USDA Food Insecurity Programs:

Barriers & Policy Recommendations

An evaluation of the effectiveness of nutrition incentive and produce prescription programs in rural areas across Arkansas, Louisiana and Mississippi identified barriers to participation for Socially Disadvantaged Farmers and Ranchers (SDFRs) and informed five policy goals for widening access and funding.

Finding 1:

Language Representation

An analysis of USDA Gus Schumacher Nutrition Incentive Program (GusNIP) grant applications found terms related to local farming and SDFRs were used at a low rate, suggesting grantees do not identify with these labels, consider them a priority or feel they would be valued.

Finding 2:

Program Variables

Consistent payment—preferably bound by a contract—has the greatest positive effect on SDFR participation in produce prescription or nutrition incentive programs. If consistent payment is guaranteed, then these are the top 3 program variables that determine whether or not and to what extent farmers can participate:

Quantity: The amount of produce farmers have or can expect to provide to the program

Farm operations: What is needed to maintain operations and produce

Transportation: The distance farmers must travel to deliver their produce to the program

Finding 3:

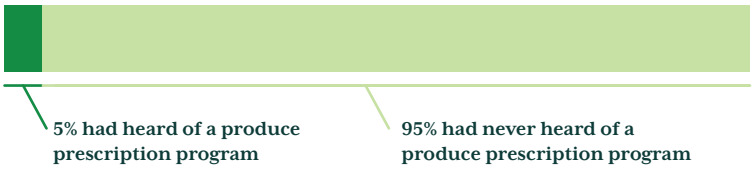
SNAP Underutilization

While many SDFRs are SNAP-certified, they do not use the program or participate in customer incentives because their customers do not use them.

Finding 4:

Program Familiarity

Of the SDFRs interviewed, 95% had never heard of a produce prescription program.



Finding 5:

Lack of Bandwidth

A majority of SDFRs do not have the bandwidth or resources to apply for USDA loans. At the same time, many prefer having a contractual or other written agreement as opposed to grants and loans because it ensures consistent payment and quantity.

How can we fix this?

To increase program participation of farmers and ranchers, especially SDFRs:

1. Incentivize participation for local farmers in food prescription and nutrition incentive programs by rewording grant evaluation criteria to include incorporating local farmers as a priority.
2. Build awareness of produce prescription and nutrition incentive programs with SDFRs through additional outreach.
3. Provide farmers with more contract based opportunities, rather than additional loan/grant programs. Allow for farmers to be built in as a contractual partners for GusNIP funding by broadening the types of entities that can apply for GusNIP funding.
4. Increase SNAP purchases by creating hybrid SNAP/produce prescription programs.
5. Address technical assistance limitations for SDFRs such as by providing additional opportunities for production advice, marketing, and environmental mitigation.

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