



# Senior Project FRESH

## 2019 Program Evaluation

Prepared by: Ottawa County Planning and Performance Improvement Department

## Program Overview

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Senior Project Fresh (SPF) aims to increase access to fresh, local produce and improve healthy eating habits among seniors age 60 years and older at 185% or below the federal poverty level in counties throughout Michigan. Participants receive \$20 in vouchers to purchase fresh produce at local farmers markets. Ottawa Food began offering the SPF program in 2017 as a result of grant funding.

In Ottawa County, three organizations currently participate in SPF: Four Pointes, Evergreen Commons, and Ottawa Food. Four Pointes is located in Grand Haven and serves the northern half of the County. Evergreen Commons is located in Holland and serves the southwestern part of the County. Four Pointes and Evergreen Commons SPF participants must obtain their vouchers in-person at these facilities. Ottawa Food—which is a collaborative group of local agencies and individuals—also partners with Community Action Agency to provide vouchers to seniors at Commodity Supplemental Food Program distribution locations, thereby serving many areas of the County. In an attempt to increase participants' fruit and vegetable consumption and achieve a higher voucher redemption rate, Ottawa Food offers its participants an educational component (e.g. information on farmers markets, how to store and cook fresh produce, etc.) as well as cooking supplies. All SPF organizations allow participants to utilize a proxy to shop for them at the farmers market.



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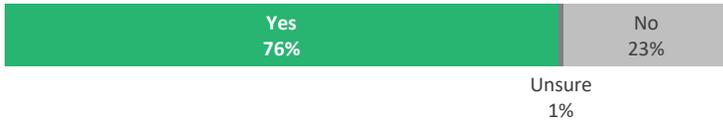
### Data Collection & Analysis

The voucher redemption data contained in this report was obtained from the State of Michigan. The remainder of the data was self-reported by participants through the completion of pre-program and post-program surveys. An overview of how many participants completed the surveys is provided below:

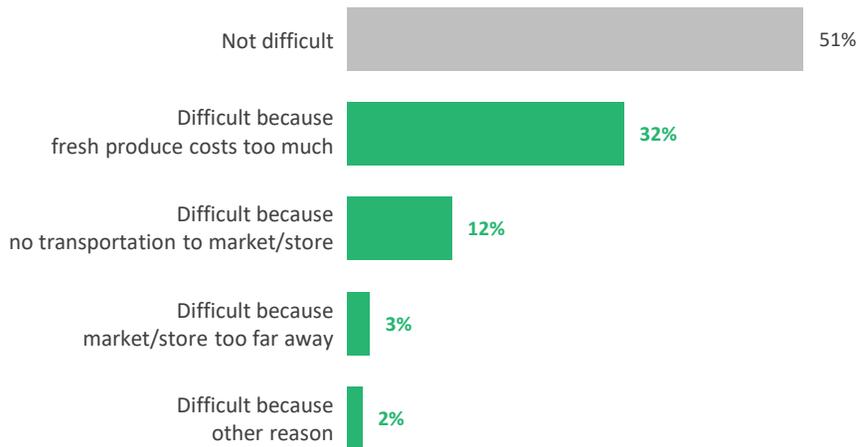
- 118 participants completed both the pre- and post-program surveys (a 40% response rate)
- 164 participants completed only the pre-program survey
- 16 participants completed only the post-program survey

## Participant Characteristics

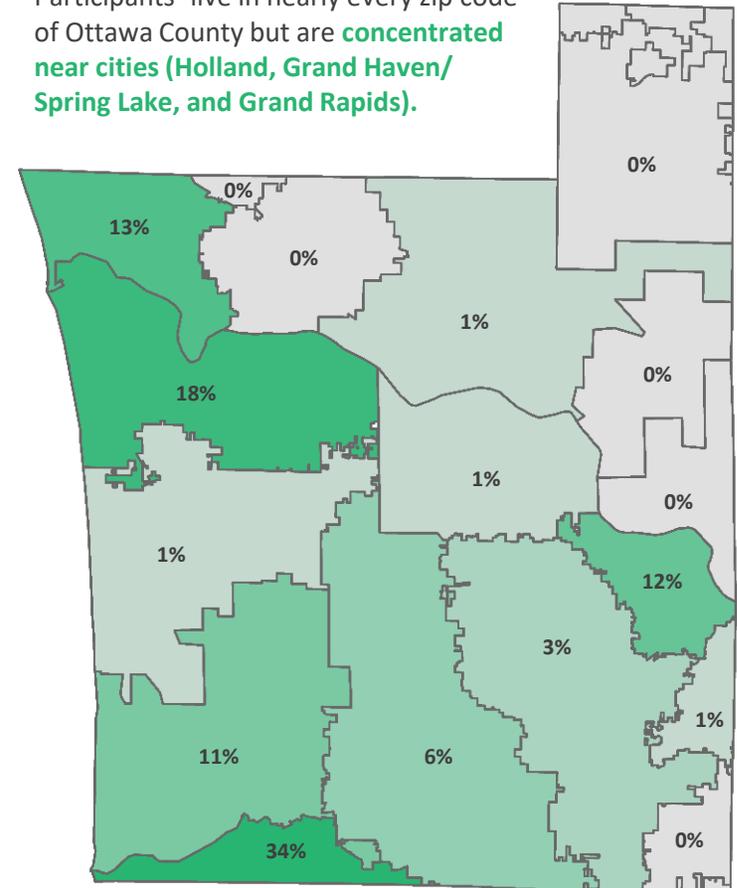
**76%** of respondents<sup>1</sup> participated in a Senior Project Fresh program before, compared to 68% in 2018.



Before starting the program, **49%** of participants<sup>2</sup> reported that they **have difficulty getting fresh fruits and vegetables.**



Participants<sup>3</sup> live in nearly every zip code of Ottawa County but are **concentrated near cities (Holland, Grand Haven/Spring Lake, and Grand Rapids).**

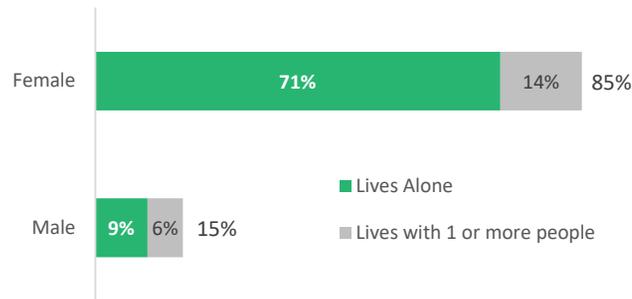


1. 281 participants answered this pre-program survey question.  
 2. 117 participants answered this pre-program survey question. Some participants selected multiple responses, therefore the chart will not add up to 100%.  
 3. 272 participants answered this pre-program survey question.

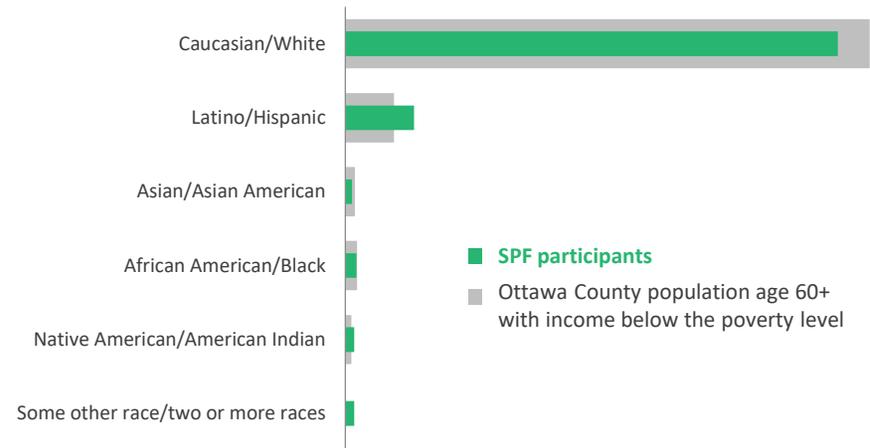
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Substantially more females participated in the program than males.<sup>1</sup>

80% of SPF participants report living alone.



83% of SPF participants<sup>2</sup> report identifying as Caucasian/White.



1. 273 participants answered this pre-program survey question. Gender of survey respondents is representative of Ottawa County's population who is age 65+ with an income below the poverty level.

2. 269 participants answered this pre-program survey question. Race/ethnicity of survey respondents is representative of Ottawa County's population who is age 60+ with an income below the poverty level.

# Program Activities

## Content Links

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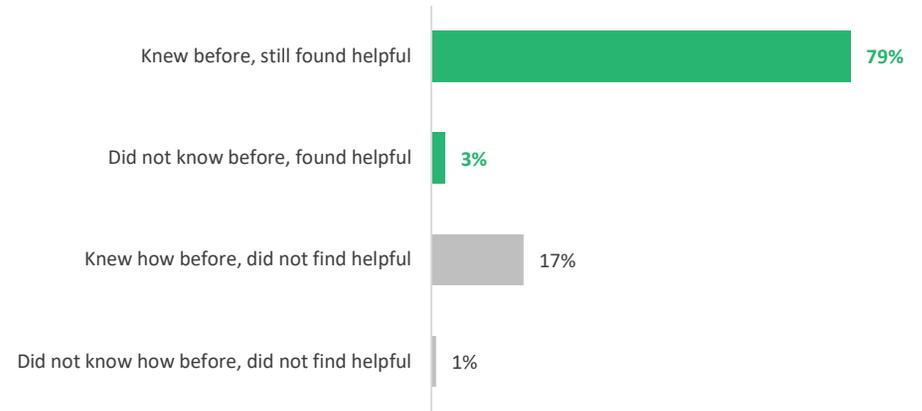
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## Educational Component & Cooking Supplies

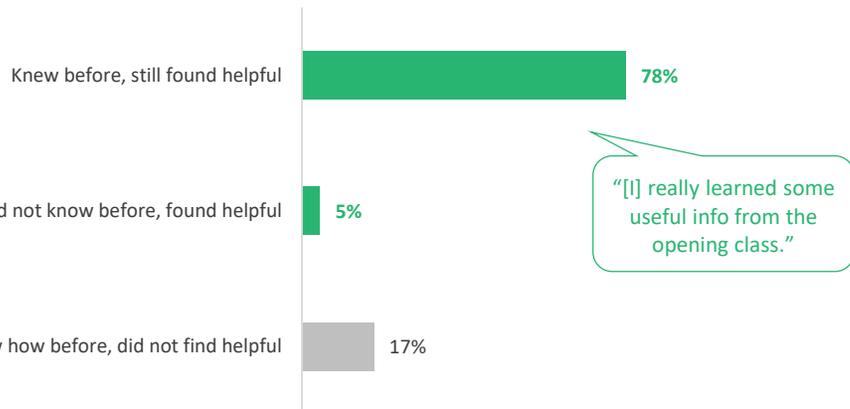
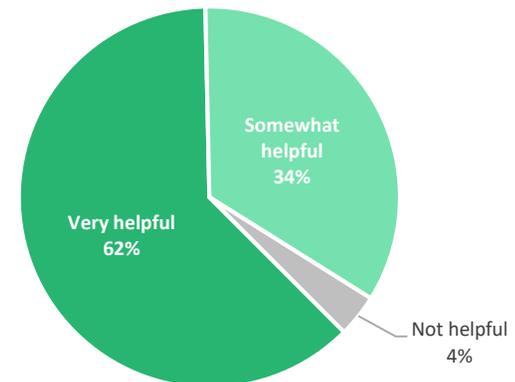
As part of the additional educational component offered by Ottawa Food, Michigan State University Extension (MSUE) staff led an educational session for SPF participants. Each participant received recipes and information about shopping at farmers markets, storing and cooking produce, eating well, seasonal availability of produce in Michigan, and how to use EBT/Bridge Cards and Double Up Food Bucks at farmers markets. In addition, participants received cooking utensils and food storage containers provided through Senior Resources of West Michigan.

**82%** of participants<sup>1</sup> reported that the classes on **prepping/cooking fresh fruits and vegetables were helpful**, including many participants who reported knowing how to prepare/cook fresh fruits and vegetables before the program.



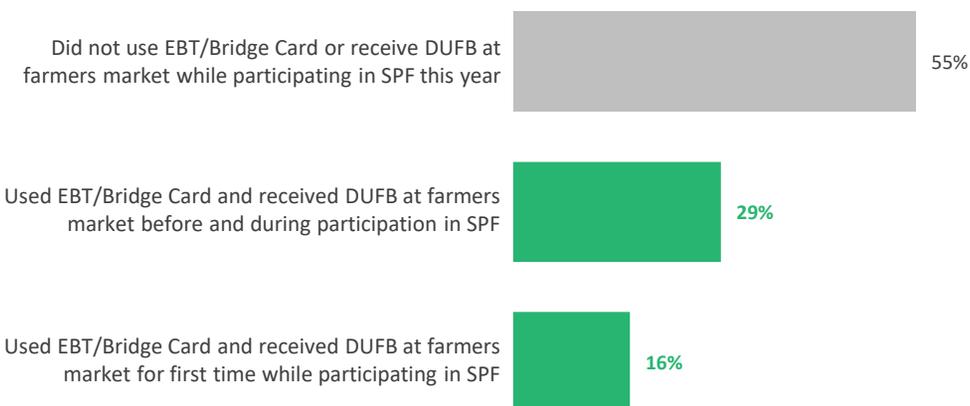
**83%** of participants<sup>1</sup> reported that the classes on **storing fresh fruits and vegetables were helpful**, including many participants who reported knowing how to store fresh fruits and vegetables before the program.

**96%** of participants<sup>2</sup> who received cooking supplies from SPF reported finding them **very helpful** or **somewhat helpful** in preparing and/or cooking fresh fruits and vegetables.



1. 118 participants completed both the pre- and post-program surveys and answered these survey questions.  
2. 111 participants answered this post-program survey question.

**45%** of participants<sup>1</sup> who reported they had an EBT/Bridge Card, reported **using it at the farmers market this summer and receiving DUFB. 16%** reported **using their EBT/Bridge Card and receiving DUFB for the first time this summer.**

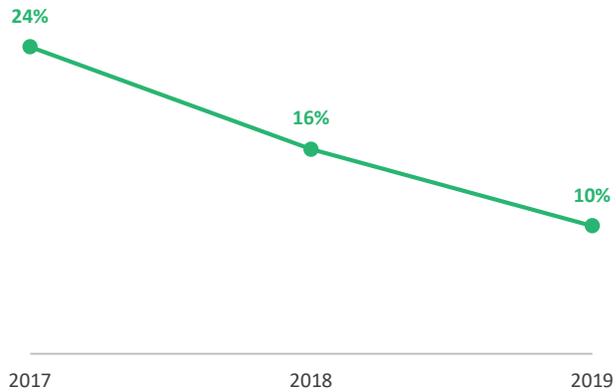


For other food assistance, contact the toll free Michigan Food Assistance Program Hotline: 855.ASK.MICH

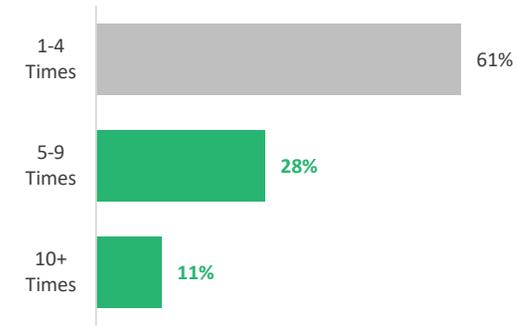
1. 56 participants reported in both the pre- and post-program surveys that they had an EBT/Bridge Card and answered these survey questions.

## Farmers Market Visits

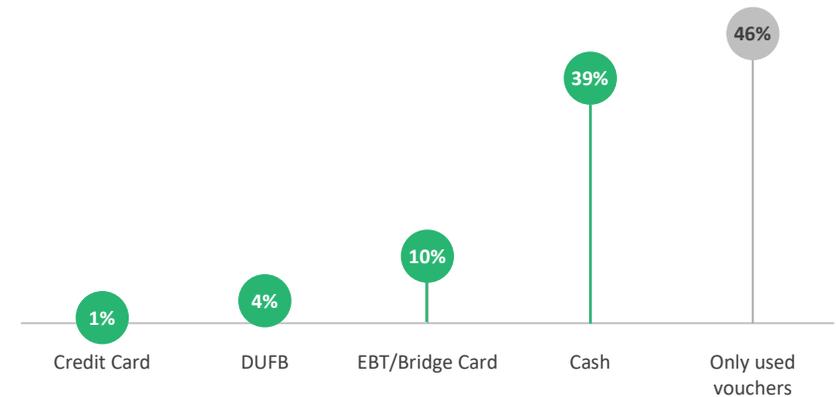
Prior to participating in SPF, 10% of the 2019 participants<sup>1</sup> report not having been to a farmers market in two years. **The percentage of SPF participants who report not having been to a farmers market in the past two years has decreased by 14 percentage points between 2017 and 2019**, likely due to an increase in repeat SPF participants.



**39% of participants<sup>2</sup> reported going to the farmers market more than 5 times in 2019.** Since 2017, the percentage of participants who have gone to the farmers market 10+ times has increased by 6 percentage points.



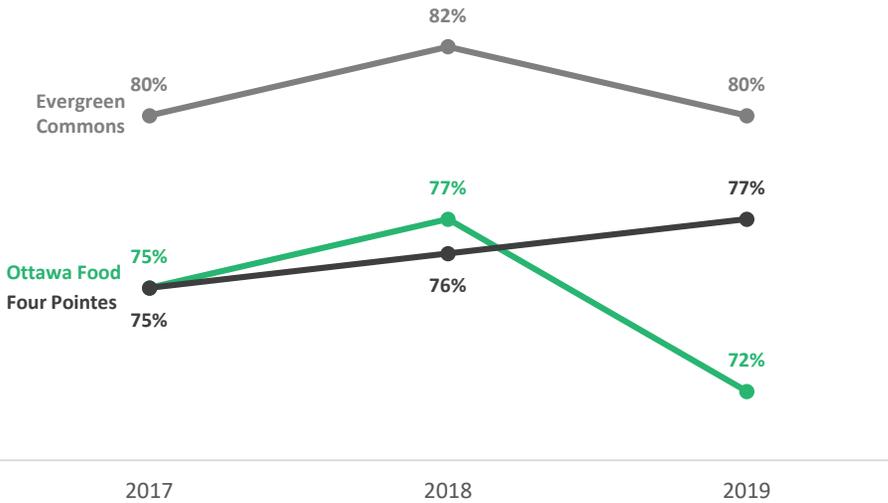
In addition to using their SPF vouchers, **54% of participants<sup>3</sup> reported purchasing fruits and vegetables at the farmers markets using other forms of payment.**



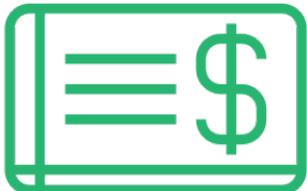
1. 281 participants answered this pre-program survey question.  
 2. 110 participants answered this post-program survey question.  
 3. 114 participants answered this post-program survey question. Some participants selected multiple responses, therefore the chart will not add up to 100%.

## Voucher Redemption – Ottawa County Organizations p. 9

Ottawa Food's voucher redemption rate decreased from 2018 and fell short of their goal to achieve a 78% voucher redemption rate.



**58% of the nearly \$27,000** in vouchers for fresh fruits and vegetables that were redeemed in Ottawa County during the last 3 years were redeemed by Ottawa Food Senior Project Fresh participants.

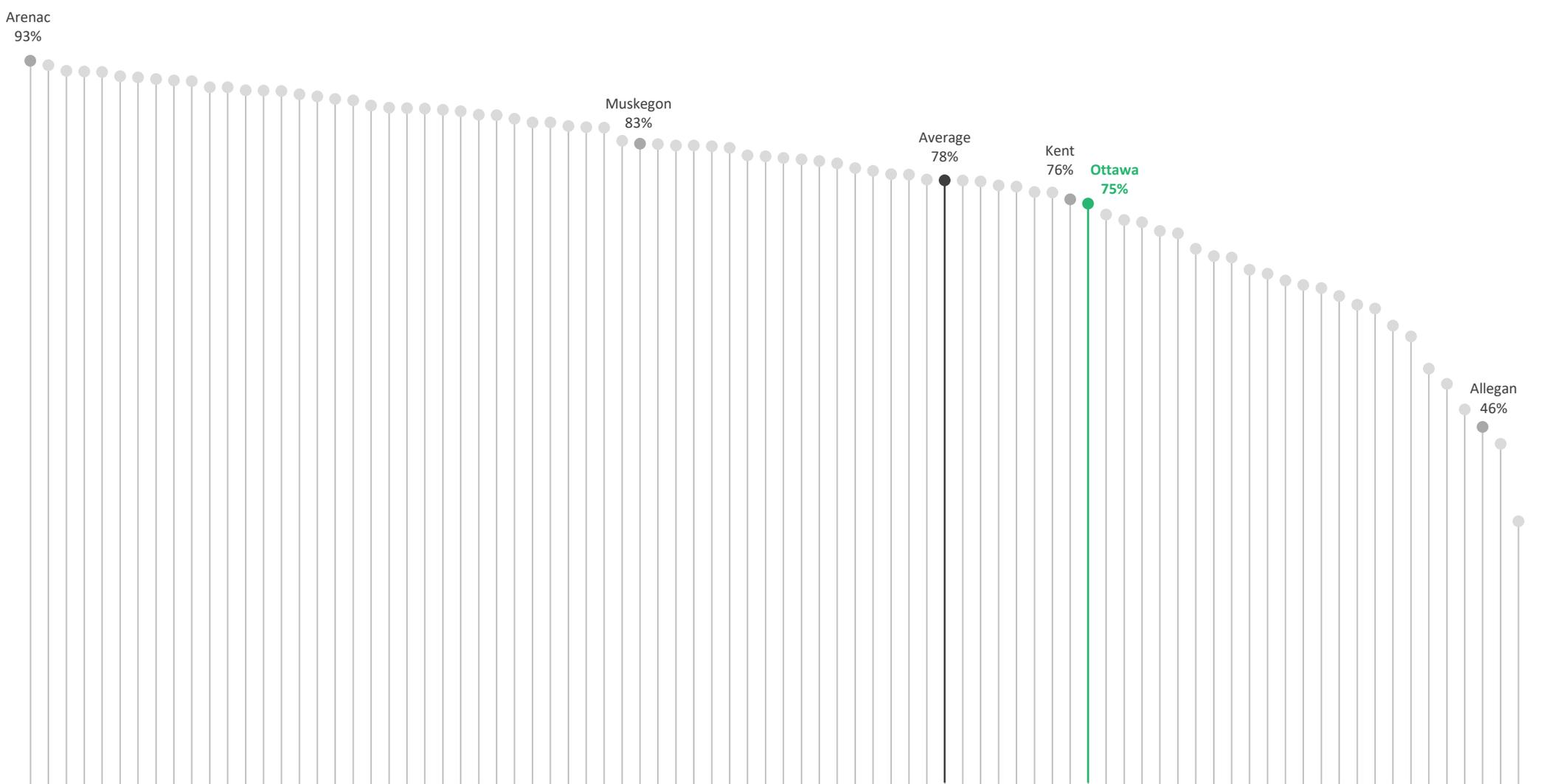


**\$4,290** in vouchers for fresh fruits and vegetables were redeemed by Ottawa Food SPF participants in 2019.

**\$15,652** in vouchers for fresh fruits and vegetables have been redeemed by Ottawa Food SPF participants during the last 3 years.

## Voucher Redemption - Statewide Rankings by County

By combining the voucher redemption rate of the three SPF organizations in Ottawa County, **Ottawa County had a voucher redemption rate of 75% and ranked 59<sup>th</sup> of 83 counties<sup>1</sup>**, which is a decrease from last year's rank of 44<sup>th</sup>.



1. Wisewoman and "Other" organizations' data are excluded from this ranking.

# Program Outputs



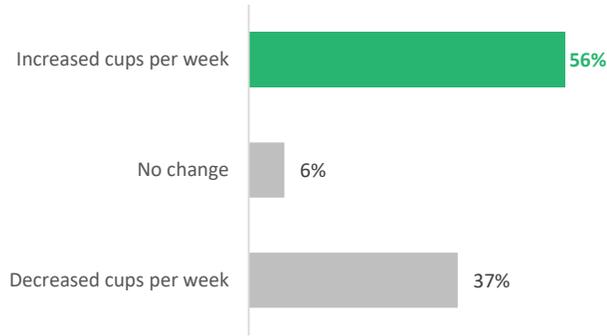
## **Content Links**

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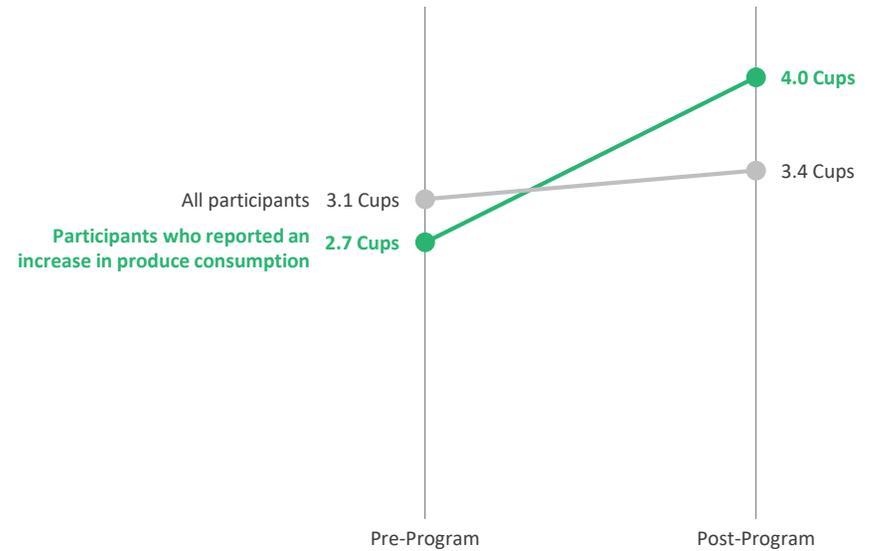
p.13 [Other Self-Reported Benefits](#)

## Produce Consumption p. 12

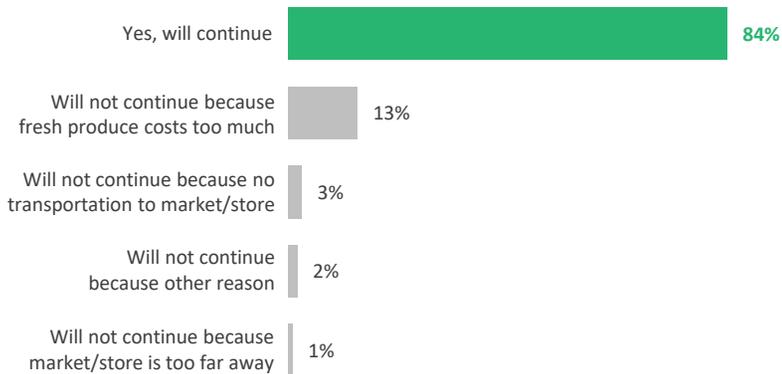
**56%** of program participants<sup>1</sup> reported an increase in the total cups of produce<sup>2</sup> consumed per week after participating in the program.



On average, participants<sup>3</sup> who reported an increase in their produce<sup>2</sup> consumption increased their daily consumption by a whole cup since participating in SPF.



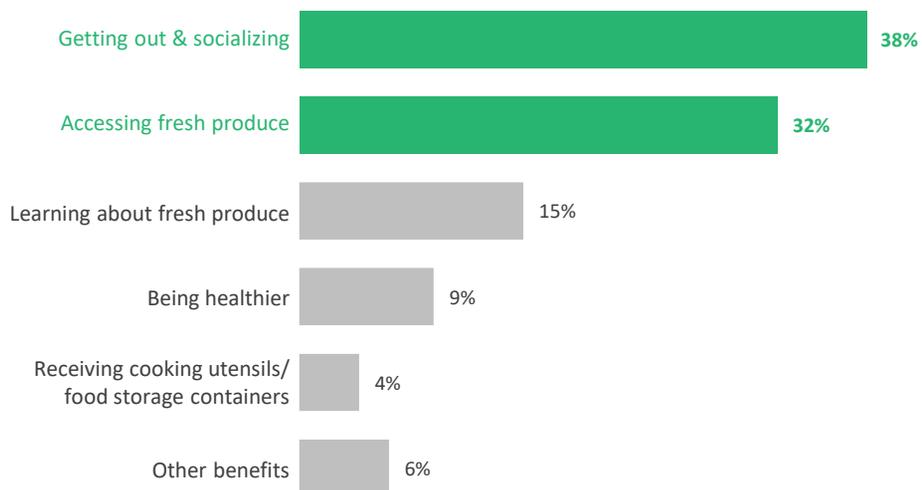
At the end of the program, **84%** of participants<sup>4</sup> reported that they **will continue to get fresh fruits and vegetables after the farmers market season ends.**



1. 114 participants completed both the pre- and post-program surveys and answered these survey questions.  
 2. This is based on the number of combined cups of fruits and vegetables consumed pre- and post-program, as reported by the participants.  
 3. 64 participants reported an increase in their produce consumption after participating in SPF.  
 4. 113 participants answered this post-program survey question. Some participants listed multiple reasons why they will not continue to get fresh fruits and vegetables, therefore the chart will not add up to 100%.

## Other Self-Reported Benefits

Participants<sup>1</sup> identified additional benefits they experienced from participating in Senior Project Fresh. The top benefits include **getting out & socializing** and **accessing fresh produce**.



### Getting out & socializing

Getting out of the house. (2 similar comments)  
 Meeting new people. (1 similar comment)  
 Feel connected to the farmer, Kathy Diemer, and their 3 for \$10 special which I use every time at the market.  
 Friendly farmers.  
 Friendly, helpful, good people.  
 Getting out, bringing others w/no car, seeing friends and getting other things.  
 Good social experience.  
 I enjoyed being able to get out and shop.  
 I enjoyed talking to the farmers.  
 Meeting people, fresh air.  
 People, experience.  
 Wonderful programming; great fun for all.  
 It was fun to just look around at the market to see the wonderful stuff.  
 Visiting with vendors and other shoppers. I enjoy this interaction.  
 I was able to use the project fresh coupons at the farmers market. Otherwise I wouldn't have gone to the farmers market.

### Accessing fresh produce

Good fresh fruit & veggies. (1 similar comment)  
 In the summer I get to have fresh fruits & vegetables.  
 \$20 very helpful. Enjoy receiving fresh fruits + veggies straight from the farmers.  
 It kept me fed.  
 Getting fresh fruits and vegetables that I do not buy because of cost.  
 Got to go shopping with money to buy stuff I wanted.  
 It gave me that little extra food.  
 Saved me food expenses!  
 Availability.  
 Amount of fresh veggies available.  
 Variety of choices + know its fresh.  
 Very helpful and appreciated. Seeing and receiving all Michigan fruits + veggies.  
 The realization that I am not the only one using the coupons.  
 "Encouraging others to use EBT card, go to more local farmers that take EBT"

### Learning about fresh produce

By seeing what was in season, it inspired me to try new recipes.  
 How to cook recipes using fresh veggies.  
 Learned a lot about veggies.  
 Really learned some useful info from the opening class.  
 Trying something different.  
 Cooking/keeping veggies fresh longer/freezing.  
 I could buy larger amount and can them.

### Being healthier

Eating better.  
 Eating healthier, thanks so much for the program!  
 Exercise.  
 Obviously financial, albeit a small benefit, it's an encouragement to eat healthier.

### Receiving cooking utensils/food storage containers

The tools we were gifted.  
 Got new grocery bags.

### Other benefits

I'm very thankful.  
 Me a gustado toda: "I liked it very much."  
 Nice, liked it, used it every day.

1. 47 participants answered this post-program survey question. Some participants listed multiple benefits.

# Impacts & Opportunities



## Impacts

The following State data and feedback from Ottawa Food SPF participants demonstrates the impact of nutritional education and improved access to fresh fruits and vegetables:

- During the last 3 years, Ottawa Food SPF participants cashed in 58% of the nearly \$27,000 in vouchers redeemed for fresh fruits and vegetables in Ottawa County.
- Of the Ottawa Food SPF participants, 56% reported an increase in the total cups of produce consumed per week from pre- to post-program.
- On average, the Ottawa Food SPF participants who reported an increase in their produce consumption increased their daily consumption by a whole cup since participating in the program.
- Before starting the program, 49% of participants reported that they have difficulty getting fresh fruits and vegetables. By the end of the program, 84% reported that they will continue to get fresh fruits and vegetables after the farmers market season ends.
- In addition to using their SPF vouchers, 54% of participants reported purchasing fruits and vegetables at the farmers market using other forms of payment.

## Opportunities

**Consider reaching out to other organizations with an above average voucher redemption rate to determine if there are practices that Ottawa Food can implement to help reach the voucher redemption rate goal. In addition, consider adding a question(s) to the post-program survey to determine why the participant did not redeem all of their vouchers if this is the case.**

In an attempt to achieve a high voucher redemption rate, Ottawa Food offers its participants an educational component as well as cooking supplies. Over 80% of participants reported that the classes on how to store and cook fresh produce were helpful and 96% of participants who received cooking supplies reported finding them very helpful or somewhat helpful. Despite this positive feedback, Ottawa Food's voucher redemption rate decreased from 2018 and fell short of their goal to achieve a 78% voucher redemption rate.

**Consider enhancing promotional/educational opportunities relating to EBT/Bridge Cards and DUFB at the farmers market.**

55% of participants who reported they had an EBT/Bridge Card, reported not using it at the farmers market this summer or receiving DUFB. Ottawa Food updated the EBT/Bridge Card and DUFB promotional materials during 2019, but this occurred after the launch of the 2019 program season.

**Consider additional ways to increase the post-program survey response rate in order to obtain valuable feedback from participants.**

164 participants completed only a pre-program survey. 118 participants completed both a pre- and post-program survey, a 40% response rate. This response rate was 4 percentage points higher than in 2018.