



Winnebago County Board of Health

Policy Statement on Farmer's Markets and other Fresh Produce Venues

Background:

The US industrial food system provides plentiful, relatively inexpensive food, but much of it is unhealthy, and the system is not sustainable. Although most US food consumption occurs within this industrial system, healthier and more sustainable alternatives are increasingly available¹.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention promotes the use of farmer's markets to provide consumers with fresh, nutritious, and locally grown produce. Health and nutrition experts say diets should contain more fruits and vegetables and there seems to be a general agreement that local foods, that are fresh picked and haven't traveled long distances, are high in nutritional value. This is a distinct advantage that farmer's markets offer consumers. Local farmers, producing local foods, picked fresh daily, are offered at local farmer's markets. The prices are reasonably competitive with other outlets of fresh foods, but the variety, the freshness and the peak of flavor of produce at farmers' markets is incomparable and available to consumers of every economic and social strata. The appeal of the fresh produce available at farmer's markets, and the whole experience of shopping there, encourages people to include more fresh fruits and vegetables in their diets, to the benefit of their entire family.

In recognition of the health value of farmer's markets, the Winnebago County Health Department is establishing this policy statement in support of farmers markets in our community. At the same time, it is also vital to public health that farmer's markets be run in a manner consistent with the principles of basic food sanitation as incorporated in IDPH and Winnebago County Health Department food sanitation regulations. These regulations follow the Hazard Analysis Critical Control Point (HACCP) principles for a risk-based approach to food safety and protection.

While Farmers Markets do offer nutritional foods, there has been a recent trend to expand the types of food offered at farmer's markets. These expanded food offerings often involve high risk foods which are more likely to support and /or grow microbial contaminants, unless sanitary handling and hot and cold storage practices are carefully followed.

It is important that there be a balance between public-health regulation and public health promotion in connection with the nutritional value of fresh fruits and vegetables offered at farmers markets and other local venues.

Local Public Health and Farmer's Market Initiatives:

Winnebago County Health Department has been working with vendors and organizations interested in farmer's markets, both through educational institutions, through organizations with an interest in farmer's markets, and directly with inquiring farmer's market vendors. The public health value of fresh, nutritious, locally grown produce is recognized. At the same time, there is a need to assure safe food sanitation practices, which is an issue with an ever expanding variety of food items being offered at farmer's markets. Through these meetings, the Winnebago County Health Department is working with to modify fees where possible to encourage farmer's markets, and to simplify farmer's market regulations to the extent feasible with good evidence-based public health practice remaining as our policy guide. Several new farmer's market brochures have been created to be more user friendly in understanding and complying with needed (and frequently IDPH mandated) safety regulations. We are increasing access to nutritious foods through our WIC program. The Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children offers the Farmer's Market Nutrition Program (FMNP). WIC clients receive farmer's market vouchers, allowing the purchase of fresh fruits and vegetables at local farmer's markets. Further, the Rockford Public School has recognized the value of more healthy, nutritious food content in school lunches, encouraged by the Winnebago County Health Department as another local effort to promote better nutrition in our community.

What Is Needed:

- Linkages are needed with our local educational institutions to encourage satisfactory local education on the value of nutritious foods and on cooking techniques, including ease of preparation using fruits, grains and vegetables
- We need to educate vendors to assure adequate food safety at farmer's markets, while making the needed regulation as user-friendly as possible. Currently, we are working with the UIC extension, in meeting with local farmer's market vendors.
- We need to continuously improve our science-based farmer's market policies, consistent with federal and state regulations, establishing the basic criteria for maintaining nutritious and safe farmer's markets.
- We need both adult and child education on the value of good nutrition. Federal and state policies regarding posting of calories and nutritional content for food is important. Under the March 2010 United States Health Reform legislation, under the 'wellness programs' section, chain restaurants with 20 or more facilities are required to disclose the nutritional content of each item sold.² This disclosure will also apply to vending machines. It must be determined how to best link local

applications of nutritional information, including restaurants with less than 20 facilities.

- We need to work with other Local Health Departments to advocate for tax increases on soda pop and other high-calorie, high-sugar non-nutritious foods.

Why It's Important:

OBESITY

- In Winnebago County, School Linked Health Center Data shows increased obesity risk factors by race, age and gender for school children.³
- In the Winnebago County Cardiovascular Disease and Diabetes Risk Indicators, 1996-2008 Data Summary⁴, page 20, it shows that over one-third of adults age 25 to 64 years old in Winnebago County suffer from obesity. Nearly two-thirds of adults age 25 to 44 are either obese or overweight, and over two-thirds of adults age 45 to 64 are either obese or overweight.
- Research has shown that as weight increases to reach the levels referred to as "overweight" and "obesity," the risks for the following conditions also increases⁵:
 - Coronary heart disease
 - Type 2 diabetes
 - Cancers (endometrial, breast, and colon)
 - Hypertension (high blood pressure)
 - Dyslipidemia (for example, high total cholesterol or high levels of triglycerides)
 - Stroke
 - Liver and Gallbladder disease
 - Sleep apnea and respiratory problems
 - Osteoarthritis (a degeneration of cartilage and its underlying bone within a joint)
 - Gynecological problems (abnormal menses, infertility)

FOODBORNE ILLNESS

The potential for foodborne illness in Illinois is very serious:

- The food industry in Illinois prepares, stores, and serves food to millions of Illinoisans every day.
- The annual tolls of foodborne illness (FBI) in the USA can be summarized as follows⁶:
 - There are 76 million reported food borne related illnesses each year;
 - It is believed that 2/3 of illnesses go unreported;
 - There are 325,000 food borne illness related hospitalizations;
 - There are 5,000 food borne related deaths each year;
 - The number one suspected cause of FBI is unsafe food handling practices!
- There is an estimated total annual FBI cost of \$152 billion per year in the U.S.A.⁷

There are three lines of defense to avoid foodborne illness, listed chronologically in the food production process⁸; The first line of defense is improvement of hygiene practices for raw foodstuffs in agriculture. Second, is the application of food processing

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technologies to reduce or eliminate pathogens. The third and most important line of defense against foodborne illness is the education of food handlers and consumers in the hygienic handling, preparation and serving of food, which has been shown to be effective even when the first two lines of defense fail.

References:

1. APHA: <http://www.apha.org/advocacy/policy/policysearch/default.htm?id=1361> accessed 05/13/10
2. <http://www.kff.org/healthreform/upload/8061.pdf> page 11 of 13
3. Blackhawk Park School Linked Health Center & Beyer Elementary School Data, 2006-2008 Child Obesity
4. Winnebago County Cardiovascular Disease and Diabetes Risk Indicators, 1996-2008 Data Summary, pg. 20
5. CDC: <http://www.cdc.gov/obesity/causes/health.html> accessed 05/13/10
6. CDC: <http://www.cdc.gov/ncidod/EID/vol5no5/mead.htm> accessed 05/13/2010
7. Georgetown University, Produce Safety Project, Dr. Robert Scharff, 03/03/10
8. World Health Organization, Foodborne Disease: A Focus for Education, Chapter 2, pages 48 -50