in developing a robust food system in Nova Scotia:

Outcome: Likely Achieved

Although our evaluation did not attempt to measure this outcome directly, it is generally accepted (as a result of numerous other studies) that investments in farmers' markets contribute to local food security and robust local food systems. In total, this pilot program directly injected \$42,000 into six farmers' markets, and this figure does not account for any secondary, tertiary, and spinoff economic impacts. For example, this evaluation did not study how much *additional* money - beyond the food coupons - participants' chose to spend at their market (money that may have otherwise been spent on products and services with less local economic impact). The evaluation also did not study the extent to which local vendors improved their chances for profitability and sustained business success through this

program (although it is presumed to have done so to some degree). While a future evaluation process may include primary research with market vendors, we are comfortable suggesting this objective has been met, even in the absence of data specific to this program.

Overall, by nearly every measure, all parties associated with this pilot program – markets, participants, and community partners – believe that it was a major success both socially and economically. Although there was no reason to believe it *wasn't* going to be effective, it is worth acknowledging that many pilot programs experience unexpected and unforeseeable snags along the way (resulting in less-than-expected results). Such was not the case with the Nourishing Communities Food Coupon program; it was well supported, well subscribed, well-administered, and well received. Although there are always opportunities for future refinement and improvement, AEC is confident asserting that this program shows true promise in achieving its stated objectives not only on the current scale, but also on a larger one.

Appendix A – Letter of Impact from Participant Teresa Neary

Reprinted with permission

Re: Letter of Impact of being a recipient of the Food Bucks program

Dear Mr. Stoddart:

I just got an e-mail from Jennifer Bolt at the Wolfville Farm Market and agreed to send along a letter of impact about the food bucks program.

As a twice recipient of the food bucks program, and recent new volunteer with the Farm Market, I truly felt that the food bucks program made sense to those in my position.

As a citizen with a long-time disability, it is beyond difficult to acquire a sense of food security with the less than adequate provincial monthly funds for food.

In my case, and a lot of others who are either disabled or on other welfare programs, -- there is a marked deficit in monthly amounts given for food purchase.

It necessitates one to access a food bank - monthly - and an emergency food bank, as well, bi-monthly, just to get by.

With the rise in food prices, one can hardly afford - what becomes - "extras" - like fresh and frozen produce and healthy food choice options.

The food bucks program enabled me to not only mingle with people and absorb the eclectic experience of the farm market, but to include truly healthy produce and locally-made specialty foods into my diet and experience.

This experience has made - also - so very interesting and satisfying to get to know the vendors and their wares and how they produce their products and display and promote them at the Market and in the community, as a whole.

Plus, meeting other consumers and locals and taking in the wonderful musical performances enhances the market experience - and makes it a holistic course of wellness in one's life. It makes a person in such a position - feel and want to then truly "to be visible."

Economics should not deny people from healthy food options and enjoying reaping some of the benefits of this rural area.

Again, I appreciated the whole experience - and hope food bucks can become a "staple" in food security - someday.

Thank you!

Sincerely,
Teresa Neary - Port Williams

Appendix B – Letter of Impact from Anonymous Participant

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Hello Margaret. My name is (redacted). I am 29 years old and have two children ages 8 and 3. I have only met you a hand full of times, but I am part of your Maggie's Place Market Buck Program. I can't thank you enough for selecting me for this program - it has benefitted my family in so many ways. I myself have a lot of social problems and I have been diagnosed with PTSD, Manic Depression, Anxiety, and OCD. Thanks to your program I have been able to go into a crowd and not pass out - one of the things my therapist and I have been working on. You gave me the courage to go out and face my fears and learn along the way. My family have been vegan for a long time now, I have learned a lot about food, how to cook different meals with different foods, and how to grow your own foods. My son has learned the power of money, he has learned that home grown foods even taste better than store bought food and our family has learned where to buy local, which is one of my favourites because I love to support families. I really hope you keep this program going in the future because it doesn't just help us adults but it gives the power to our children to make healthier choices and to know what's going into their bodies. It shows them the power of a dollar and how it can help out families in the future. I hope if you continue this program you would consider choosing us again for the program.

Appendix C – All Participant Quotes and Statements

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I would tell them it is a wonderful program and to do it.

It's great to have the opportunity to buy foods you normally can't

I appreciate this program. It helped me buy things that I could not afford on my income

This program is very beneficial to low income seniors, in regard to purchasing local fresh vegetables. that you would not be able to purchase at the grocery store (my input as a senior)

I could buy things like meat and fish that I don't get at the food bank

I feel blessed to be included in this program. It really helps.

Use the money to try new things. We have found new food and products that we will continue to purchase even after the program as a result of being able to try them without financial worry.

It is great!! We tried so many different things that we would have never tried.

That there are very nice people at the farmers market. The vendors are willing to answer all questions.

I would tell them that the food bucks program will enhance their sense of belonging and being part of the community. They would enjoy meeting the vendors and trying their various food products, thus augmenting their diet. They would find the social interaction invaluable.

Try a new food each week! Get your kids and family involved in the meal planning! Take your family with you to the weekly farmers market! Try to visit at least one new farmers market vendor each week! Ask questions and learn about new products you don't have a lot of knowledge about and ask the vendors what goes good with the products! They are very kind and knowledgeable

Couldn't actually think of a way to make it better as Margaret was very accommodating. Where I work full time I was able to pick up my food bucks Saturday mornings at the market. All of the vendors were very kind to my family and I.

I would say not to change a thing ! I loved everything about this program

I have more food now. Thank you so much. I hope the program continues - it helps my quality of life greatly. I can get more food - it supplements my diet.

We had just moved in a new house had no money for groceries I had 200 hundred dollars 8n food bucks I went to marker got what we needed so grateful came in handy,, a lady in charge helped me a lot I have a cane and I find it hard to get around sometimes,, I left the market feeling like a million dollars,, t was a great experience! The farmer's market isn't somewhere we would usually go but since participating in this program we go regularly and will continue to do so because our 3 year old twins absolutely love going to the market.

I found that I met people I knew and enjoyed talking to them. Also, it is neat to see people of all ages and stations in life, making the market a wonderful microcosm of tastes and personages.

This program had a dramatic impact on our family. It provided us with an affordable family outing each week where the children were able to try new healthy foods and able to try some new activities, listen to local music and meet local vendors who helped to instil the idea in supporting local at their early ages. This inspired us to pick a new item to try each week and teach them how to use it in a different way teaching them important cooking skills.

We had a lot of fun in the program we have learned a lot about food and money and our community

Amazing experience for my children and I. My children learned math, budgeting, and felt very proud to have their own money. They also felt super happy to be able to buy presents from members whether they were meals or items or food. Thank you.

That it is a great program to help out for your budget and a healthier lifestyle. Very useful to maintain in a fixed income.

Would love to participate again. I recommend the farmers market to anyone. We even got plants for tomatoes and peppers that were started. Very beneficial. Very grateful for the opportunity to make better choices for food for our home.

It was amazing

Perhaps giving a list of vendors out to whoever is receiving the market money, so they have an idea of what they will be able to buy (so that you don't buy it somewhere else before market day).

Thank you for the opportunity to experience something new that I will continue to enjoy in the future.

Reach out to every vendor. Have conversations and get engaged with sellers.

It's a great atmosphere. Vendors are friendly.

This is a Great opportunity for families.

Appendix D – Coupon Redemption by Market

Expressed in Dollars

Market	Product Category					
	Produce	Other Agri	Prepared foods	Beer, wine, spirits	Artisans/crafts	Other
Avon Community	764	619	555	93	537	74
Cape Breton	215	220	740	0	1,145	0
Lunenburg	1,390	1,510	1,580	300	0	55
New Glasgow	1,035	2,715	2,330	380	1715	85
Truro	3,275	2,305	2,910	130	700	185
Wolfville	3,935	2,970	2,425	80	350	45

Expressed in Percentage

Market	Product Category					
	Produce	Other Agri	Prepared foods	Beer, wine, spirits	Artisans/crafts	Other
Avon Community	28.9	23.4	21.0	3.5	20.3	2.8
Cape Breton	9.3	9.5	31.9	0.0	49.4	0.0
Lunenburg	28.7	31.2	32.7	6.2	0.0	1.1
New Glasgow	12.5	32.9	28.2	4.6	20.8	1.0
Truro	34.5	24.3	30.6	1.4	7.4	1.9
Wolfville	40.1	30.3	24.7	0.8	3.6	0.5