



## Research Supporting Mobile Markets

### *Challenges and Successes of Mobile Market Operations in Rural Areas*

#### Defining a mobile produce market

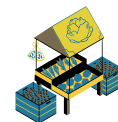
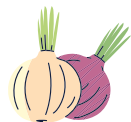
- Mobile produce markets (MMs) are farmers markets on wheels traveling to areas with predominantly low food access selling fresh fruit and vegetables (F&V) and other healthy foods.
  - Many MMs accept food assistance benefits (e.g., SNAP) and offer incentives (e.g., SNAP matching)
- Previous research shows that MMs in urban settings are a promising solution for increasing (F&V) intake (sources [1](#), [2](#), [3](#), and [4](#)).

#### Disparities faced by rural areas and defining need for mobile markets in rural areas

- Compared to urban areas, rural populations: [have lower college completion rates \(21% vs 35%\)](#)
  - report lower income, and are less likely to have health insurance (sources [6](#), [7](#), and [8](#))
  - [experience higher rates of chronic health conditions including obesity, diabetes, cancer, stroke and chronic lower respiratory disease, but lower rates of physical activity.](#)
  - have fewer public transportation options, sidewalks, and grocery stores carrying (F&V) (sources [10](#), [11](#), and [12](#)).
  - had higher [SNAP](#) program utilization rates ([16% vs 13%](#)) with its [use rising between 2005-2018](#).
    - Some receiving free food or using food access benefits feel stigmatized (sources [16](#), [17](#), [18](#)).
- Rural residents drive an average of 23.4mi for inpatient care as more hospitals close (sources [6](#), and [19](#)).
- The combination of these factors demonstrate a need for easier access to F&V in rural areas, which MMs could provide decreasing financial cost, and improving quality of life.

#### Challenges experienced by mobile markets operating in rural areas

- In 2021-22, staff from ten organizations discussed challenges and successes of operating a rural MM.
- Challenges unique to rural MMs (RMMs):
  - Long distances to MM locations leads to less office time and potentially visiting fewer MM sites
  - Poor cellphone signal limits SNAP/EBT transactions made with point of sale (POS) systems
- Challenges experienced by rural and urban MM:
  - Limited staff and funding restricts operational practices such as completing a formal evaluation
  - Finding MM sites that are suitable for customers and operators of MMs
  - Finding ways to break down the stigma of accessing food at a MM and reduced cost or free food



# Veggie Van Training Center



## Successes experienced by rural mobile markets

- Developing personal relationships with customers encourages regular shopping habits
- Partnerships with stakeholders lead to mobile market success
- Taste testing and other nutrition education encourage shoppers to try and purchase new foods

## Aligning the findings with previous research and future research directions

- The findings here are similar to the [common practices](#) and [operational challenges](#) found in urban settings.
  - Several of the overlapping challenges are exacerbated by rural location.
- Future studies could examine 1) F&V intake in RMM shoppers, 2) sustainability of RMMs, 3) the impact of stigma in shopping decisions. Studies should include shoppers from all demographics to capture a full picture of RMM effectiveness.

## Policy Considerations and Practical Implications for this research

- The SNAP program is utilized by over [41 million Americans](#), its [use rose between 2005-2018](#).
  - SNAP-FNS should consider MMs when designing policies and providing guidance to merchants.
  - Stigma for nutrition benefit programs can be reduced by 1) expanding coverage, 2) limiting demographic data required for participation, 3) minimizing extra steps required when utilizing the program benefits (e.g., school breakfast being served before school (sources [24](#), and [25](#)).
- Training courses and other opportunities specifically designed for those in rural areas provide an opportunity to discuss some of the unique challenges RMMs face.
- Funding infrastructure projects, such as improving road conditions and cellphone signal, can make MM operations, as well as customer accessibility and shopping experience easier.
- Prioritizing food security and MMs when designing policies, and appropriating funds has the potential to improve rural residents' diet and overall health, decreasing financial cost and increasing quality of life.



Courtesy of [the Nourish and Develop Fdn](#) in ON, Canada



Courtesy of [Tacoma Farmers Market- Fresh Express Mobile Market](#) in WA



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For a full reference list used in the report, please [click here](#). The references used in this summary are linked in blue text throughout.