

Multnomah County- Racial and Ethnic Approaches to Community Health Year-two Success Story

Multnomah County's Community Supported Agriculture Program Adjusts to Meet COVID-19 Needs

At A Glance

Multnomah County's Racial and Ethnic Approaches to Community Health (REACH) program, partnered with Beyond Black Community Development Corporation to launch an 8-week community supported agriculture (CSA) program in East Multnomah County. The purpose of this initiative was to address food insecurity and increase access to fresh and culturally appropriate fruits and vegetables for priority populations.



Due to the current COVID-19 pandemic and to adhere to public health guidance, adjustments included a drive-thru CSA food box distribution. Hygiene products (e.g., bleach) and personal protective equipment (hand sanitizers, face masks) were also distributed with the food boxes in order to address community needs.

Public Health Challenge

Food access is a well-established need among the REACH priority population. Approximately 15% (or 114,000) of Multnomah County residents are food insecure and over 124,000 receive SNAP food benefits. (1). Additionally, 1 in 5 Multnomah County children are food insecure (2).



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Approach

Over the course of eight weeks, Multnomah County's REACH program and its partners Beyond Black CDC and Mudbone Grown hosted a weekly CSA that launched on June 19, 2020 coinciding with the community's historical and cultural commemoration of Juneteenth. Thereafter, every Saturday the CSA food box distribution occurred in the parking lot of the Sunrise Center, a local community center located in Gresham, Oregon. The location was converted into a drive-thru pick up site where participants adhered to established public health protocol by remaining in their cars. Participants received various items including fresh produce, non-perishable food items, household products, cleaning supplies, books, census and voter registration information and more! CSA participants drove through the CSA following clearly marked arrows and signage, opened their car trunk and volunteers loaded their vehicle with the weekly CSA share and resources. To respond to identified transportation barriers, trained volunteers delivered the weekly shares to half (25) of the 50 CSA participants.

Beyond Black CDC leveraged an additional \$50,000 from the Oregon Food Bank to address food insecurity and enhance local COVID-19 response and support. To promote economic development with Multnomah County's Black community, the partnership included Mudbone Grown, a local black-owned farm that provided fresh produce including collard greens, peppers, mint and kale to the participating households.

Results

The CSA partnership, operating at the nexus of the local food system, nurtures and promotes a health community environment that supports nutrition, social cohesion and economic mobility. As part of the CSA programming and to address local need, Mudbone Grown distributed an additional 20 weekly CSA shares to elders at Life Change Church. In September, Multnomah County's REACH program will partner with Yaske Pharms for a fall CSA program. Similar to the Beyond Black CSA, it will serve 50 households with all participants receiving needs-based referrals through culturally specific community partners.



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Sustaining Success

Beyond Black CDC's staff and volunteers disseminated multiple food and basic need resources available throughout the county. CSA participants received information about the Department of Health and Human Services' online "Food Finder" portal, which allows users to enter their zip code and obtain locations of prepared nutritious meals and/or community food pantries. Additionally, participants received information about Portland Public Schools' free lunch pick up sites that offer free packaged lunch meals for students and community members.

Quote

"The most rewarding part of the CSA has been seeing Black folks come on a consistent basis being able to eat healthy food on a consistent basis and learning how to use the produce using the recipes we gave them," said Germaine Flentroy, Beyond Black CDC, staff member.



1. The Oregon Center for Public Policy's Food Insecurity and SNAP report (2018)
2. Multnomah County Health Department's Leading Causes of Death: Chronic Disease Report (2019)



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