



Feeding People, Feeding Communities

An Evaluation of the 2023 Nourishing Communities Food Coupon Program

Prepared April 2024 by
Flourish Community Development Co-operative



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1.0 Executive Summary

The 2023 Nourishing Communities Food Coupon Program was the fifth iteration of a program first piloted in May 2019. This iteration upheld the same three key objectives as the previous iterations:

1. To provide financial support to those in need to access healthy food, recognizing that 28.9%, almost 1 in 3, people in Nova Scotia are food insecure, the highest rate amongst the provinces¹;
2. To provide an experience that supports physical, mental, and community health; and
3. To support local producers and farmers in developing a robust and resilient food system in Nova Scotia.

With funding support from: the Nova Scotia government department of Communities, Culture, Tourism and Heritage (\$422,400); Nova Scotia Liquor Commission *For the Good of Our Community Fund* (\$500); and Nova Scotia Young Farmers (\$500) – Farmers’ Markets of Nova Scotia (FMNS) distributed \$299,673 worth of market bucks (also referred to as “Food Bucks”) over an 8-month period to 386 households (an average of approximately \$776 per household) across 33 participating farmers’ markets in partnership with 48 community partner organizations. The 33 FMNS member farmers’ markets were:

Markets Continuing from Previous Years	
Alderney Landing Farmers’ Market	Mabou Farmers’ Market
Annapolis Royal Farmers’ and Traders’ Market	Merigomish SchoolhouseMarketplace
Antigonish Farmers’ Market	Musquodoboit Harbour Farmers’ Market
Avon Community Farmers’ Market	New Glasgow Farmers’ Market
Barrington Farmers’ Market	Novalea Farmers’ Market
Bridgewater Farmers’ Market	Privateer Farmers’ Market
Cape Breton Farmers’ Market	Prospect Communities Farmers’ Market
Chester Farmers and Artisans Market	Pugwash Farmers’ Market
Fairview Clayton Park Farmers’ Market	Shelburne Guild Hall Farmers’ Market

¹Statistics Canada (April 2024). Food Insecurity by Geography table from Canadian Income Survey (CIS) 2018-2022. <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/t1/tbl1/en/cv/recreate.action?pid=1310083401&selectedNodeIds=1D71D8,1D13,3D6,4D2&checkedLevels=0D1,0D3,1D1&refPeriods=20180101,20220101&dimensionLayouts=layout3,layout3,layout2,layout3,layout2&vectorDisplay=false>
 Data on food insecurity for CIS are collected in the year following the survey reference year. We've chosen to label the data using the year of data collection to better reflect the timing of experiences captured.

Markets Continuing from Previous Years	
Halifax Brewery Farmers' Market	Spryfield Farmers' Market
Halifax Seaport Farmers' Market	Tantallon Farmers' Market
Hope Blooms Farmers' Market	Tatamagouche Farmers' Market
Hubbards Farmers' Market	Truro Farmers' Market
Kentville Farmers' Market	Wolfville Farmers' Market
Lunenburg Farmers' Market	Yarmouth Farmers' Community Market
New Markets for 2023	
Argyle Farmers' & Artisanal Market	Springhill Farmers' Market
Portapique Farmers' Market	

By nearly any measure, the 2023 Nourishing Communities Food Coupon Program was a great success. Consider the following highlights:

1. **High redemption rates:** Coupon redemption rates were extremely high, with 95.7% of all coupons being used. This figure is higher than the first, second, and third iterations of the program (88.9%, 86% and 86.5% redemption rate, respectively) and slightly below last year's (96.5%).
2. **Healthy spending choices:** 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 79% of all coupons redeemed were used directly towards the purchase of foods, which included produce, prepared foods, value-added foods and other agri-food products (compared with 74% last year and 78% the year prior). 27% of all redemptions were for produce, up from 23% last year.
3. **Engaged participants:** 341 participants (88% of all program participants) completed an exit survey at the conclusion of the program to evaluate their experience (results included within the report). This is a significantly high response rate for this type of engagement.
4. **Tangible benefits:** When asked to evaluate the overall benefit of the program, 95% of respondents indicated that the program provided either 'an extreme amount of benefit' or 'quite a bit of benefit' (This is on par with 95% in 2022 and up from 80% in 2021). Four percent said the program offered 'some benefit but not much', and just 1% of respondents indicated they received no real benefit at all.

5. **Expanding social networks:** 77% of participants indicated they made at least one new friend or social contact through their participation in the program. This is similar to last year (79%), but up from the first three years of the program (57% in 2019, 43% 2020, and 61% 2021).
6. **Diversifying dietary choices:** 88% of participants bought/consumed foods that were not part of their diet previously (similar to 89% last year, 88% in 2021 and 82% in 2020).
7. **Expected long-term dietary changes:** 78% of participants expect to make long-term changes to their diet because of their participation in this program. This is slightly lower than last year (82%), but up from 61%, 62% and 50% in the first three years of the program.
8. **Increased sense of community belonging:** 93% of participants report feeling more connected to their community because of their participation in this program. This is up from 89% last year, and 85% during the pilot year.
9. **Eating healthier:** 91% of participants reported eating healthier foods than usual during their participation in the program (on par with last and up slightly from the first three years of the program - 81%, 87% and 85%).
10. **Freeing budgets to meet other needs:** 92% of participants – as a result of this program – felt they had more money to meet their other (non-food/grocery) needs. This is consistent with 88%, 85%, 94% and 94% during the first four years of the program.
11. **Good value for money:** 97% of market going and online ordering participants believe they received good value for their Food Bucks overall (This is consistent with 97% in 2019 and 2022, and slightly up from 93% in 2020 and 91% in 2021). 100% of food box recipients believe they received good value for their market boxes, overall.
12. **Spending time browsing and socializing:** 62% of all market going respondents reported that they stayed at the market for more than 30 minutes each week (up from 59% last year, and 41% in 2021), while an additional 29% said they stayed between 21-30 minutes (up from 26% last year). Only 10% of participants reported staying less than 20 minutes (down from 15% last year). Online ordering participants spent less time shopping, with 22% spending more than 30 minutes shopping, 55% spending 11-30 minutes shopping and 22% spending less than 10 minutes shopping online.
13. **Making it a social outing:** 60% of market going respondents either always or often attended the market with a family member or friend (up from 56% in 2022). 19% sometimes attended the market with someone else (up from 17% in 2022), while 21% either never or almost never attended the market with someone else (down from 27% in 2022). Online ordering respondents, however, were less likely to shop with someone else, with 70% of respondents always shopping by themselves, 10% rarely shopping with someone and 20% sometimes or always shopping with someone else.

14. **Extended reach of purchased foods:** 85% of all respondents indicated that other people in their household regularly consumed products they purchased/received as part of the Nourishing Communities program (up significantly from 61% in 2022, and 73% in 2021). On average, participants regularly shared their purchased foods with 2.68 other people (up from 2.35 in 2022, 1.87 in 2021). Therefore, more participants regularly shared their purchased foods in 2023 compared to 2022, and of the people who did share, they shared with a larger number of people.
15. **Injecting more money into the local economy:** 65% of market going and online ordering participants reported spending money during their market visits/orders *in addition to* their market Bucks (on par with 66% last year). 32% of participants reported spending more than \$10 of non-Food Bucks money per visit, on average, with 18% of that group spending more than \$20 of non-market Bucks money (i.e. cash) per visit, on average. A conservative estimated average of additional expenditure per participant was \$7.51 per visit. This is slightly down from \$8.46 in 2022.
16. **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. Similar to the prior four years of the program, participants continued to note that knowing they were supporting local producers when using their market Bucks was an important aspect of their program experience.
17. **High Interest in further participation:** 99% of participants would, if given the opportunity, participate in the program again.
18. **Continued market visits:** 88% of participants would like to continue visiting their farmers' market on a regular basis now that the program has ended. However, of the 88%, 52% of them are unable to without the help of the program. Only 3% said they would not be interested without the program and 4% were unsure. 6% gave other responses, with all respondents stated that they would like to continue, but noted some of the things that may get in the way like markets being closed during certain seasons, only being able to shop when their funds allow for it, and not being able to spend the same amount of money without the program.
19. **Positive life impact:** 99% of respondents agreed that 'this program had a positive impact on my life', with 81% strongly agreeing, and 18% somewhat agreeing.

In addition to these measures, participants from all 33 markets offered **glowing endorsements** of the program. Here are several examples:

I absolutely love this program and I feel so grateful I've been able to participate again. I think it is an incredible opportunity. It is crucial in bridging the gap to nutritious food and community for the participants and it also gives a sense of belonging. I love that the program is offered in my community and I hope it can be offered to more people in the future. Thank you!!


Thank you so much for this program. We are so grateful it goes a long way in feeding my family wholesome real nourishing food.

I'm a second year participant. The program has had a very positive outcome on my life. I go without less. I participate in events I never would've been able to. It's my only social outing and it's helped me make friends. I'm also a proud volunteer at the market now. You've improved the quality of my life. I really can't thank you enough

It was a wonderful experience getting to participate in the program. It gave me access to food I would not be able to buy on my fixed income. We were able to eat healthier options. Thank you so much for the opportunity.

This program provides for my family on so many levels. And is teaching my children about supporting local businesses, budgeting, etc. It also allows them to be able to afford to attend their school classroom trips to the farmers market. Thank you so much!

I could join friends when due to budget [before the program] I'd make an excuse to stay home. I made friends with all the vendors, tried new things, and made a stew every market day. The program makes me feel like a "normal" parent to participate. I want to participate again, if funds are enough for others. Attending the market is the highlight of my week. Thank you!



“This program benefitted my mental health, not just by providing access to healthy food but also by facilitating me connecting with my community; socializing in a positive way and making friendships with creators and producers. Thank you!”

2.0 Acknowledgments

FMNS Staff	
Justin Cantafio, <i>Executive Director, Farmers' Markets of Nova Scotia</i>	Alicia Steeves, <i>Membership and Programs Lead, Farmers' Markets of Nova Scotia</i>
Emily Lawrence, <i>Communications and Creative Lead, Farmers' Markets of Nova Scotia</i>	Rebekkah Hyams, <i>former Administrative Lead, Farmers' Markets of Nova Scotia</i>
Market Staff and Volunteers	
Lisa Jowsey & Linda Leblanc, <i>Alderney Landing Farmers' Market</i>	Kim MacIvor, Ann Foot, Jason Roy, & Shawna MacIvor, <i>Merigomish Schoolhouse Marketplace</i>
Chelsey Marshall & Rachael Browne, <i>Annapolis Royal Farmers' and Traders' Market</i>	Sarah MacKenzie, <i>Musquodoboit Harbour Farmers' Market</i>
Annette Tarrant & Mike Ward, <i>Antigonish Farmers' Market</i>	Kristi Russell & Michelle Mullins, <i>New Glasgow Farmers' Market</i>
Laura Mitchell, <i>Argyle Farmers' & Artisanal Market</i>	Dane George, <i>Novalea Farmers' Market</i>
Karen Cooper, <i>Avon Community Farmers' Market</i>	Ashley Swan, Stephen Csontos, Dakota Swan, Lucy Adams, & Steve Brine, <i>Portapique Farmers' Market</i>
Frances Young, Jennifer Spencer, Abby Doane, Carole Greenwood, Emily Van Norden, Erin Doane, & Glenn Young, <i>Barrington Farmers' Market</i>	Brian Saville, Willo Treschow, & Kate Fagan, <i>Privateer Farmers' Market</i>
Rita Landraf & Jenny MacDonald, <i>Bridgewater Farmers' Market</i>	Jessica McCarron, Meghan McNeil, Erin Poorooshasb, Tammy Richards, Callie Richards, Allison Lawlor, Natasha Lawlor, Rebecca Reiss, & DC Boudreau, <i>Prospect Communities Farmers' Market</i>
Pauline Singer, Debbie MacDougall, & Alyssa MacDougall, <i>Cape Breton Farmers' Market</i>	Marsha Amanova, <i>Pugwash Farmers' Market</i>
Nancy Humby & Laura Mulrooney, <i>Chester Farmers and Artisans Market</i>	Therese Cruz, Natasha Amalfa, Vicky Healy, & George MacDonald, <i>Shelburne Guild Hall Farmers' Market</i>
Debbie MacKinnon & Yvonne Noel, <i>Fairview Clayton Park Farmers' Market</i>	Eileen Davage, Robyn Forbes, Dr. Carson, & Marion Murray Community Centre Maintenance Staff, <i>Springhill Farmers' Market</i>
Alison Lynes, Ash Scriven, & Zoë Beale, <i>Halifax Brewery Farmers' Market</i>	Andrew Linton, <i>Spryfield Farmers' Market</i>

Sarah Rector, Ervan Gould, Sara Shpyth, Emily Lowe, Holly Kennedy, & Harriet Wiegert, <i>Halifax Seaport Farmers' Market</i>	Jeani Mustain, Steve Mustain, & Debbie Bull, <i>Tantallon Farmers' Market</i>
Veronica Gutierrez & Kolade Boboye, <i>Hope Blooms Farmers' Market</i>	Ashley Crouse & Sean Crouse, <i>Tatamagouche Farmers' Market</i>
Haley Thomas & Jackie Leppard, <i>Hubbards Farmers' Market</i>	Sera Senakovicz & Cam MacKay, <i>Truro Farmers' Market</i>
Carol Goodwin & Betty Jordan, <i>Kentville Farmers' Market</i>	Jennifer Bolt, Kelly Marie Redcliffe, & Annita Nichol, <i>Wolfville Farmers' Market</i>
Whitney Cruikshank, <i>Lunenburg Farmers' Market</i>	Nancy Hood, Scott Nickerson, Sundae Wiser, & Melanie Carpenter, <i>Yarmouth Farmers' Community Market</i>
Kerry Walkins & Indigo Christ, <i>Mabou Farmers' Market</i>	

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- NSLC For the Good of Community Regional Fund;
- Nova Scotia Young Farmers; and
- Everyone who donated to this program via our [donation page](#) or participated in our fundraising efforts by purchasing one of our Spring Fundraiser Bundles or [Hodgepodge Bundles](#).

A special ongoing acknowledgement is in order from FMNS to the following:

- All 48 partner organizations across the province, without which this program wouldn't be possible. For the sake of confidentiality, these partner organizations are not named in this report.
- The FMNS Board of Directors, who provide sage counsel and guidance to FMNS staff.
- *Jessica Wall*, former Acadia University Community Development Student, who first brought the Food Bucks program to the Wolfville Farmers' Market in 2016.
- *The British Columbia Association of Farmers' Markets*, which generously enabled FMNS to follow their Nutrition Coupon Program. FMNS would especially like to thank BCAFM staff, who have graciously shared their time, knowledge, and experiences.

“I love attending the farmers market weekly. We have such a strong community bond and it feels like we’re going to visit family when we visit our farmers market. We know our vendors personally, who raised or grew our food and always feel welcomed.”



3.0 The 2023 Nourishing Communities Food Coupon Program: Background

The 2023 Nourishing Communities Food Coupon Program was instituted at 33 different FMNS farmers' markets across Nova Scotia². The program aimed to expand on the success of both the 2019 pilot program (of the same name), followed by three iterations in 2020, 2021 and 2022. Led and overseen by the Farmers' Markets of Nova Scotia (FMNS) Cooperative, the program has 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; and
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 evolving program around four realities:

- Over 1 in 4 (28.9%) Nova Scotian households are food insecure³.
- Nova Scotia has the most farmers' markets per capita in Canada. Therefore, these markets were assumed to be well positioned to support Nova Scotians in need.
- Farmers' markets are social and economic hubs that have been proven to play a key role in reducing both food insecurity and social isolation.
- The first four iterations of the program were evaluated to be very successful.

Beginning in May 2023, each of the 33 participating farmers' markets worked with 1 to 3 community agencies (for a total of 48 partners in 2023) to identify households who could benefit from the program. Once participants were identified and agreed to participate in the program, they were given a predetermined number of market coupons per week (sometimes referred to as 'Market Bucks' or 'Market Money'), redeemable at their respective farmers' market. In early May 2023 (dates varied somewhat depending on the market), the program officially re-launched, as markets began distributing the market bucks to participants.

To ensure that participants could best meet their needs, they were given no conditions or restrictions about how the market bucks could be redeemed. Rather, they were given the opportunity to spend the market bucks on any product or product category available at the

² These markets are Alderney Landing (Dartmouth), Annapolis Royal, Antigonish, Argyle, Avon Community (Windsor), Barrington, Bridgewater, Cape Breton (Sydney), Chester, Fairview Clayton Park, Halifax Brewery, Halifax Seaport, Hope Blooms (North Halifax), Hubbards, Kentville, Lunenburg, Mabou, Merigomish, Musquodoboit Harbour, New Glasgow, Novalea (Halifax), Portapique, Privateer (Liverpool), Prospect, Pugwash, Shelburne, Springhill, Spryfield, Tantallon, Tatamagouche, Truro, Wolfville, and Yarmouth.

³Statistics Canada (April 2024). Food Insecurity by Geography table from Canadian Income Survey (CIS) 2018-2022. <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/t1/tbl1/en/cv/recreate.action?pid=1310083401&selectedNodeIds=1D71D81D13.3D6.4D2&checkedLevels=0D1.0D3.1D1&refPeriods=20180101,20220101&dimensionLayouts=layout3,layout3,layout2,layout3,layout2&vectorDisplay=false>
Data on food insecurity for CIS are collected in the year following the survey reference year. We've chosen to label the data using the year of data collection to better reflect the timing of experiences captured.

market⁴ (ranging from fruits and vegetables to wine, soap, and crafts). The redemption rate by product category is presented 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 long standing Farmers' Market Nutrition Coupon Program (launched in 2007 and with a current annual budget of more than \$12 million provided by the province of British Columbia), and also on similar projects undertaken by both the Wolfville ,New Glasgow and Avon Community Farmers' Markets. The 2016 Wolfville Project, launched as a research project by Acadia University Community Development student Jessica Wall, supported 27 households and was widely considered a major success.

In addition to the program's three stated goals (presented above), FMNS' 2023 Nourishing Communities Food Coupon program aimed to:

- Build on the positive outcomes of the previous four iterations;
- Experiment with some new processes and methodologies (based on insights gained from previous programs, and from the research carried out by Erika Bout in 2021⁵);
- Ensure that the program is having an equitable and representative impact on communities experiencing food insecurity; and
- Ensure that our program is part of the wrap-around services of support in this province.

The 2023 Nourishing Communities Food Coupon Program also aimed at continuing to move the program closer to a sustainable and more self-sufficient funding future, which is discussed in Section 9.

⁴ While most of the 33 farmers' markets offer similar products, some markets are much larger than others and feature more diverse offerings. As such, all program participants did not have access to identical products.

⁵ Bout, E. (August, 2022). Exploring the Impacts of the Nourishing Communities Food Coupon Program: A research summary report. Retrieved from <https://farmersmarketsnovascotia.ca>

4.0 A Program More Important Than Ever

Never before has the Nourishing Communities program been as important to Nova Scotians as it has been this year. 2023 was a particularly difficult time for many Nova Scotians, as interest rates soared along with the cost of living. Household incomes failed to keep pace with rapidly inflating costs of living, resulting in more people relying on their discretionary budgets such as food, to cover the cost of housing⁶. Food Banks Canada's 2023 Poverty Report supports this finding; according to the report, Nova Scotia scored a failing grade (F), the lowest grade in all Canadian provinces⁷. The report found that an average of 65.5% of Nova Scotians income is spent on fixed costs beyond housing, further demonstrating the budgetary restrictions that are greatly impacting food spending. Therefore, not only do Nova Scotians have less of their budgets to spend on food, the increase in inflation means they get less for what they are able to spend. The cost of food is the second highest category of inflation after housing¹, a devastating reality for families already experiencing food insecurity and many more who are no longer food secure.

The Nourishing Communities Food Coupon program increased participants' discretionary budgets, which would otherwise be greatly limited. Not only does the program provide financial support for food insecure households, the money spent by participants went directly back into the local economy, disseminating the economic benefits throughout the province. Participants' purchases at the market increased the overall direct economic impact of farmers' markets in their community and the province as a whole. Keeping government funding circulated in the local economy was yet another benefit of the Nourishing Communities Food Coupon program that is especially impactful in terms of economic downturn.

Farmers' Markets of Nova Scotia and the Nourishing Communities Food Coupon program have demonstrated to be an essential support for food insecure households in Nova Scotia for a half a decade. During the pandemic, FMNS was able to shift and transform the program, to continue meeting the needs of their communities. With increasing costs of living, including a 10.5% increase in food price inflation in Nova Scotia from 2022 to 2023, the highest rate of food inflation over the past 40 years⁸, communities were increasingly dependent on the Nourishing Communities Food Coupon program to continue to provide them with the dignity of choice, a connection to their communities, and access to local, nutritious food. We cannot entirely predict what is in store for Nova Scotians in the coming years, but if the cost of living continues to rise at unprecedented rates, the necessity of this program will only deepen. Thankfully, after 5 successful years, the Nourishing Communities Food Coupon program has demonstrated they will continue to provide Nova Scotians with the support they need, even during the most turbulent of times.

⁶ Canada's Food Price Report 2023. Retrieved from https://cdn.dal.ca/content/dam/dalhousie/pdf/sites/agri-food/Canada's%20Food%20Price%20Report%202023_Digital.pdf

⁷ Food Banks Canada. Nova Scotia Poverty Report 2023. Retrieved from <https://foodbankscanada.ca/poverty-index/2023-nova-scotia/>

⁸ Canada's Food Price Report 2023. Retrieved from https://cdn.dal.ca/content/dam/dalhousie/pdf/sites/agri-food/Canada's%20Food%20Price%20Report%202023_Digital.pdf

5.0 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 would help us to see the full picture, ensuring fully informed decisions about how best to carry forward. Given that the program has just concluded, however, we can only evaluate its short-term outcomes at this time. An evaluation of longer-term outcomes should be considered at a later date, especially now that 5 years of the program has been completed. A 5- or 10-year long-term impact report would be greatly valuable for the overall evaluation of the program.

The 2023 Nourishing Communities Food Coupon program evaluation consisted of three steps:

Step 1: Post-program Questionnaires

When the program concluded in the fall and winter of 2022, all participants were provided with a short (10-15 minute) questionnaire, either in digital format or hard copy (notably, most chose to complete this survey online). There were three post-program questionnaires that differed slightly from one another, created for each of the three types of participants and their specific program experiences:

- 1. Market-going Participants:** Participants who received Market Bucks to spend in-person at their farmers' market.
- 2. Online Ordering Participants:** Participants who received Market Bucks to spend using their farmers' market online ordering system.
- 3. Food Box Participants:** Participants who received food boxes instead of Market Bucks.

These questionnaires were intended to determine the impacts the program had on participants. The questionnaires offered space for participants to share stories, testimonials, or anecdotes, some of which are included in this report. They also contained a series of questions aimed at helping us understand the demographic characteristics of the participants. A copy of the post-survey questionnaire can be seen in Appendix C. 341 participants (325 market-going; 10 online ordering; and 6 food box participants) completed this survey, for an impressive response rate of 88%.

Step 2: 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: what percentage of coupons were redeemed, and on which product categories were the coupons redeemed. This data is presented later in the report.

It is important to note that unlike previous years, the 2023 methodology did not include a pre-program survey. FMNS's decision to eliminate the pre-program survey was based on

consultation from the Acadia Entrepreneurship Centre. The data from the past three years continued to show that the answers in the pre-program surveys remained consistent. Moreover, asking participants to fill out two surveys adds potential stress for this community. The post program survey results, however, continue to offer the most value in terms of the data. This decision is further supported given the recommendations from Acadia University honours student Erika Bout, who undertook an extensive study that explored the impacts of the Nourishing Communities Food Coupon program on participants and their communities. Her report encourages program administrators to "become more aware and critical of surveillance and paternalistic practices"⁹.

Step 3: Market and Partner Surveys

Two additional surveys were created, one for Market Managers and the other for Partner Organizations, to evaluate the effectiveness of the administration of the program between FMNS, participating markets, and partner organizations. The survey questions suggested improvements and examined the helpfulness of internal processes, including the tracking sheet, reporting, the managers' guidebook, fundraising, and overall communication. Managers and partner organizations were also invited to share the successes and challenges they experienced this year. The results of these surveys are outside the scope of this report, but will inform future program processes by improving the effectiveness of the internal administering of the program.

⁹ Bout, E. (August, 2022). Exploring the Impacts of the Nourishing Communities Food Coupon Program: A research summary report. Retrieved from <https://farmersmarketsnovascotia.ca>



“I really loved being part of [the Nourishing Communities program]. I got to meet and greet all kinds of different vendors, as well as try different foods/produce I may not have tried otherwise. It is a tremendous program.”

6.0 Key Outcomes and Participant Characteristics by the Numbers

Investment, Participation, and Coupon Redemption

- Total value of market bucks distributed (all markets): \$299,673 (compared with \$397,439.77 in 2022, \$264,210 in 2021, \$78,235 in 2020, and \$42,000 in the 2019 pilot)
- Total investment by the province: \$422,400 (compared to \$494,800 in 2022, \$400,000 in 2021, \$80,000 in 2020, and \$63,100 in 2019)
- Total value of market bucks redeemed (all markets, as of January 31, 2024): \$287,596 (compared with \$383,608 in 2022, \$228,602 in 2021, \$67,555 in 2020, and \$37,367 in 2019).
- Overall food coupon redemption rate: 95.7% (compared with 96.5% in 2022, 87% in 2021, 86% in 2020, and 88.9% in 2019). Expiry dates on coupons were first introduced in 2022 to prevent coupons from the previous year being used, and to encourage higher redemption rates.
- Total number of food coupon recipients (all markets): 386 households, directly impacting over 1,200 people. This included 88 individuals living on their own, and 1,144 individuals from families of 2 or more.
- Number of food coupon recipient households by market:

Market	# of Households	Market	# of Households
Alderney Landing Farmers' Market	10	Merigomish SchoolhouseMarketplace	5
Annapolis Royal Farmers' and Traders Markets	37	Musquodoboit Harbour Farmers' Market	11
Antigonish Farmers' Market	14	New Glasgow Farmers' Market	14
Avon Community Farmers' Market	7	Novalea Farmers' Market	5
Barrington Farmers' Market	7	Portapique Farmers' Market	7
Bridgewater Farmers' Market	12	Privateer Farmers' Market	4
Cape Breton Farmers' Market	26	Prospect Communities Farmers' Market	6
Chester Farmers and Artisans Market	10	Pugwash Farmers' Market	14
Fairview Clayton Park Farmers' Market	11	Shelburne Guild Hall Market	8

Market	# of Households	Market	# of Households
Halifax Brewery Farmers' Market	10	Springhill Farmers' Market	7
Halifax Seaport Farmers' Market	14	Spryfield Farmers' Market	11
Hope Blooms Farmers' Market	9	Tantallon Farmers' Market	7
Hubbards Farmers' Market	12	Tatamagouche Farmers' Market	18
Kentville Farmers' Market	7	Truro Farmers' Market	17
Lunenburg Farmers' Market	9	Wolfville Farmers' Market	29
Mabou Farmers' Market	15	Yarmouth Farmers' Community Market	18
		Total	386

Gender & Age

As in previous years, the participant group was not equally distributed, with 84% of participants identifying as women (notably the same as last year) and 12% identifying as men (also the same as last year). 7 respondents (2%) identified as non-binary, 4 identified as Two-Spirit (1%) and 3 identified as gender-fluid (1%).

There was a higher proportion of younger participants in this iteration of the program compared to last year. Almost three quarters (73%) of respondents fell between 25 and 54 years old, compared to over two thirds (69%) of respondents in 2022. 2023 also had a 4% increase in respondents who were aged 18-24 compared to 2022.

Age Categories	% of Respondents in 2023	% of Respondents in 2022
18 - 24	6%	2%
25 - 34	28%	20%
35 - 44	30%	30%
45 - 54	15%	19%
55 - 64	10%	17%
65+	11%	12%

Population Characteristics

18% of program participants self-identified as living with a disability, and 8% were a primary caretaker of someone with a disability. 8% of respondents identified as being a member of the LGBTQ+ community, 4% were Acadian/Francophone, 7% identified as Metis, First Nation and/or Inuit, and 3% as a Person of Colour. 7% indicated they had immigrated to Canada within the last 5 years. 13% of participants identified with none of the above. Other populations that were submitted by 8 respondents were: Ukrainian, an immigrant of 15+ years, international students, single parent, having a son who is First Nations and Filipino.

Food Coupon Redemption by Category

Product Category	Total Amount Redeemed (\$)	% of Total 2022 Program market bucks	% During 2022 Program
Produce	\$82,440.56	26.5 (+)	23.3
Other agricultural products	66,702.92	21.5 (-)	23.6
Prepared foods	65,771.34	21.2 (-)	21.8
Value-added foods	31,241.06	10.1 (+)	5.6
Beer, wine, and spirits	9,120.00	2.9 (-)	3.3
Personal hygiene	10,035.15	3.2 (-)	4.7
Artisans/crafts	39,368.78	12.7 (-)	14.0
Unclassified/other	6,264.49	2.0 (-)	3.7

It is important to note that, to maximize personal choice and individual decision-making, program participants were issued no restrictions on how their coupons could be redeemed. Overwhelmingly, however, participants continue to opt to spend their coupons on locally grown or made food products. 79% of all coupons were redeemed for produce, prepared foods, and other agri-food products (slightly higher than 74% last year, and 78% in 2021). The produce and value-added foods categories significantly increased while all non-food categories lowered in their redemption rates this year compared to last year.

Social, Inclusion and Community Outcomes

- 93% of participants reported feeling more connected to their community because of their participation in this program, with 59% strongly agreeing. This is consistent with 85% during the pilot, 92% in 2020, 86% in 2021 and 93% in 2022.

- 91% of participants agreed that their existing relationships were strengthened by the program, a slight increase from 89% in 2022. 96% of participants agreed they felt welcome at the Farmer’s Market, consistent with 95% last year.
- 77% of participants indicated they made at least one new friend or social contact through their participation in the program. This is consistent with last year (79%) and slightly up from the first three years of the program (57% in 2019, 43% in 2020 and 61% in 2021).

	Strongly Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Somewhat Agree	Strongly Agree
This program helped me feel more connected to my community	3%	4%	34%	59%
I felt welcome at the Farmers’ Market	3%	1%	13%	83%
My existing relationships were strengthened by the program	2%	7%	37%	54%
I made at least one new friend or social contact through this program	10%	13%	30%	47%

Nutritional and Health-Related Outcomes

- 88% of participants purchased foods that were not part of their diet previously (compared with 89% in 2022, 88% in 2021, 82% in 2020 and 98% in the 2019 pilot)
- 84% of participants believe they cooked from scratch more frequently as a result of being in the program (up from 79% last year).
- 78% of participants expect to make long-term changes to their diet because of their participation in this program (up from 62% in 2019, 50% in 2020, 61% in 2021 and slightly down from 83% in 2022).
- 91% of participants reported eating healthier foods than usual during their participation in the program (consistent with 91% in 2022 and up from 87% in 2019, 85% in 2020 and 81% in 2021).

	Strongly Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Somewhat Agree	Strongly Agree
During this program, I bought and consumed foods that were not part of my regular diet before	4%	8%	39%	49%
I ate healthier foods than usual while I was participating in this program	2%	7%	29%	62%

	Strongly Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Somewhat Agree	Strongly Agree
I cooked from scratch more frequently during my participation in this program	6%	10%	38%	46%
I believe my long-term eating habits have changed somewhat as a result of this program	6%	16%	43%	35%

Financial Outcomes

- 92% of participants, as a result of this program, worried less about having enough to eat, consistent with 93% in 2022.
- 92% of participants, as a result of this program, felt they had more money to meet their other (non-food/grocery) needs. This is consistent with 85% in 2019, 94% in 2020, 88% and 94% in 2022.
- 91% of market going and online ordering participants believe they would have benefited from receiving more market bucks if they were available. This is consistent with 95% last year. 100% of food box participants believe they would have benefited from receiving more food boxes, if they were available.
- 97% of market-going and online ordering participants believe they received good value for their market bucks overall (consistent with 97% in 2022 and during the pilot and slightly up from 91% in 2021 and 93% in 2020). 100% of food box recipients believe they received good value for their food boxes overall.

	Strongly Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Somewhat Agree	Strongly Agree
While participating in this program, I worried less about having enough food to eat	3%	4%	28%	64%
During this program, I found that I had more money to meet my other (non-food/grocery) needs	3%	6%	28%	64%
I would have benefitted from receiving more Food Bucks, if they were available	3%	6%	19%	72%

I would have benefitted from receiving more Food Boxes, if they were available	0%	0%	17%	83%
I believe I received good value for my Food Bucks, overall	1%	1%	20%	77%
I believe I received good value for my Food Boxes, overall	0%	0%	67%	33%

Accessibility and Other Challenges

- 38% of participants found farmers’ market prices to be higher than the grocery store (2022: 58%, 2021: 65% 2020: 54% pilot: 63%).
- 15% of participants found it difficult to get to and from their market (17% during the pilot, 20% in 2022)
- 14% of participants feel many of the foods they want are not available at the farmer's market (compared to 22% last year).
- 8% of participants feel they do not have enough time to shop at the Farmers’ Market regularly (compared to 7% last year).
- One participant (0.3%) feels the Farmers’ Market does not feel like a safe or welcoming space for them (consistent with less than 1% last year).
- 1% found the farmers' market online ordering system difficult to use.

Overall Evaluation

- When asked to evaluate the overall benefit of the program, 95% of respondents indicated that the program provided either ‘an extreme amount of benefit’ or ‘quite a bit of benefit’ (Consistent with 95% in 2022 and up from 80% in 2021). 4% said the program offered ‘some benefit but not much’, and just 1% of respondents indicated they received no real benefit at all.
- A significant percentage of participants said they *strongly agree* that they looked forward to visiting the Farmers’ Market each time (85%); had positive interactions with vendors (84%); their mental health was better because of participating in the program (59%); and the program had a significant, positive impact on their life (79%).

	Strongly Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Somewhat Agree	Strongly Agree
I looked forward to visiting the farmers' market each time	1%	1%	12%	85%
Overall, I had positive interactions	1%	1%	13%	84%

	Strongly Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Somewhat Agree	Strongly Agree
with the vendors at my farmers' market				
My mental health was better because of participating in this program	2%	4%	35%	59%
I want to participate in this program again	1%	1%	7%	91%
This program had a significant, positive impact on my life	2%	2%	17%	79%

7.0 In Their Own Words: Participant Experiences

At the end of the Nourishing Communities Food Coupon Program, we asked each participant (through their exit survey):

What was your favourite part about participating in this program? What stood out for you?

The financial support of the Nourishing Communities program continued to be participants' favourite part of being in the Nourishing Communities Food Coupon program. Purchasing food they otherwise would not have been able to afford, especially produce, meant a great deal to participants. They were grateful to be able to provide fresh, local, wholesome and nutritious food for their families, free from financial pressure. A number of participants noted that their experience at the market was significantly better than at grocery stores, both in the quality of food and overall experience. The social aspect of the market was a close contender for participants' favourite part of the program. The social benefits included: meeting new people, building friendships, strengthening relationships with family and friends, an opportunity to get out and be social, an activity to do as a family, to feel a part of a community. Other responses included being able to try new foods, allowing their kids to pick out their own food and being able to choose products for themselves without restriction and knowing that they were supporting local vendors in their community. Below are a few quotes that highlight participants' favourite aspects of the program.

I love to enjoy the fantastic food that the farmers grow. It helped my family eat healthier and save us some money buying food in the superstore. This program has been wonderful to me, because I got a chance to meet some local farmers and enjoyed some beautiful time with my two little ones. They love to try the new food at the farmer's market.

As a single income family of 5/6 this program helps me feed my family. I LOVE purchasing local produce and since joining this program, I have gotten into preserving as much as possible. Buying bulk from local farmers & canning that produce up to be shelf stable, homemade foods that nourish my family through the winter months too.

The program not only helped contribute some financial relief to help with the cost of food, it also allowed my family and I to have access to fresh, local foods. This opportunity also improved my emotional well being- I no longer had finances as an excuse to prevent me from going on "an outing". Living in rural NS (30 minutes from new Glasgow), I didn't feel guilty spending a bit extra in gas money to take my family on a fun weekend outing!

Sometimes, my kids would come with me and that would be good quality time with them. We were able to grab healthy food, try different fruits, get to know some of the vendors, just being out and seeing people was great. My daughter loves crafting and she got some inspiration from the products she saw at the market.

It was a big help financially, less stress knowing we would have fresh fruit & vegetables each week. It was also something we did as a family each week. The kids looked forward to it.

At the start of this program, you received a welcome package (tote bag and printed materials). Do you have any comments or suggestions about the contents of the welcome package?

The welcome packages were a huge hit overall. Participants loved the bag, recipes, information, and stickers. One participant noted that her kids especially loved using the recipe cards. The bag was the most loved part of the package, with participants stating they used it every week and was a huge help in carrying their purchases. Some participants did not receive a welcome package, a result of joining the program part way through. Others shared a few suggestions for improvement including, something fun for the kids (e.g. colouring page), more information on the other farmers' markets (e.g. location, schedule), and more durable tote bags (i.e. reinforce straps, sturdier material to hold it's shape at the bottom). The most frequent suggestion was to include coupons and/or samples from vendors. Overwhelmingly participants expressed gratitude for the welcome packages, stating they were helpful, informative and a beautiful gift.

The welcome package was delightful! I use the tote for everything. I enjoyed the printed materials, and I hung the seasonal produce card up on my fridge for reference.

I thought you guys went above and beyond with the welcome package!! Thank you

They were really good, I really loved the bag. Maybe giving two bags as they are expensive. I liked the recipes, my kids really like to cook and tried some recipes from the book.

It was a perfect gift. The bag was beautiful and reflects the purpose of the program.

Aside from the beautiful and sturdy bag where I put everything I buy in the market, I also love the concept of the leaflets where information about seasonal goods is given. This will give a heads-up as a first-time consumer.

I enjoyed the welcome package. The bag was helpful because I used it while going to the market. Makes you feel like you're a part of it all.

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?

There was an overwhelming consensus from respondents that they would recommend the program to others. They highlighted the financial, social and health benefits of the program. Being able to support local producers, connect with the community, strengthen relationships and provide nutritious food for their families, were frequent themes amongst participants'

responses. A couple respondents provided tips they would give to new participants to “stretch the benefits” of the market bucks out, such as preserving produce for the winter, stocking up on shelf stable items and looking around at all the options before buying to find the best value of products.

It's wonderful because it allows low-income people to buy quality, healthy fresh food on a regular basis, not just when something comes on sale at a grocery store. It also supports local farmers.

I would say congratulations! This is a great program that helps with not only the financial aspect, but the community connection, as well as social. There are so many great foods to try at the market. It helps to lean in to more nutritional eating, too. Don't be afraid to talk to vendors or other attendees.

I would tell them that this program is a wonderful tool in supporting local, accessing healthier produce and foods, making shopping more personable/human and enjoyable again (going to the grocery store can be disheartening), and feeling happier and more connected.

Get on this program! The financial aid went a long way for my family. I enjoyed attending the market weekly and always felt welcomed in the community. My children loved attending the market, visiting other children, the events and feeling like part of a 'market family'.

I would tell them it is a wonderful program to participate in and they will benefit greatly. They will connect with people and food in different ways than the grocery stores. They will have a deeper sense of community and new appreciation for hard work and good food.

It has enriched my life both from a dietary standpoint but also from a mental health standpoint. Felt very supported.

8.0 Possible Opportunities for Program Enhancement

Increase Market Bucks Allocation

Participants' most frequent feedback for improvement was for an increase in the amount of market bucks distributed. This feedback is consistent with the findings that showed 91% of participants believe they would have benefited from receiving more market bucks if they were available. Participants pointed to rising inflation, causing their coupons to not go as far. One participant stated, "I understand with inflation the prices are higher everywhere but we were limited to a couple of items."

Another participant shared immense gratitude for the program, but also stated that, "Inflation means [they] haven't been able to buy as much this year as [they] have in previous years with this program. Especially as the amount [they were] given goes down each year."

The request for more coupons was especially frequent among larger households. One participant has a family of 6 and said that they would skip weeks to save up enough coupons to purchase more products in one trip. They were not the only participant saving their coupons to purchase more on their visit. Not only does this finding indicate participants are not getting the financial benefits they need, but skipping visits also means they are missing out on the social benefits that come from going to the market.

Participants also continue to share their desire for the program to continue and want to see the program expand to support other individuals and families in need as well. When asked if they would have benefited from receiving more market bucks, one respondent said they "...would rather spread the love to other single parents." Responses such as this, speak to participants' empathy and awareness of the potential impact the program could have with more resources. FMNS should continue to seek investment into the expansion of the program so that it can reach more food insecure people across Nova Scotia, and deepen its impact by offering more weekly market bucks.

Improve Vendor Awareness & Education

Improving vendor awareness and understanding of the program is required to ensure smooth transactions and most importantly, a welcoming environment for participants. Unfortunately, some participants continue to experience difficulties in their interactions with vendors. There were some instances where vendors were unaware of the program or confused as to how it worked. As one participant noted, this is usually an issue with seasonal vendors, but there were some exceptions. A couple participants attempted to explain the program to vendors, with some vendors continuing to not sell to them, while others happily made a seamless transition. The most frequent negative feedback on vendor interactions from participants was that some vendors treated them differently once they brought out their coupons. This includes vendors rolling their eyes, giving them a hard time, seeming put off, refusing to accept the coupons, not giving change back and/or charging extra. Participants noted that these interactions made them feel embarrassed and less important than other customers.

Despite these experiences, the overwhelming majority of participants reported having positive experiences with vendors. In certain instances, it was reported that some shoppers even developed friendships with vendors, and that others went out of their way to accommodate them. Unfortunately, even one negative interaction can have devastating and lasting impacts for individuals with their regards to perceptions of the program. Therefore, it is essential that all vendors, no matter their regularity, are educated and understand the program (e.g. why it exists and how to handle transactions) and held to a high standard in their interactions with all customers. Ensuring that vendors accept market bucks without discrimination or negative attitudes towards participants is essential.

Reducing the Stigma of Market Bucks

The Participant experience can be enhanced by addressing the anxiety and embarrassment associated with the stigma of using market bucks. A large number of participants said they felt nervous at first when starting the program. For the majority of participants, this nervousness went away after their first few visits, but a few others continued to experience anxiety when using the coupons. As noted in the previous section, vendor education plays a large role in reducing this stigma. However, educating the entire market community (i.e. staff, vendors, customers) about the program and increasing the use of the market bucks outside of the program, would also help in reducing the stigma felt by some participants. One participant experienced a group of other customers joking about her coupons as she used them to pay a vendor. Another participant explained the toll the stigma had on their mental health. They stated, “So many of the attending people and vendors were people I knew. I was embarrassed to use the market bucks...I also never saw anyone else ever use market bucks so I kind of felt alone in it.”

A similar experience was shared by a participant who felt “...embarrassed [their] friends would find out [they] are broke.” Market bucks need to become more widely used and marketed to other customers as an option that anyone can use when shopping at the market, and make a great gift. This would make the sight of market bucks more common and less associated with Nourishing Community members only. One participant shared positive feedback from vendors that had signs saying they accept market bucks, which is another way to market the use of coupons and reduce confusion. These steps would help reduce stigma by expanding the use of market bucks to all market customers.

Improved Market Accessibility

Physical inaccessibility at farmers’ markets continues to be a challenge for participants, especially those with disabilities or have young children. Physical barriers shared by participants included slipping on wet floors, and not having enough seating. However, crowding remains the largest accessibility complaint from participants. Using mobility aids, strollers and walking in general was made difficult by the large crowds moving through narrow aisles. Markets could consider implementing a crowd management system to ensure the number of people in the Market at any given time does not impede customers ability to

safely navigate the space. Another factor that impacts over-crowding, as noted by participants, is that products, especially produce, run out fast if you don't go early enough. Continuing to build and provide more accessible spaces for market-goers should remain a significant priority for FMNS and their markets. FMNS should support Markets in finding grants designed to improve building accessibility. Other accessory challenges noted by two participants were language barrier, and not being comfortable around dogs. A couple parents also noted the challenge of shopping with their kids and would like to see more kid-friendly spaces and activities. Some farmers' markets have already successfully implemented some kind of kids programming, allowing other markets an opportunity to learn from and implement programming of their own.

Financial Support for Transportation

Providing transportation options (e.g. gas subsidies, taxi fare/shuttle/public transportation subsidies) to and from the market was recommended to address to improve the accessibility of the program. One participant explained, "Being a single mother with only child benefit, it is hard to get the extra money for gas to get [to the market]. Offering gas money to get there would be great."

Transportation is especially a barrier for those who live far away from markets in low-density/rural areas with limited to no public transportation. For some participants, driving to the market was a financial burden due to the cost of gas. One participant shared that the cost of fuel outweighed the financial benefit of the program. Another participant found it challenging to have to make two trips to the market to pick up their market bucks one day and shop another. This could be a result of a lack of timing, transportation, or both. Allowing participants to pick coupons up on the same day of the market, a system already in place at many markets, would help alleviate this issue.

Low Sensory Times

As expressed by the majority of participants, going to the farmers' market is an enjoyable experience, with a fun atmosphere, opportunities to socialize and even listen to live music. However, these same benefits can have the opposite impact for some participants who find the loud music, and large crowds to be overwhelming. The farmers' markets are lively, with a more enjoyable atmosphere than at a typical grocery store, as noted by some participants. However, it also means it is a high-sensory environment, which can be especially challenging for people with PTSD, anxiety, autism, ADHD and other sensory conditions. Implementing low-sensory times (e.g. time when the music is turned off, lights are dimmed, the number of people inside is reduced, etc.) is one way many organizations have begun to improve accessibility for neurodivergent people. Implementing a low-sensory time at the market might be challenging and require some intentional planning, but would drastically improve the shopping experience for these participants. This suggestion would not only benefit participants in Nourishing Communities, but other customers as well, and invite in new

customers who otherwise wouldn't attend the market because of the highly stimulating environment.

Expand Market Access

Participants continue to ask for longer hours, more times, and year-round access to the market. Many participants expressed a desire for the program to continue into the winter months, especially as the cost of living is often higher in the winter. Other participants were limited by the hours the market was open, conflicting most often with their work schedules. A few participants suggested that allowing participants to spend their market bucks at nearby markets, which have a different schedule, would fix this issue. Two other participants also experienced scheduling issues, with one only being allowed to shop on one of the three days their market was open, and the other had a hard time keeping track of the inconsistent hours of their local market.

Increase Number of Producers & Expand Variety of Products

A lack of variety and vendors was another challenge brought up by several respondents, specifically the lack of food producers. Most participants wanted more variety and amount of vegetables available. However, meat was also mentioned as sometimes being hard to come by. Another respondent said they would like to be able to purchase more ethnic foods, such as halal meat, and another wanted more simple greens & herbs. Sometimes it was the low number of vegetable vendors that limited participants' choice and other times it was how fast the produce ran out, a particular issue for those who could not go early enough. One participant stated that they were concerned that there won't even be a farmers' market anymore with the decreasing number of farmers. Therefore, continuing to support producers is critical for keeping and expanding the availability of foods available at farmers' markets. This could look like direct support for producers, as well as supporting and collaborating on initiatives that strengthen the food system, creating more opportunities for current and future producers.



“[The] Farmers Market is a great area to go! Great people who work and shop there, amazing items to be purchased and amazing entertainment to listen to. The food is amazing to eat if you haven’t had anything to eat before going, and great to smell. The environment is always welcoming, I will always go back!”

9.0 Next Steps: Program Sustainability and Future Funding Models

FMNS and its partners have spent the past five years designing, rolling out, and continuously improving an exemplary and impactful program. In that short window of time, FMNS has grown this program from one that provides \$42,000 worth of market bucks to 105 households across 6 markets in 2019, to one that distributed \$299,673 to 386 households across 33 markets in 2023. This is no small feat, especially given that two of those years were marked by a global pandemic, followed by an economic recession teetering on depression. Despite these circumstances, Nourishing Communities has continued to be a successful and highly-demanded program. There continues to be widespread support for the program from FMNS member markets and partner organizations, as well as communities-at-large, and a widespread desire to enhance the program's reach and impact.

2023 marked the 5th anniversary of the launch of Nourishing Communities, a significant milestone for the program. The ongoing success of the program over the past 5 years demonstrates the program's ability to remain efficient and successful in its impact as it continues to grow and evolve. The program continues to grow in an attempt to deepen the impact of the program, expand into more communities and attempt to meet the growing demand.

To continue increasing the sustainability of the Nourishing Communities program for years to come, FMNS will continue to:

1. Work to expand the Nourishing Communities [Donor Program](#), live on the FMNS website, as part of FMNS' 2023-2026 Strategic Plan.
2. Work with our program partners to diversify our funding model, including providing training and support for our markets to engage in local fundraising efforts at the market level. FMNS continues to identify other ways to support its markets to engage in local fundraising to fund a minimum of 25% of their total individual coupon program requirements on a year-to-year basis.
3. Continue to leverage its national clout as a founding member of [Canadian Farmers' Markets](#) (CFM), Canada's national farmers' market sector association. Through CFM, FMNS is actively involved in a nationwide campaign asking the Government of Canada to invest in a national nutrition coupon program fund that will strengthen and grow existing and proposed provincial and territorial farmers' markets nutrition coupon programs across Canada, including in Nova Scotia.

The demand by Nova Scotians experiencing food insecurity to participate in the Nourishing Communities program has only increased amidst the growing food insecurity crisis in Canada. The Nourishing Communities waitlist continues to grow, while the amount of coupons distributed to households needs to keep up with inflation.

In response to this growing demand, FMNS asked the Department of Communities, Culture, Tourism and Heritage (CCTH) for \$500,000 in additional funding for the 2024 program. While FMNS did not receive the full amount asked for, they are deeply appreciative of the \$250,000 in one-time funding that was made available for the 2024 program, which means CCTH's contribution for the 2024 program will be \$672,400, the largest single year contribution they've made to date during the now six-year long partnership (2019-2024).

FMNS is deeply committed to building on its successful partnership with the Province of Nova Scotia through the Nourishing Communities program. To this end, FMNS is working towards a goal of securing a multi-year funding agreement of \$1 million per year from the Province of Nova Scotia, and will actively work towards this objective in 2024 and beyond.

FMNS is grateful for all financial contributions to date, and will continue to pursue further investment in an effort to eliminate the dire food insecurity everyday Nova Scotians are experiencing. FMNS is actively working to further equip our member markets with tools to fundraise for their own programs. Further, we are exploring new opportunities to bring more funding into our own organization to further support the Nourishing Communities program. In 2023, an impressive **\$\$21,563.68** was raised by thirteen member markets to support the program. FMNS will also continue to work with the provincial government to increase the funding amount, as the only limiting factor to this program's important success and impact is access to funding.

Thinking further into the future, FMNS would like to make this a million dollar program that is supplemented by regional fundraising at the market level. To that end, FMNS is committed to the following funding strategy first proposed for 2023 and will continue for future iterations:

1. FMNS will continue to work with its project partners to roll out and further develop long-term fundraising strategies built on a resilient and diverse funding model.
2. FMNS developed a donor program in 2021, allowing individuals, small businesses, and corporate sponsors to support FMNS and the Nourishing Communities Food Coupon Program. The donor program was launched in 2022, and will continue to be built and expanded over time.
3. FMNS will take a lead role in training each of its participating markets on how to create their own fundraising models, with the objective of enabling FMNS member farmers' markets to fund at least 25% of their individual coupon program requirements on a year-to-year basis.

FMNS acknowledges that the Nourishing Communities Food Coupon program will always require some level of government investment, and it recognizes the need to find creative revenue models to minimize its reliance on government contributions while demonstrating continued community support. FMNS also believes this multi-pronged funding approach will allow the organization to continue to work effectively with the government to ensure this program continues to grow and deepen its impact.

10.0 Conclusion: A Shining Light in the Dark¹⁰

Having collected and analyzed five years' worth of qualitative and quantitative data, and having closely followed the execution and rollout of this program, we are confident that the Nourishing Communities Food Coupon Program will remain a stable and impactful program for years to come.

2023 had the highest rates of food insecurity in Nova Scotia since before the pilot, with rates starting at 20.9% in 2019, followed by 18% in 2020, 17.7% in 2021, 22% in 2022 and ending with the highest increase in 2023 at 28.9%¹¹. These statistics demonstrate just how difficult of a year it has been for Nova Scotians. The Nourishing Community program continues to be a consistent support for Nova Scotians, providing financial and social support during a very difficult time.

This program has evolved into a well-established program that has demonstrated an ability to succeed even in the most trying of circumstances. At this point, there is little reason to wonder whether this program can achieve what it has set out to achieve. An abundance of evidence points clearly towards seven things:

1. People across all parts of Nova Scotia – and across all subsets of the population – have clearly shown the program is needed and wanted. Subscription is a non-issue, and waitlists are always full.
2. Participants overwhelmingly report that their experience with the program is positive and beneficial both financially and socially, as well as improving both their physical and mental health.
3. Participants overwhelmingly indicate that, as a result of this program, they are trying new and healthier foods, cooking from scratch more often and have changed the way they eat as a result of the program.
4. FMNS and its participating markets have proven that they can operationalise, administer, and scale-up this program effectively with minimal challenges. Further, they have done so in an accountable way that provides precise tracking of coupon redemption and participant outcomes.
5. This program is bringing many people to farmers' markets who would not otherwise attend, either for financial, social or health related reasons.
6. In addition to the \$299,673 that has been directly channelled to local producers in 2023 (through the program's budget), 65% of participants are choosing to spend their own

¹⁰ The reader may note that the following section is similar to the 2022 report. This is because the evidence continues to be true and if anything has become stronger in 2023.

¹¹ Statistics Canada (April 2024). Food Insecurity by Geography table from Canadian Income Survey (CIS) 2018-2022. <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/t1/tbl1/en/cv/recreate.action?pid=1310083401&selectedNodeIds=1D71D8,1D13,3D6,4D2&checkedLevels=0D1,0D3,1D1&refPeriods=20180101,20220101&dimensionLayouts=layout3,layout3,layout2,layout3,layout2&vectorDisplay=false>
Data on food insecurity for CIS are collected in the year following the survey reference year. We've chosen to label the data using the year of data collection to better reflect the timing of experiences captured.

money on locally produced goods every week; money that, without this program, would most likely otherwise be spent in ways that have a higher ratio of economic leakage.

7. 48 grassroots community organizations across Nova Scotia are supportive of this program, illustrating this by participating directly in it.

At this stage in the program's evolution, after half a decade of programming, we have ample qualitative and quantitative evidence to be confident that these findings are accurate, and will remain accurate barring unforeseen circumstances or major changes to the program. At the same time, it is only fair to acknowledge that while this program has been largely successful (measured against its stated aims), there are still some important questions we cannot yet answer, such as:

- Do participants continue to purchase new or healthier foods after their participation in the program has concluded?
- What percentage of participants continue to visit their local farmers' market on a regular basis after they have completed the program?
- What is the total economic impact of this program on the local economy?
- How have individual vendors and businesses been impacted by the arrival of this program?
- What other positive short-term or long-term spinoff effects might this program have had on the lives of participants?

These are all important questions, and ones which FMNS has in some cases already begun to study. The answers to these questions will help FMNS and its partners further refine and improve the program as it continues to grow.

For now, it is appropriate to revisit the original aims of the program. The 2023 iteration of the Nourishing Communities Food Coupon 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; and
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 1 – Provide financial support to those in need to access healthy food: Achieved

FMNS and its 33 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, 386 households meeting these criteria were selected to participate in the program. Although not all coupons were redeemed for items that would normally be considered 'healthy food', the data clearly shows that the majority of redemptions fell into this category. Questions such as 'While participating in this program, I worried less about having enough food to eat' and 'During this program, I found that I had more money to meet my other (non-food/grocery) needs', both answered affirmatively, providing further support that this objective that has been achieved.

Objective 2 – Provide an experience that supported physical, mental, and community health: 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. For example, responses presented below all suggest that the program has made progress toward this objective:

- "I made at least one new friend or social contact through this program",
- "I felt more connected to my community as a result of this program",
- "During this program, I consumed foods that were not part of my regular diet before",
- "I ate healthier foods than usual while I was participating in this program", and
- "I think my long-term eating habits have changed somewhat as a result of this program"

Although self-reporting is often considered somewhat anecdotal, FMNS has plans to institute more in-depth behavioural research during future iterations of the program. This research will tell us even more about this outcome.

Objective 3 – Support local producers and farmers in developing a robust food system in Nova Scotia: 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 \$299,673 into thirty three farmers' markets, and this figure does not account for any secondary, tertiary, and spinoff economic impacts. And while we can't say with certainty how much extra money the program's participants spent (in addition to their market bucks), we can say that 65% of participating households reported spending some of their own money at the market during each visit. 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 likely been met, even in the absence of data specific to this program.

By nearly every measure, all parties associated with this program – markets, participants, and community partners – believe the program 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 early-stage programs experience unexpected and unforeseeable snags along the way (resulting in less-than-expected results). Such has not been the case with the Nourishing Communities Food Coupon program; it has been overwhelmingly well supported, well subscribed, well administered, and well received. Even during a global pandemic and economic recession, the program was able to meet its objectives, and continues to do so. Although there are always opportunities for future refinement and improvement, Flourish is confident asserting that this program shows true promise in achieving its stated objectives not only on the current scale, but also on a much larger one.

Appendices

Appendix A: Key Learnings and Opportunities for Enhancement from Previous Years (2019-2022)

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 that 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 is 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.

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).

1. 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).
2. 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 is helpful in the 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.

14. Better vendor education: several respondents indicated that – at least on occasion – market vendors either didn't know about the Food Bucks program, or had a minimal understanding of how it worked. Although we cannot evaluate whether this was a

wide-scale problem, it is not difficult to imagine that this could put Food Bucks recipients in an uncomfortable situation as they attempt to make their purchases.

15. More visible price lists: a few respondents indicated that they were either timid or embarrassed about asking vendors about the prices of their items (to determine whether or not they could afford to purchase those products). Although there may be cases where it is not logistically viable for this to occur, we believe visible price lists would enhance the participant experience considerably. It may be worth considering increased online shopping opportunities as well, as this would enable participants to study both the products and their prices privately and without social pressure.

16. Greater product diversity and a more consistent experience across markets: although this is likely obvious to most markets (and something many are probably working on), several respondents did express disappointment at the small range of items for sale. This is likely especially true at smaller, less-established markets. As each market continues to grow, this problem will likely subside. The interim solution to this may be to manage participant expectations more effectively, by telling them at the beginning of the program what products they are (and aren't) likely to find at each market.

17. Specify market bucks allocation dates: as one respondent insightfully pointed out, *“my only suggestion is to make participants aware of the exact date funds will be provided. For people living on 45% of the poverty limit, the date you are able to shop is a significant part of how to plan/attempt to stretch resources to try and have food for the whole month.”* There is little paraphrasing that could describe this insight better than this respondent.

18. Making market bucks 'universal': while it may be logistically complex (and potentially not especially necessary), one respondent indicated their desire for market bucks to be usable *across* markets (i.e., the same bucks could be used at both the Brewery Market and the Spryfield Market). Another respondent indicated that her Food Bucks were usable, 'only at the Saturday market, but not the Wednesday market' and that she could not use them at the market store (presumably referencing the Wolfville Farmers' Market). While the benefits of such changes must be weighed against the costs, it is reasonable to suggest that a more 'universal' system for Food Bucks redemption may enhance the participant experience.

19. Easily distinguishable market buck denominations: another small but notable suggestion came from one respondent who indicated they found it difficult to quickly identify the value of their various Food Bucks. This participant suggested it may be helpful to fashion FMNS Food Bucks similarly to Canadian banknotes, which can be easily identified by their colour.

20. Market bucks inflation: it is no secret that Canada has recently experienced above average levels of inflation (and many expect this trend to continue). To that end, one participant wondered whether future market bucks allocations would reflect the shrinking purchasing power of a dollar. While this is almost certainly a long-term policy decision for FMNS and its partners, it is notable that at least one participant (and likely more) is noticing food price inflation.

21. Online shopping opportunities: although it was originally presumed that most program participants would be keen to do their purchasing in-person (at the market), there is evidence to suggest that at least some would prefer to shop online. About a quarter of program participants not only reported making their purchases online, but largely reported having an easy time doing so. Moreover, well over half of participants indicated that they *would* feel comfortable making their purchases online if necessary. While FMNS must weigh this against other program priorities (i.e., bringing people to the market for a prolonged social/community experience), it should also consider how to best meet the needs of all participants.

22. More reliable product availability: it is widely understood that the 27 participating markets come in all different sizes and scopes. Some – like the Wolfville or Halifax Markets – are longstanding and offer a wide variety of goods, while others are in their infancy and have far fewer vendors. This discrepancy has been noted by many participants, one of whom stated: *'it would be great if the program included the local café-market, as the farmers' market is so small that it doesn't include dairy products or much variety. If it rained, there were almost no vendors at the market, so no groceries that week.'* Although there is no obvious or easy solution to this challenge, it is one that FMNS and its partners should continue to explore as time goes on.

23. More market coupons: once again, and somewhat unsurprisingly, the most frequently cited opportunity for improvement (among participants) was for an increase in the amount of food coupons distributed. Although this request can likely be expected on an ongoing basis, it may be particularly notable this year given the impact inflation has had on prices over the past year. Numerous participants noted they felt prices were high, and according to one participant, *"I just wish the prices were lower so that we could continue to go to the Farm Market where the program is over now."*

24. Longer hours/more accessible times: once again this year, several participants noted that they simply could not always attend the market within the designated times (the market's regular operating hours). Although the vast majority of participants did not find this to be a major problem (given the high coupon

redemption rates), individual markets may wish to explore flexible alternatives to accommodate those participants who cannot make it to the market during scheduled operating hours.

25. **Consistent coupon distribution:** when asked how the program improved, one participant replied, *'not having to go weekly to pick up bucks. Sometimes we'd forget and have to get them the following week.'* This is an anecdotal comment and may be an isolated situation, however it does suggest that there may be some differences in how

different markets distribute their food coupons. Ideally, there would be a standardised method for all participants at all markets.

26. **Gas certificates:** interestingly, a couple of participants suggested that while the market coupons were very helpful, the fast-rising price of gas has caused them some financial strain in relation to the program (this may be a bigger issue in rural areas, where participants have to travel longer distances to attend the market). While these are also somewhat anecdotal comments (and possibly outside the scope of the program), they do suggest that it may be worthwhile for FMNS and its partners to consider the user's *entire* A text message received from a participant in the Truro Farmers' Market program

experience with the program, and not just what occurs once they arrive at the market.

27. **Input on food box content/food box distribution:** although the vast majority of program participants (87%) did not receive a food box as part of this program (and the vast majority of those who did report being satisfied with the box), there were some who suggested that there are opportunities for improvement in that area. A couple of participants, for example, indicated that they did not have any input into the contents of their box, while another participant worried that the food in her box (which she was occasionally unable to pick up as planned) would go to waste. These are minor concerns overall, but worth considering as part of FMNS' efforts to fully satisfy all participants.

28. **Wheelchair accessibility:** while some of the more developed markets have made considerable investments to become more accessible, some smaller markets (mostly due to location or resource constraints) have not yet been able to reach their desired standard. This was noted by a few participants, one of whom explained, *'I am disabled and as long as I could walk with my cane or walker, I could manoeuvre. I could not with my wheelchair, so had to ask a friend to pick up what I wanted.'* This should continue to be a significant priority for both the markets themselves and FMNS.

29. Better Vendor Education

Several respondents indicated that, occasionally, market vendors didn't know about the Food Coupon program, and/or did not accept their food coupons. This caused confusion for some respondents, such as one respondent who felt they had to ask every vendor if they accepted food coupons and other respondents who wished vendors had signs indicating whether or not they accept food coupons. Another respondent noted that this confusion caused "a heated debate between two vendors after one told [the respondent] they wouldn't take the 'bucks'." A few respondents said they had to educate vendors on what the program was. Although we cannot evaluate whether this was a pervasive problem, it is not difficult to imagine that this could put Food Coupon recipients in an uncomfortable situation as they attempt to make their purchases. Respondents stated that they felt "embarrassed" and "awkward" having to ask and/or be told they were not accepted. One strategy to alleviate this issue could be to host a mandatory vendors information webinar on the Nourishing Communities Program at the beginning of the year, and recording it so that it can be shared with new vendors who join later in the season as part of their on-boarding process. These webinars should be completed by FMNS to ensure consistency in messaging.

30. Market Staff & Volunteer Education

Respondents indicated that they were told misleading information by others at the market about how they can and cannot use their food coupons. It is difficult to know who told participants the misleading information as it could have been market staff or volunteers, but it could also have been vendors, customers or even other participants. However, the more understanding staff and volunteers have of the program and how it works, the better they will be able to intervene when issues arise and answer questions for both vendors and participants when needed. A similar webinar like the one suggested above for vendors, designed for staff and volunteers, could help increase their understanding of the program and how to step in when program discrepancies or conflicts arise.

31. Improved Participant Orientation

Respondents have suggested having more information and clarity about the program would be helpful. Some suggestions include, having an orientation to the physical market space, having a contact at the market to ask market-specific questions to, and an orientation on how to use the online ordering systems, including knowing when the cut off times are and how to interact with the site. There was confusion expressed by a number of respondents around the logistical aspects of the program as well. For example, participants were unsure when the food coupons expired, where and how

they could spend their coupons (one respondent was told they could only spend it on food products), by when they need to have used their coupons, and whether they needed to spend it all every week or keep it for future trips. Overall education about the program is needed for participants, alongside vendors and staff. Ideally, offering in-person orientations would help address this challenge, however, it would interfere with participants' anonymity. Therefore, FMNS should offer an online orientation video for participants, which they can access from their own Markets' website or social media channel.

32. Improved Physical and Environmental Accessibility

While some of the more developed markets have made considerable investments to become more accessible, some smaller markets (mostly due to location or resource constraints) have not yet been able to reach their desired standard. This was noted by a few participants, who had accessibility needs, such as wheelchair access, more space to accommodate mobility issues, a place to sit and rest, access to drinking water and more accessible parking spaces. A couple respondents indicated that the environment itself was not accessible. This included having dogs at the market, and not having a fragrance-free space. Several respondents noted that the space was very crowded, which was difficult mobility wise, as well as for other disabilities, including PTSD. One respondent stated, "It was so cramped with mobs of people that it made it slightly unsafe to bring my young children along with me. The risk of them being trampled was greatly high." Continuing to build and provide more accessible spaces for market-goers should continue to be a significant priority for both the markets themselves and FMNS.

33. Expand and Deepen Program Impact

Many respondents noted that the amount of food coupons they received did not go far enough, and especially with the increasing prices of food. These comments were consistent with the findings that showed 95% of participants believe they would have benefited from receiving more food coupons if they were available. A few other participants stated that the program should be offered to more people. One respondent stated that they would like "to have more newcomers join the program." Participants seem to be aware of the possible scale of impact the program could have if given the resources to reach more people. FMNS should continue to request more government funding to be able to expand the program to more food insecure people across Nova Scotia, and deepen the impact the program has on participants by offering more weekly food coupons.

34. Clear, Consistent, Discreet, and Accessible Coupon Pick-up Locations

Several respondents indicated that they had difficulties picking up their food coupons. There were at least two different kinds of pick-up locations noted by respondents, suggesting the food coupons pick up process varies by location. A few respondents noted that they had to stand in a vendor line with other patrons to pick up their food coupons. One respondent suggested "Maybe have a dedicated individual to pass out the envelopes on the side of the ice cream stand so that the collection can be discreet for the person picking up the market bucks, rather than have the individual stand in line with the rest of the patrons who are grabbing coffee or ice cream, to lower anxiety or concerns." Another respondent said they had to track down the general manager to get their food coupons, which was not always an easy task, as they were usually busy talking with others. Timing was also a challenge for one respondent, who said they were often working during the time they had to pick-up the coupons. Most participants pick up their coupons directly from their partner organization, only a few markets have participants pick up at the market. Therefore, having clear, consistent, accessible and discreet pick-up locations for these specific markets could help address this issue.

35. Expand Online and In-Person Market Access

Participants continue to ask for longer hours, more accessible times, and year-round access. Several respondents indicated that the current market hours are limiting, and several more indicated that the seasonality of the program makes winters hard. A lack of variety and vendors was also a challenge brought up by several respondents. Therefore, continuing to support farmers' markets in expanding their capacity will help to address these issues.

Another solution, which has already been implemented in some markets, is the online ordering option. An online ordering system can provide an accessible format of shopping for participants who cannot attend the market in person for various reasons including health, disabilities and conflicting schedules. One participant shared that "due to [her] chronic fatigue and dizziness [she is] unable to get to the market every week, especially in the winter when it's harder to walk. [She relied heavily on the online market and delivery service. Because of this [they were] able to order more and heavier items like potatoes that [they] can't manage to walk with on [their] own." Another participant stated that they "loved the online ordering because [they] can't get out every week." However, not all respondents like the online ordering system, and instead stated that they prefer in-person shopping. Therefore, the online option should not replace, but rather complement the in-person market experience. Continuing to build and provide online ordering and pick-up options for market-goers

should continue to be a priority for both the markets themselves and FMNS, and will also help them in developing market accessibility.

36. Continue Welcome Package, but with More Consistency

An overwhelming majority of respondents loved their welcome package, especially the tote bag. One respondent stated, “It is so lovely to have even a few items that are meant to be ‘just nice items’ and not related to base survival. I love my market tote and proudly use it. I love that even though I am severely income limited (to the point of food insecurity), I can still communicate with others that local matters.” Other respondents said that the bag made them “feel a part of the farmers market family” and was useful for both market shopping and outside of the market. Some respondents provided suggestions to improve the packages which included, providing translated versions, and to provide more clarity in the information pamphlets on where the market bucks could be spent (which vendors, other markets) and how quickly they need to spend them. It was clear from the survey responses that consistency in terms of who received a welcome package and what was included was lacking. Some participants received extra goodies, while others did not receive a package at all. Some reasons this may have occurred is the timing of when participants joined the program and the capacity and space of partner organizations to hold onto the welcome packages. The welcome packages are well received, but they need to be more consistent to ensure everyone gets to benefit from them. Therefore, encouraging partner organizations to offer a time at the beginning and mid-way through the program (at a minimum) for participants to pick-up their welcome package could help in ensuring all participants, including those who joined later or missed the first pick-up day, to receive and benefit from the welcome package.

Appendix B: Coupon Redemption by Market

Market	Product Category							
	Produce	Other Agr. Foods	Prepared Foods	Value-added Foods	Beer, Wine, Spirits	Personal Hygiene	Artisans / Crafts	Other
Alderney	\$5,380.00	\$3,015.00	\$995.00	\$350.00	\$515.00	\$360.00	\$2,165.00	\$220.00
Annapolis Royal	\$3,471.00	\$2,599.00	\$3,002.00	\$2,070.00	\$828.00	\$659.00	\$1,522.00	\$356.00
Antigonish	\$2,835.00	\$4,135.00	\$8,065.00	\$0.00	\$175.00	\$355.00	\$1,455.00	\$745.00
Argyle	\$873.00	\$0.00	\$367.00	\$638.00	\$36.00	\$29.00	\$81.00	\$52.00
Avon	\$970.00	\$1,265.00	\$1,235.00	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$200.00	\$555.00	\$95.00
Barrington	\$1,215.50	\$704.00	\$1,483.00	\$348.00	\$0.00	\$50.00	\$389.50	\$0.00
Bridgewater	\$1,543.87	\$2,655.98	\$1,068.55	\$411.50	\$0.00	\$221.00	\$1,205.40	\$212.00
Cape Breton	\$259.00	\$806.00	\$3,451.00	\$1,872.00	\$1,099.00	\$287.00	\$5,883.00	\$90.00
Chester	\$1,260.00	\$2,405.00	\$1,450.00	\$0.00	\$600.00	\$125.00	\$160.00	\$0.00
Fairview	\$2,715.00	\$0.00	\$1,370.00	\$20.00	\$105.00	\$75.00	\$210.00	\$0.00
Halifax Brewery	\$7,502.45	\$2,737.00	\$3,060.20	\$2,001.00	\$65.00	\$290.00	\$425.00	\$1,925.00
Halifax Seaport	\$3,130.00	\$1,870.00	\$1,800.00	\$2,380.00	\$1,300.00	\$340.00	\$900.00	\$1,140.00
Hope Blooms	\$2,525.00	\$0.00	\$475.00	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$0.00
Hubbards	\$3,300.00	\$1,730.00	\$1,730.00	\$700.00	\$570.00	\$280.00	\$810.00	\$80.00

Market	Product Category							
	Produce	Other Agr. Foods	Prepared Foods	Value-added Foods	Beer, Wine, Spirits	Personal Hygiene	Artisans/ Crafts	Other
Kentville	\$1,508.00	\$2,616.00	\$778.00	\$1,373.00	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$770.00	\$0.00
Lunenburg	\$3,589.00	\$5,681.00	\$1,729.00	\$5,485.00	\$558.00	\$715.00	\$2,087.00	\$0.00
Mabou	\$1,305.00	\$1,510.00	\$650.00	\$400.00	\$25.00	\$255.00	\$1,085.00	\$0.00
Merigomish	\$80.00	\$315.00	\$795.00	\$1,020.00	\$0.00	\$50.00	\$670.00	\$0.00
Musquodoboit	\$2,492.00	\$1,120.00	\$1,475.00	\$1,101.00	\$406.00	\$643.00	\$2,264.00	\$514.00
New Glasgow	\$2,065.00	\$8,260.00	\$4,630.00	\$320.00	\$390.00	\$2,125.00	\$3,580.00	\$0.00
Novalea	\$1,080.00	\$1,320.00	\$255.00	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$25.00	\$0.00	\$0.00
Portapique	\$4,191.00	\$427.00	\$375.00	\$450.00	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$77.00	\$0.00
Privateer	\$40.00	\$947.00	\$527.00	\$970.00	\$0.00	\$230.00	\$1,356.00	\$0.00
Prospect	\$3,398.74	\$3,293.94	\$2,272.59	\$253.56	\$0.00	\$281.15	\$57.88	\$125.49
Pugwash	\$1,852.00	\$1,315.00	\$405.00	\$2,138.00	\$860.00	\$385.00	\$1,995.00	\$250.00
Shelburne	\$528.00	\$296.00	\$867.00	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$209.00	\$510.00	\$30.00
Springhill	\$817.00	\$0.00	\$195.00	\$1,513.00	\$444.00	\$442.00	\$1,021.00	\$0.00
Spryfield	\$4,835.00	\$45.00	\$2,060.00	\$475.00	\$70.00	\$140.00	\$340.00	\$10.00
Tantallon	\$1,581.00	\$1,295.00	\$573.00	\$35.00	\$129.00	\$26.00	\$165.00	\$147.00
Tatamagouche	\$2,500.00	\$4,890.00	\$4,150.00	\$255.00	\$125.00	\$80.00	\$1,530.00	\$0.00

Market	Product Category							
	Produce	Other Agr. Foods	Prepared Foods	Value-added Foods	Beer, Wine, Spirits	Personal Hygiene	Artisans/ Crafts	Other
Truro	\$5,705.00	\$4,410.00	\$4,540.00	\$1,060.00	\$60.00	\$290.00	\$955.00	\$200.00
Wolfville	\$6,485.00	\$4,239.00	\$8,801.00	\$1,545.00	\$300.00	\$595.00	\$3,367.00	\$0.00
Yarmouth	\$1,409.00	\$801.00	\$1,142.00	\$2,057.00	\$460.00	\$273.00	\$1,778.00	\$73.00

Appendix C: Post-Program Participant Questionnaire Intro



Farmers' Market:

Farmers' Markets of Nova Scotia

2023 Nourishing Communities

Program

Participant Exit Survey

Greetings,

On behalf of Farmers' Markets of Nova Scotia (FMNS), we would like to thank you for your participation in the 2023 Nourishing Communities Food Coupon Program. We hope that your experience with this program was positive and rewarding.

We would like to ask you some questions about your experience. This will help us evaluate whether the program was successful and will help us make improvements to it in the future.

This survey will take you about 15-20 minutes to complete.

This is an anonymous and confidential survey unless you choose to leave your name. Your personal information will not be shared with anyone except the FMNS project evaluation team. Please try to answer all questions, however you may skip any questions you don't feel comfortable answering.

Please complete this survey as soon as possible and return it to the individual or organization that provided it to you. Thanks for your cooperation. If you have any questions about the survey, please let your host organization know and we'll answer them for you right away.

Appendix D: Post-Program Participant Questionnaire (Market-Going Participants)

Question 1: What is your age?

- 18-24
- 25-34
- 35-44
- 45-54
- 55-64
- 65+
- Prefer not to answer

Question 2: Do you consider yourself to be a member of any of the following populations? (choose any that apply)

- First Nation, Inuit or Métis
- African Nova Scotian
- Person with a disability
- Primary caretaker of someone with a disability
- 2SLGBTQIA+
- Acadian/Francophone
- Immigrant (within the last 5 years)
- Caucasian
- Person of Colour
- Other (please specify): _____
- None of the above

Question 3: How many people regularly consumed the products you purchased with your Market Bucks (this might include partners, children, housemates, etc.)?

- Just me (nobody else)
- 1 other person
- 2 other people
- 3 other people
- 4 other people

- 5+ other people
- Prefer not to answer

Question 4: What gender do you most identify with?

- Woman
- Man
- Non-binary
- Two-Spirit
- Prefer to self-describe: _____
- Prefer not to answer

Question 5: Was this your first time participating in the Nourishing Communities program?

- Yes, it was my first time
- No, I participated at least one other time

Question 6: What was your favourite part about participating in this program? What stood out for you?

Question 7: At the start of this program, you received a welcome package (tote bag and printed materials). Do you have any comments or suggestions about the contents of the welcome package?

Question 8: Please think for a moment about the SOCIAL aspects of the Nourishing Communities program and tell us whether you agree or disagree with each of the following statements.

Statement	Strongly disagree	Somewhat disagree	Somewhat agree	Strongly agree
This program helped me feel more connected to my community				
I felt welcome at the farmers' market				

My existing relationships were strengthened by the program (perhaps by providing a weekly activity to do together, or providing opportunities to cook or eat meals together)				
I made at least one new friend or social contact through this program				

Question 9: Please think for a moment about the *NUTRITIONAL and HEALTH-RELATED* aspects of the Nourishing Communities program and tell us whether you agree or disagree with each of the following statements.

Statement	Strongly disagree	Somewhat disagree	Somewhat agree	Strongly agree
During this program, I bought/consumed foods that were not part of my regular diet before				
I ate healthier foods than usual while I was participating in this program				
I cooked from scratch more frequently during my participation in this program				
I believe my long-term eating habits have changed as a result of this program				

Question 10: Please think for a moment about how the Nourishing Communities program affected you FINANCIALLY and tell us whether you agree or disagree with each of the following statements.

Statement	Strongly disagree	Somewhat disagree	Somewhat agree	Strongly agree
While participating in this program, I worried less about having enough food to eat				
During this program, I found that I had more money to meet my other (non-food/grocery) needs				
I would have benefited from receiving more Market Bucks, if they were available				
I believe I received good value for my Market Bucks, overall				

Question 11: Please think for a moment about your OVERALL EXPERIENCE with the Nourishing Communities program and tell us whether you agree or disagree with each of the following statements.

Statement	Strongly disagree	Somewhat disagree	Somewhat agree	Strongly agree
I looked forward to visiting the farmers' market each time				
Overall, I had positive interactions with the vendors at my farmers' market				
My mental health was better because of participating in this program				

I want to participate in this program again				
This program had a, positive impact on my life				

Question 12: On average, about how much money did you spend each week at your farmers' market in ADDITION to your Market Bucks?

- I didn't spend any additional money (I only used my Market Bucks)
- \$1-2 per week
- \$3-5 per week
- \$6-10 per week
- \$11-20 per week
- More than \$20 per week

Question 13: On average, how much time did you spend at the market per visit?

- 10 minutes or less
- 11-20 minutes
- 21-30 minutes
- 31-60 minutes
- More than an hour

Question 14: How often did you bring someone else with you to the farmers' market (e.g., a friend or family member)?

- Never; I always went by myself
- Rarely; once or twice I attended the market with someone else
- Sometimes I attended the market with someone else
- Often times I attended the market with someone else
- I always went with someone else

Question 15: How much benefit did you receive from your participation in the Nourishing Communities Food Coupon Program?

- No benefit at all
- Some benefit, but not very much
- Quite a bit of benefit
- A significant amount of benefit

Question 16: Would you like to continue shopping from the farmers' market on a regular basis now that the Nourishing Communities program is finished?

- Yes; I plan to continue shopping from the farmers' market
- Yes; I would like to continue, but I am unable to without the Nourishing Communities program
- No; without the Nourishing Communities program, I'm not really interested
- Unsure
- Other (please specify below): _____

Question 17: Listed below are some of the reasons people might choose not to continue visiting their farmers' market. Which ones (if any) apply to you? (choose any that apply)

- Food is more expensive at the farmers' market than at the grocery store
- Many of the foods I want are not available at the farmers' market
- The farmers' market is difficult for me to get to
- I don't have enough time to shop from the farmers' market regularly
- The farmers' market does not feel like a safe or welcoming space for me
- The farmers' market online ordering system is difficult to use
- None of the above
- Other (please specify in the space below): _____

Question 18: 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?

Question 19: Listed below are some of the challenges people may have with this program. Please tell us which ones apply to you.

(choose any that apply)

- I felt nervous or anxious about participating in this program or attending the market
- I felt worried about being judged for using Market Bucks
- I found the pricing of the products unclear at the farmers' market
- I found the guidebook I was given difficult to follow
- The farmers' market did not feel like a safe or welcoming space for me
- The farmers' market was not a physically accessible space for me
- None of the above

Question 20: Were there any other challenges you encountered during your participation in this program, or any changes you could recommend to improve the program?

Question 21: Is there anything else you would like to tell us about your experience with the Nourishing Communities Food Coupon Program? If so, please tell us here.

Appendix E: Post-Program Participant Questionnaire (Online Ordering Participants)

Question 1: What is your age?

- 18-24
- 25-34
- 35-44
- 45-54
- 55-64
- 65+
- Prefer not to answer

Question 2: Do you consider yourself to be a member of any of the following populations (choose any that apply)

- First Nation, Inuit or Métis
- African Nova Scotian
- Person with a disability
- Primary caretaker of someone with a disability
- 2SLGBTQIA+
- Acadian/Francophone
- Immigrant (within the last 5 years)
- Caucasian
- Person of Colour
- Other (Please Specify): _____
- None of the above

Question 3: How many people regularly consumed the products you purchased with your Market Bucks (this might include partners, children, housemates, etc.)?

- Just me (nobody else)
- 1 other person
- 2 other people
- 3 other people

- 4 other people
- 5+ other people
- Prefer not to answer

Question 4: What gender do you most identify with?

- Two-Spirit
- Non-binary
- Woman
- Man
- Prefer to self-describe: _____
- Prefer not to answer

Question 5: Was this your first time participating in the Nourishing Communities program?

- Yes, it was my first time
- No, I participated at least one other time

Question 6: What was your favourite part about participating in this program? What stood out for you?

Question 7: At the start of this program, you received a welcome package (tote bag and printed materials). Do you have any comments or suggestions about the contents of the welcome package?

Question 8: Please think for a moment about the SOCIAL aspects of the Nourishing Communities program and tell us whether you agree or disagree with each of the following statements:

Statement	Strongly disagree	Somewhat disagree	Somewhat agree	Strongly agree
This program helped me feel more connected to my community				
The Market staff and volunteers were friendly and helpful				

My existing relationships were strengthened by the program (perhaps by providing opportunities to cook or eat meals together)				
I made at least one new friend or social contact through this program				

Question 9: Please think for a moment about the *NUTRITIONAL and HEALTH-RELATED* aspects of the Nourishing Communities program and tell us whether you agree or disagree with each of the following statements.

Statement	Strongly disagree	Somewhat disagree	Somewhat agree	Strongly agree
During this program, I bought/consumed foods that were not part of my regular diet before				
I ate healthier foods than usual while I was participating in this program				
I cooked from scratch more frequently during my participation in this program				
I believe my long-term eating habits have changed as a result of this program				

Question 10: Please think for a moment about how the Nourishing Communities program affected you FINANCIALLY and tell us whether you agree or disagree with each of the following statements.

Statement	Strongly disagree	Somewhat disagree	Somewhat agree	Strongly agree
While participating in this program, I worried less about having enough food to eat				
During this program, I found that I had more money to meet my other (non-food/grocery) needs				
I would have benefited from receiving more Market Bucks, if they were available				
I believe I received good value for my Market Bucks, overall				

Question 11: Please think for a moment about your OVERALL EXPERIENCE with the Nourishing Communities program and tell us whether you agree or disagree with each of the following statements.

Statement	Strongly disagree	Somewhat disagree	Somewhat agree	Strongly agree
I looked forward to ordering and receiving my food each time				
Overall, I had positive interactions with the online ordering system at my farmers' market				
My mental health was better because of participating in this program				

I want to participate in this program again				
This program had a positive impact on my life				

Question 12: On average, about how much money did you spend each week at your farmers' market in ADDITION to your Market Bucks?

- I didn't spend any additional money (I only used my Market Bucks)
- \$1-2 per week
- \$3-5 per week
- \$6-10 per week
- \$11-20 per week
- More than \$20 per week

Question 13: On average, how much time did you spend shopping on the online Market each time?

- 10 minutes or less
- 11-20 minutes
- 21-30 minutes
- 31-60 minutes
- More than an hour

Question 14: How often did you shop with someone else when ordering from the farmers' market (e.g. a friend or family member)?

- Never; I always shopped by myself
- Rarely; once or twice I shopped with someone else
- Sometimes I shopped with someone else
- Often times I shopped with someone else
- I always shopped with someone else

Question 15: How much benefit did you receive from your participation in the Nourishing Communities Program?

- No benefit at all
- Some benefit, but not very much
- Quite a bit of benefit
- A significant amount of benefit

Question 16: Would you like to continue shopping from the farmers' market on a regular basis now that the Nourishing Communities program is finished?

- Yes; I plan to continue shopping from the farmers' market
- Yes; I would like to continue, but I am unable to without the Nourishing Communities program
- No; without the Nourishing Communities program, I'm not really interested
- Unsure
- Other (please specify below)

Question 17: Listed below are some of the reasons people might choose not to continue shopping from their farmers' market. Which ones (if any) apply to you?

(choose any that apply)

- Food is more expensive at the farmers' market than at the grocery store
- Many of the foods I want are not available at the farmers' market
- The farmers' market is difficult for me to get to
- I don't have enough time to shop from the farmers' market regularly
- The farmers' market does not feel like a safe or welcoming space for me
- The farmers' market online ordering system is difficult to use
- None of the above
- Other (please specify in the space below):

Question 18: 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?

Question 19: Listed below are some of the challenges people may have with this program. Please tell us which ones apply to you (choose any that apply).

- I felt nervous or anxious about participating in this program
- I felt worried about being judged for using Market Bucks
- I found the pricing of the products unclear on the online store
- I found the guidebook I was given difficult to follow
- The online ordering system is difficult to use
- None of the above

Question 20: Were there any other challenges you encountered during your participation in this program, or any changes you could recommend to improve the program?

Question 21: Is there anything else you would like to tell us about your experience with the Nourishing Communities Food Coupon Program? If so, please tell us here.

Appendix F: Post-Program Participant Questionnaire (Food Box Participants)

Question 1: What is your age?

- 18-24
- 25-34
- 35-44
- 45-54
- 55-64
- 65+
- Prefer not to answer

Question 2: Do you consider yourself to be a member of any of the following populations (choose any that apply)

- First Nation, Inuit or Métis
- African Nova Scotian
- Person with a disability
- Primary caretaker of someone with a disability
- 2SLGBTQIA+
- Acadian/Francophone
- Immigrant (within the last 5 years)
- Caucasian
- Person of Colour
- Other (please specify): _____
- None of the above

Question 3: How many people regularly consumed the products you received from the Nourishing Communities Program (this might include partners, children, housemates, etc.)?

- Just me (nobody else)
- 1 other person
- 2 other people
- 3 other people
- 4 other people
- 5+ other people
- Prefer not to answer

Question 4: What gender do you most identify with?

- Two-Spirit
- Non-binary
- Woman
- Man
- Prefer to self-describe:_____
- Prefer not to answer

Question 5: Was this your first time participating in the Nourishing Communities program?

- Yes, it was my first time
- No, I participated at least one other time

Question 6: What was your favourite part about participating in this program? What stood out for you?

Question 7: At the start of this program, you received a welcome package (tote bag and printed materials). Do you have any comments or suggestions about the contents of the welcome package?

Question 8: Please think for a moment about the SOCIAL aspects of the Nourishing Communities program and tell us whether you agree or disagree with each of the following statements:

Statement	Strongly disagree	Somewhat disagree	Somewhat agree	Strongly agree
This program helped me feel more connected to my community				
The Market staff and volunteers were friendly and helpful				
My existing relationships were strengthened by the program (perhaps by providing opportunities to cook or eat meals together)				
I made at least one new friend or social contact through this program				

Question 9: Please think for a moment about the NUTRITIONAL and HEALTH-RELATED aspects of the Nourishing Communities program and tell us whether you agree or disagree with each of the following statements.

Statement	Strongly disagree	Somewhat disagree	Somewhat agree	Strongly agree
During this program, I received and consumed foods that were not part of my regular diet before				
I ate healthier foods than usual while I was participating in this program				

I cooked from scratch more frequently during my participation in this program				
I believe my long-term eating habits have changed as a result of this program				

Question 10: Please think for a moment about how the Nourishing Communities program affected you FINANCIALLY and tell us whether you agree or disagree with each of the following statements.

Statement	Strongly disagree	Somewhat disagree	Somewhat agree	Strongly agree
While participating in this program, I worried less about having enough food to eat				
During this program, I found that I had more money to meet my other (non-food/grocery) needs				
I would have benefited from receiving more Market boxes, if they were available				
I believe I received good value for my Market boxes, overall				

Question 11: Please think for a moment about your OVERALL EXPERIENCE with the Nourishing Communities program and tell us whether you agree or disagree with each of the following statements.

Statement	Strongly disagree	Somewhat disagree	Somewhat agree	Strongly agree
I looked forward to receiving my Market box each time				
Overall, I had positive interactions with the staff, and volunteers at my farmers' market				
My mental health was better because of participating in this program				
I want to participate in this program again				
This program had a positive impact on my life				

Question 12: How much benefit did you receive from your participation in the Nourishing Communities Program?

- No benefit at all
- Some benefit, but not very much
- Quite a bit of benefit
- An significant amount of benefit

Question 13: Would you like to continue shopping from the farmers' market on a regular basis now that the Nourishing Communities program is finished?

- Yes; I plan to continue shopping from the farmers' market
- Yes; I would like to continue, but I am unable to without the Nourishing Communities program
- No; without the Nourishing Communities program, I'm not really interested
- Unsure

Other (Please specify below)

Question 14: Listed below are some of the reasons people might choose not to continue shopping from their farmers' market. Which ones (if any) apply to you? (choose any that apply)

- Food is more expensive at the farmers' market than at the grocery store
- Many of the foods I want are not available at the farmers' market
- The farmers' market is difficult for me to get to
- I don't have enough time to shop from the farmers' market regularly
- The farmers' market does not feel like a safe or welcoming space for me
- The farmers' market online ordering system is difficult to use
- None of the above
- Other (please specify in the space below):

Question 15: 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?

Question 16: Listed below are some of the challenges people may have with this program. Please tell us which ones apply to you (choose any that apply).

- I felt nervous or anxious about participating in this program
- I felt worried about being judged for receiving food boxes
- I found the guidebook I was given difficult to follow
- The farmers' market staff and volunteers were not friendly or helpful
- None of the above

Question 17: Were there any other challenges you encountered during your participation in this program, or any changes you could recommend to improve the program?

Question 18: Is there anything else you would like to tell us about your experience with the Nourishing Communities Food Coupon Program? If so, please tell us here.