



PUBLIC HEALTH INSTITUTE
OF WESTERN MASSACHUSETTS
PARTNERS FOR HEALTH EQUITY



LiveWell
SPRINGFIELD



GoFresh
SPRINGFIELD

Bringing Care, Food and Love to Households

Go Fresh Distributes Over 5000 Boxes of Fresh Produce

January 2021



Acknowledgments

We are grateful to the many helping hands of the Go Fresh Mobile Farmers Market funders, sponsors, and partners. We particularly thank those funders that in the midst of the pandemic supported us in redirecting resources to address the immediate needs of food insecurity for Springfield residents. Your support enabled us to serve the community at a time of a great need for emergency food and even greater need for unity and community support. Even though the Go Fresh project ended this October, we know the need for fresh produce still exists for Springfield residents. We also thank the YMCA of Greater Springfield that operated the market in previous years and supported the transition to the emergency program.

Project Partners:

- Public Health Institute of Western Massachusetts
- Wellspring Cooperative Corporation
- City of Springfield, Health and Human Services
- Community Involved in Sustaining Agriculture
- Gardening the Community
- Mosque 13
- YMCA of Greater Springfield
- UMass Extension Nutrition Education Program
- Caring Health Center



Support for this program was provided by grants from the following:



Pivoting to Emergency Food Distribution



During the COVID-19 pandemic, the Go Fresh Mobile Farmers Market project pivoted to providing free boxes of fresh produce to older adults at housing and senior-centers, as well as patients and families identified by healthcare and social service partners. The program distributed 5,472 boxes of fresh produce from April to October 2020. Our work started with five partner sites in April of this year, growing to engage 18 community partners from senior housing, health care and community-based organizations. By the end of the 27-week project, there were 19 site locations serving older adults and families in Springfield. In addition, we distributed 300 social isolation care packages, 900 sets of PPE supplies and 627 holiday pumpkins. The social isolation kits included personal care items, games and activities (funded by Tufts Health Plan Foundation), bags/resource list from UMass Extension, cooling towels donated by Ener-g-Save; PPE from Serenity Care as well as materials from 413Cares, and CISA.

The program, initially designed to provide fresh produce to older adults who are at high risk for COVID-19, began with Go Fresh Mobile Market's existing site partners serving older adults including Raymond Jordan Senior Center, Mass Senior Action, Independence House, Riverview Senior Center, Colonial Estates and Linden Towers. We later expanded to other site partners, which included community-based organizations (Square One, Arise for Social Justice and Mosque 13) and health-related programs (Baystate Health Geriatrics Program, Springfield Healthy Homes Asthma Program, Caring Health Center, Trinity/Mercy Care Alliance- BMC Healthnet ACO, and Partners in Health.)

Site Partners

- Raymond Jordan Senior Center
- Mass Senior Action
- Colonial Estates
- Independence House
- Linden Towers
- Riverview Senior Center
- Square One
- Arise for Social Justice
- Mosque 13
- Baystate Health Geriatrics Program
- Springfield Healthy Homes Asthma Program
- Caring Health Center
- Trinity/Mercy Care Alliance- BMC Healthnet ACO
- Partners in Health

The site partners promoted the free produce distribution program to the residents, consumers, and older adult clients who could benefit from a free produce box twice a month. Produce purchasing, sorting, and redistribution were coordinated by **Wellspring Harvest**, who stepped in to manage this new program. After the Go Fresh manager was injured, the Wellspring staff stepped up to take on this program in addition to their regular duties.

The program's growth is a clear testament to the critical need for emergency food distribution for older adults and families during the pandemic and residents' desire to have fresh produce. Initial funding came from committed Go Fresh funders such as the Beveridge Family Foundation, and sponsors including Trinity Health of New England/Mercy Medical Center, Baystate Health, Health New England, Davis Foundation, and Beacon Communities, which allowed the pivot from the Go Fresh's planned mobile farmer's market. A focus on older adults was made possible by the Tufts Health Plan Foundation, which funds the Live Well Springfield Age Friendly Initiative. Trinity Health of New England's Transforming Communities Initiative funded outreach to families. As the Go Fresh Advisory Committee recognized the emerging need to sustain this effort, additional funding was secured through the Community Foundation of Western Massachusetts' COVID-19 Response Fund. With these additional resources, the program effort was immediately doubled from serving 300 to 600 residents monthly.



This project thrived on partnerships. One example is how Mass Senior Action coordinated with Alden Baptist Church to give out produce boxes. Each week, church volunteers set up a tent and tables to allow for a socially distanced way for seniors to pick up their produce. This exemplifies how partners helping partners is critical to surviving/thriving during the pandemic and is a cornerstone of the work of Live Well Springfield.



The impact is evident in the voices of those receiving the supplies. Baystate Geriatrics reports that one team member commented that it brought tears to her eyes when one of her patients blew kisses of thanks from her doorway. The next day, another patient called the office and left the following message: "I just called to thank you guys. You came to my house and left me some vegetables. And I appreciate that. Thank you for caring."

A CHW from Trinity Mercy Alliance shared a text received from one of their patients who was so grateful for the fresh produce. The patient sent this from the hospital where he was still admitted after a number of days. "Just wanted to take a moment to convey our gratitude for your generosity and help. Thank you so much. You know it's actually the first time my kids have ever eaten corn on the cob, and it's the one thing they all love now."



Survey Results

We surveyed residents in the final two weeks of distribution and received 126 surveys out of the approximately 600 households served, including 20 surveys in Spanish.

Who we served

- The program primarily targeted older adults, and more than half of the respondents (60%) were older adults. Three-fourths were women.
- Of those who responded, 48% were Latinx, 28% were African-American, 16% were White, 2% American Indian or Alaska Native and 3% identify in another way.
- The program served all neighborhoods of Springfield with Brightwood (9%), East Springfield (8%), Liberty Heights (8%), McKnight (7%) and Six Corners (7%) most represented in the survey.

Impact

The program addressed a critical need during the pandemic:

- Over 2/3 (68%) of the respondents noted that the Go Fresh boxes provided healthy produce for their household that they would not have been able to purchase themselves.
- Three out of four respondents (74%) noted that they ate more fruits and vegetables because they received fresh produce in the Go Fresh boxes.

One community resident shared the feeling of gratitude to have the boxes each week, “These boxes are truly a blessing and allow me to get creative with my meal planning.” Another resident highlighted the value each box provided their family with this comment, “I really appreciate the Go Fresh boxes. The boxes are very helpful for my family; the onions and peppers and lettuce save me a decent \$ amount per week.”



Social Isolation

The survey also asked about social isolation and digital connection during the pandemic:

- A majority of respondents (57%) have contact with their family, friends and neighbors who do not live with them every day or several times a week. However, 20% have contact with others once every 2 or 3 weeks or less, and 5% are totally isolated with no contact.
- Social isolation is a concern for one third or more of respondents: 47% report lacking companionship, 33% feel left out, and 37% feel isolated.
- Over a quarter of respondents do not have a device that connects to the internet.

Live Well Springfield's Age Friendly Initiative will be analyzing this data and working to develop programming to address these concerns.



Next Steps

After ten years of leading the Go Fresh Mobile Market with a number of operators, the Public Health Institute of Western Massachusetts will be turning over the operation of the market to Wellspring Community Harvest. Wellspring was chosen by the Go Fresh Advisory Committee through an RFP process in the fall.



We thank the Go Fresh Advisory Committee members and Wellspring for their hard work and support during this unusual time. We look forward to continued success in addressing the food insecurity and fresh produce needs of Springfield residents.

