

Exploring New Places & Foods

Through *Discover* WI Farmers Markets



FOOD WISE
Healthy choices, healthy lives.

UW-MADISON EXTENSION

A long-standing partnership with Riverview Apartments in Fond du Lac created a strong foundation for FoodWise educator Melanie Phillips to explore new education spaces with participants. With the support of Julie Schelk, Resident Services Coordinator, they worked together to encourage seniors to learn and enjoy the nearby farmer's market.

A Challenge

In July of 2021, Melanie reached out to three low-income housing sites to see about expanding from newsletters and printed resources to return to some in-person classes. While Julie at Riverview Apartments was the only organization to reply, her support with distributing flyers that Melanie made and bringing extra energy was reflected with participation. During the 6-series in-person Healthy Cents lessons that Melanie taught, more residents attended than had previously.

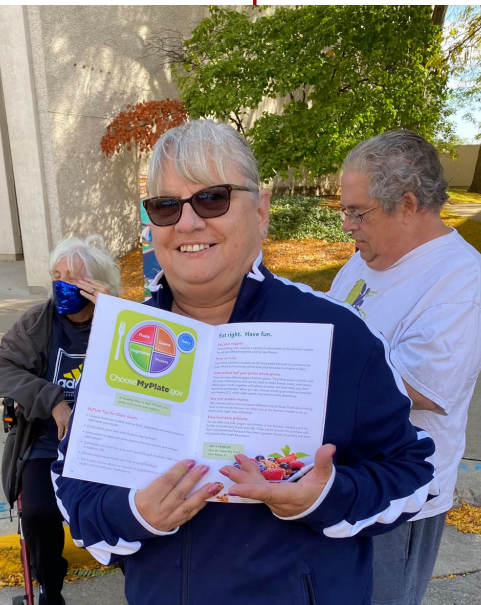
Though she had not led Discover Wisconsin Farmers Market tours before, a conversation with participants at Riverview about the nearby downtown market led to a lot of enthusiasm. In reaction to that excitement, Melanie wanted to learn more about how she could connect these residents with all the benefits of a local market. She had encouragement from Fond du Lac county FoodWise Coordinator Amanda Miller, who had done some of these tours and knew the markets well, along with FoodWise colleagues in other counties who previously used the curriculum. These conversations helped Melanie tailor a tour for her Riverview seniors.



*I learned something new,
so I wanted to come back!*

- Participant

A Solution



Using the Discover WI Farmers Market Seniors booklet for prompts and guidance, Melanie pared down to a few main points for the first tour – she wanted participants to learn about using their SNAP benefits with their electronic benefits transfer (EBT) at the market and have an engaging experience with a vendor. Each of these goals would support participants in gaining confidence to ask questions and use federal benefits. She was also able to help participants benefit from a fruit and vegetable prescription program. Through a partnership between United Healthcare’s Small Steps and the farmers market, participants received a \$5 voucher to spend on produce.

On the day of the tour, Riverview’s Julie met the 5 participants in the lobby. With an energy of taking a field trip, the group went together to the market, about a five minute walk. They began at the EBT booth, meeting the Market Manager and learning that the market had a match program. Participants talked with vendors, taking time to notice produce they hadn’t seen before. They asked how these foods could be used and what might be a good amount to buy so that the ingredient could be used up in three or four days in healthy meals for one or two people. When the hour-long tour ended and the group headed back to Riverview, seniors were excited to share what they’d purchased with their Small Steps vouchers.

Successes



Questionnaires completed by participants after the tour showed an increased confidence in using EBT, engaging with vendors, and buying produce. As a result of the tour, Melanie is planning to return to the market with participants in the spring. She thinks it will be a great way to begin a new series and create energy along with connections to the market.

Melanie is also learning how the Discover WI Farmers Market tour can be supportive with other partners within walking distance of the downtown market. For participants at a residential treatment center, where Melanie teaches a rotation of monthly classes focused on food safety and nutrition, connecting to the farmers market could support inclusivity. For people experiencing significant transitions, including aging and living without substances, these skill-building opportunities not only expand access to local fruits and vegetables, but also opportunities for connections with the farmers and vendors who grow these goods.