



Manitoba Community Food Currency Program

2025 Program Evaluation

Program Overview

The Manitoba Food Currency Program, first piloted in 2020, distributes community food currency (vouchers) to people with barriers to accessing healthy, whole foods. Participants use the vouchers to purchase food directly from participating farmers' markets across Manitoba. Starting with five community partners and four farmer's markets in 2020, the program currently distributes currency through 27 community agencies for use at one of a dozen farmer's markets throughout the province.

Together, Direct Farm Manitoba, market coordinators, and community partner organizations promote food literacy and food security by making healthy, local food more accessible to Manitobans in need.

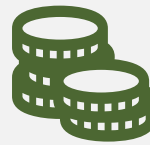
How does the Community Food Currency Program work?



Farmers' markets **partner with community organizations** connected to food insecure individuals.



Community organizations **select individuals and families** to participate.

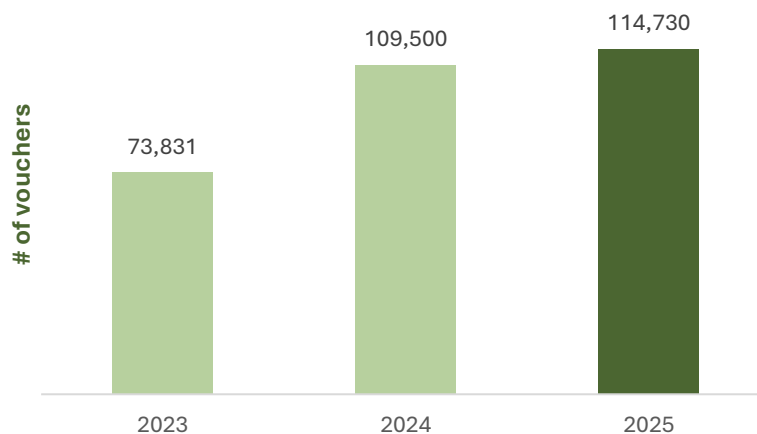


Direct Farm Manitoba provides **community food currency** to community partners for distribution.



Participants **purchase food** at local market, using food currency vouchers.

Since 2023, The Community Food Currency Program has distributed almost **300,000 vouchers** worth a value of **\$968,014**.



Program Partners

Farmers' markets partner with community organizations, connecting with people who could benefit from access to fresh, local food. In 2025, 12 markets and 27 community organizations participated in the program.

Participating Farmers' Markets

- Altona Farmers' Market
- Brandon Farmers' Market
- Carman Farmers' Market
- Lac Du Bonnet Farmers' Market
- Le Marche St. Norbert's Farmers' Market
- Morden Farmers' Market
- South Osborne Farmers' Market
- Steinbach and District Farmers' Market
- Teulon Farmers' Market
- West Broadway Farmers' Market
- Winkler Farmers' Market
- Wolseley Farmers' Market

Participating Community Organizations

- 1JustCity
- Behavioural Health Foundation Inc.
- Carman Wellness Connections
- Central Station
- Fort Garry Women's Resource Centre
- Fort Whyte Farms
- Klinik Community Health
- Lac du Bonnet Food Cupboard
- Makoon Transition Inc.
- Many Hands Resource Centre
- Mrs. Lucci's Resource Centre
- Parc la Salle School (Parc's Pantry)
- Rene Deleurme Centre
- Resource Assistance for Youth
- Recreation Opportunities for Children Eastman
- Samaritan House Ministries
- South Winnipeg Family Information Centre
- Spence Neighbourhood Association
- Steinbach Community Outreach
- Teulon & District Seniors Resource Council
- The Community Exchange
- The Women's Resource Centre (Brandon)
- Thrive Community Support Circle
- Villa Rosa
- West Broadway Good Food Club
- West End Resource Centre
- Women's Health Clinic

Evaluation Findings

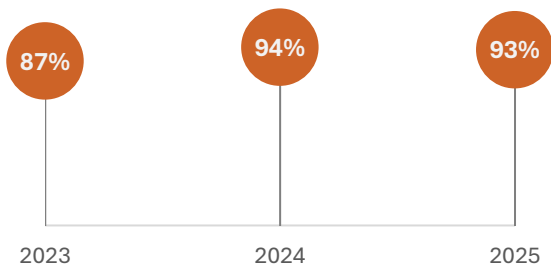
Findings are based on:

- **tracking food currency** distributed by community organizations and spent at the farmers' market
- **online survey with program participants** (n=344)
- **online survey with farmers' market coordinators** (n=11)
- **online survey with vendors** (n=42)

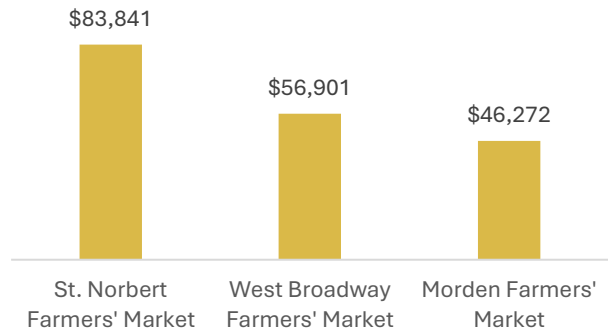
Implementation

Since 2023, a total of 298,061 vouchers, valued at \$968,014, were distributed. Each voucher was valued at \$3, except for 2023 vouchers which were valued at \$4. Of the nearly \$1M distributed, \$883,402 (91%) was redeemed at markets across Manitoba.

From 2023-2025, voucher redemption was consistently high. Average redemption rate, over three years, has been 92%.



In 2025, over half of all vouchers redeemed were at three markets. The total value redeemed was \$187,014.

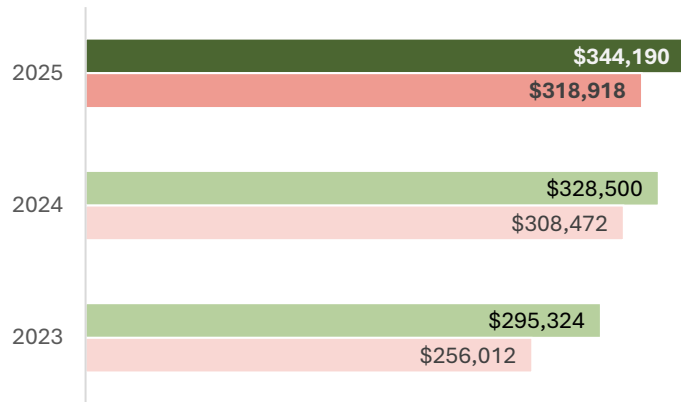


106,306 three-dollar vouchers were distributed and spent at 12 farmers' markets in 2025.

\$318,918

The **dollar value redeemed** at 2025 farmers' markets.

**Over three years,
\$968,014 in vouchers
were distributed and
\$883,402 redeemed.**



Participant Demographics

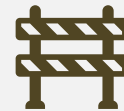
Participants (n=344) from 21 community partner organizations completed an online survey. Two-thirds of respondents (67%) were returning program participants. Twenty-six percent using currency were seniors, and 6% were newcomers. Thirty-three percent identified as First Nations or Métis.

Nearly all respondents had previously encountered barriers to accessing healthy food (38% often, 44% sometimes).

Eighty-two percent of survey respondents had the option of self-disclosing demographic information in their own words. A summary of key themes is illustrative of those who chose to provide details and can not be generalized to the full sample of survey respondents.

32%

were **first time** participants.



73% had **past barriers** accessing healthy food. (91% in 2024)

Income and employment

The most common “demographic” information shared related to economic circumstances, specifically reliance on income assistance, disability support or pension income. Many shared employment status as unemployed, injured or unable to work due to disability. Several respondents self-described as employed but struggling to make ends meet. Economic hardships were expressed in stark terms: “poor”, “poor AF”, “totally broke” and were often paired with challenges related to housing costs, medical expenses, mobility limitations and caregiving responsibilities.

Household composition

Many participants described themselves through caregiving roles, especially parenting. Single parents, especially single mothers, frequently caring for two to six children. Some respondents live in multi-generational or shared living arrangements. Several respondents highlighted caregiving for children or family members with disabilities. Many people self-

described as being low-income with caregiving obligations, a combination that shapes food access, employment, and financial stress.

Age

While not consistently provided, age was the most frequently shared demographic detail. Based on those who shared age information, survey respondents represent a broad range of age distribution, from young adults (ages 17 – 26, students living alone and young parents) to adults in their 30s to 40s (parents of young children and/or working age people with disability or unstable employment) to a substantial number identifying as 'senior'. Older respondents often highlighted fixed incomes and difficulties affording food after covering monthly costs such as rent and utilities.

Gender and gender identity

Gender was frequently, but inconsistently, mentioned. Most self-described as either male (approximately 25¹) or female (approximately 100), with a smaller number explicitly identify as non-binary, genderfluid, genderqueer, or transgender (approximately 12).

¹ Gender counts are approximate estimations based only on explicit self-identification in open-text responses without inferring gender from names, pronouns or household roles (e.g. mother).

Program Satisfaction

Overall, perceptions of the program among participants, vendors, and market coordinators were positive.

Participant satisfaction

Participants most frequently identified access to fresh, healthy food as the primary benefit of the program. Among survey respondents, 84 participants indicated that access to fresh food was their favourite aspect of participation.

“The ability to purchase fresh items.”

“I love being able to purchase fresh products”

Several participants emphasized the importance of this access for their families.

“We love eating fresh vegetables, but no longer have access to a garden. This program allowed our family to enjoy fresh garden food while supporting our community.”

“My favourite part is taking my kids to see the changing seasons and vegetables and products offered weekly.”

Affordability was also noted as an important factor, particularly for items such as meat and vegetables, which participants described as otherwise costly.

“The meat and veggies stands because they’re both really expensive”

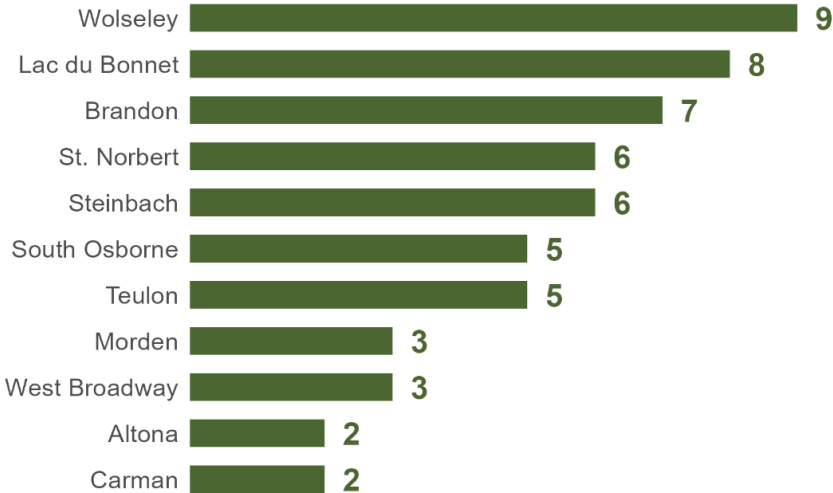
Beyond food access, participants appreciated the social aspects of the market. Several respondents described enjoying opportunities for social connection, including “getting out and meeting people.” Supporting local producers was also meaningful to participants, as reflected in comments such as “supporting local” and “Supporting Manitoba farmers.”

Finally, some participants commented on the program’s usability. A few respondents described the program as “easy to use,” and one participant specifically noted an appreciation for “how easily identifiable participating vendors are.”

Market vendor satisfaction

In 2025, 42 market vendors completed a satisfaction survey. Most vendors (32) reported selling at one market, nine sold at two to three markets, and one vendor sold at four different markets.

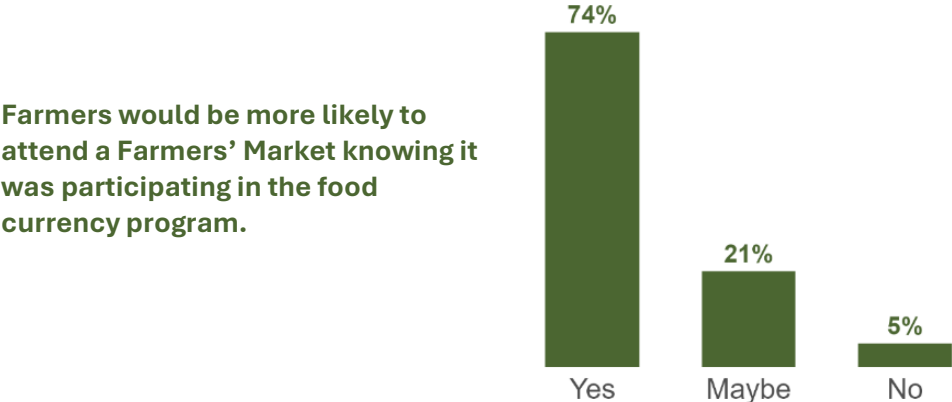
Vendor survey respondents by market



Overall, vendors reported that the currency program was straightforward to implement. Forty-one out of 42 vendors indicated that it was “easy” to accept the currency, while one vendor described it as “somewhat easy.” All vendors reported feeling well prepared to take part in the program.

“it is a very easy to use program”
“Very prepared”

Nearly three-quarters (74%) of vendors indicated that they would be more likely to sell at a Farmers’ Market knowing that it was participating in the currency program.



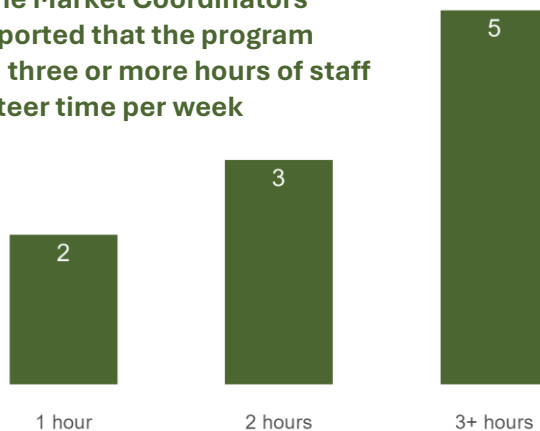
Market Coordinator Satisfaction

Ten Market Coordinators completed a survey at the end of the 2025 season. All agreed (most often strongly agreeing) that the program was a positive experience and easy to implement.

100% of Market Coordinators **Strongly Agreed** or **Agreed** that the program was a good experience.



Half of the Market Coordinators (5/10) reported that the program required three or more hours of staff or volunteer time per week



Eight out of 10 think their market could host more participants next season, 2 replied maybe.

Program Outcomes

On a scale of 1 to 5, participants rated the overall benefit of the program highly, with an average score of 4.8 out of 5. Most participants (n = 285) rated the overall benefit as 5 out of 5.

When asked to specify the benefits of the program, participants overwhelmingly identified improved access to fresh, healthy food. Respondents most frequently referenced access to vegetables, fruit, and unprocessed items that they would otherwise be unable to obtain.

“Fresh healthy food not from a can!”

“Improved access to healthy food that improves my overall health.”

Many respondents specifically highlighted access to meat, including items such as chicken, bison, lamb, and fish, noting that these products are often unaffordable outside of the program.

“With the price of meat nowadays I am able to purchase meat and veg at farmers’ market.”

“The ability to have vegetabales and meat in my house...it has been months since I had a fresh vegetable and I nearly cried when getting chicken breast.”

Beyond food access, respondents frequently described the program as reducing financial stress and helping them meet basic needs. Many participants emphasized the program’s role in supporting their ability to provide healthier meals for their children and families, including exposing children to fresh foods and new tastes.

Increased access to fresh, local, farm food

Several participants noted that the program helped offset the increasing cost of food. Respondents described how the vouchers allowed them to save money and purchase items they would not otherwise be able to afford.

“I loved how much new fruits and vegetables I got to experience. I was amazed at how much food I could make at home that I wasn’t able to before. The meat truck was also phenomenal, hamburger is sooo expensive these days and our family uses it for soo many meals. Being able to actually have access to hamburger was a blessing. I can’t express how grateful I am for this program and how much it helped my family”

“Being able to shop for foods we can’t afford not afford to buy at store”

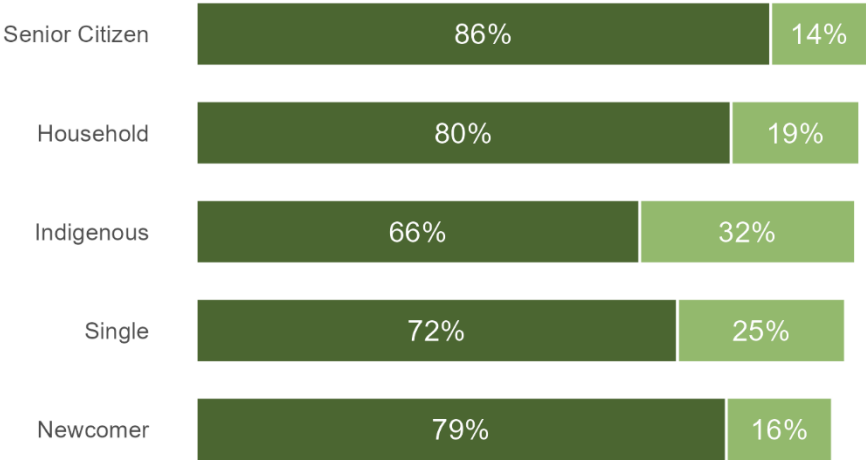
Participants also described perceived improvements in their health and diet as a result of program participation.

“Since the program began my health has noticeably improved.”

“I was able to purchase better food and enjoy a healthier diet”

Survey results supported these perceptions. Almost all participants indicated that the program enabled them to buy better food and enjoy a healthier diet, with 257 respondents strongly agreeing and 67 agreeing with this statement. There were no significant differences in outcomes across demographic groups.

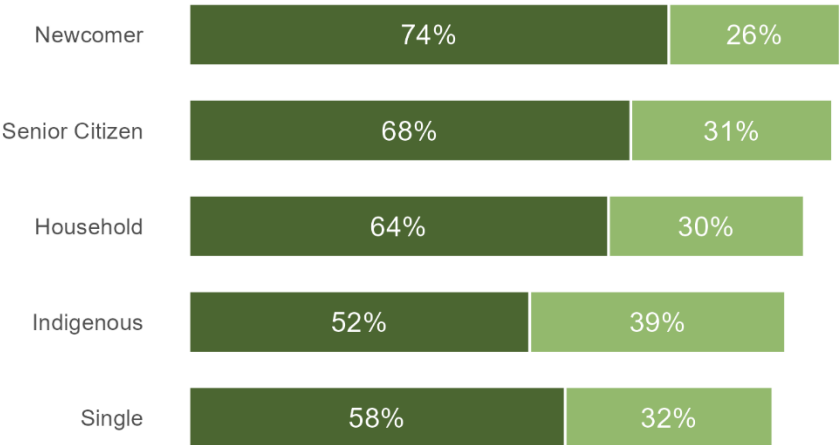
Across all groups, most participants **Strongly Agreed** or **Agreed** that the program improved their diet.



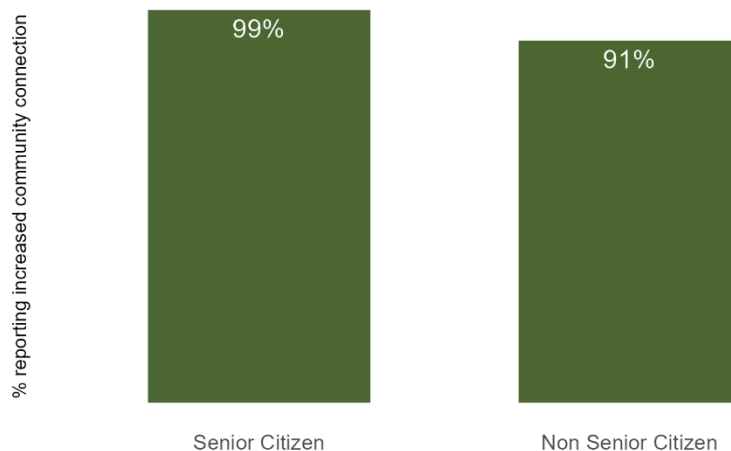
Enhanced community connection

Participants also reported strong community-related outcomes associated with the program. A large majority of participants reported positive impacts, with 204 respondents strongly agreeing and 98 agreeing that the program increased their sense of community connection.

Across all groups, most participants **Strongly Agreed** or **Agreed** that the program connected them to community.



Senior citizens were slightly more likely than non-senior citizens to report stronger community connection as a result of the program. This difference was statistically significant.² Overall, 98.8% of senior citizens reported feeling more connected to their community, compared to 91.1% of non-senior citizens.



When describing the benefits of the program in their own words, many participants emphasized social connection as a key outcome. Respondents described feeling welcomed, included, and part of their community through participation in the market and interactions with vendors and other participants. Several responses highlighted a sense of belonging and dignity, opportunities to meet people and build relationships, and reduced stigma compared to traditional food assistance programs.

“The best part is helping vulnerable people feel a sense of belonging in the community.”

Participants also described how the vouchers encouraged them to attend farmers' markets more regularly, where they enjoyed the broader market experience, including music and entertainment, cultural activities, spending time with family, and connecting with others.

“meeting people every week, getting to know the farmers and exchanging recipes.”

“Being among other people. I can get very isolated”

² Based on chi-square test with results $\chi^2 = 4.35$, $df = 1$, $p = 0.03697$

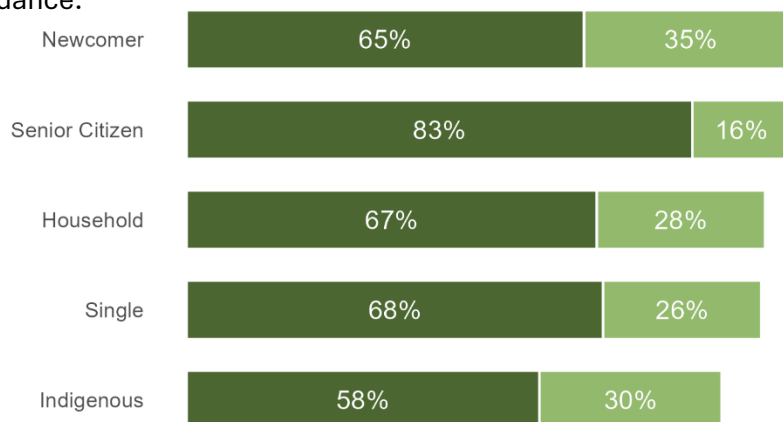
Increased support and sales at local markets

Vendor and market coordinator survey findings suggest strong participant retention and consistent market engagement.

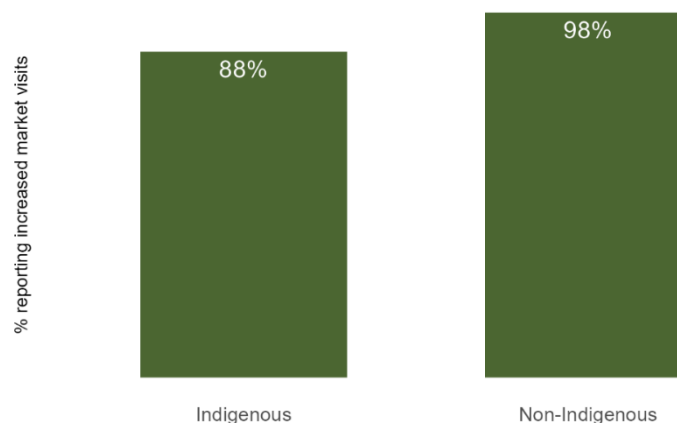
In the vendor survey, vendors were asked whether they observed the same participants returning to purchase food week after week. The majority (93%) reported seeing repeat participants, with 58% indicating they saw the same individuals return often and 35% reporting they saw repeat participants sometimes. Similarly, in the market coordinator survey, 90% of coordinators reported observing participants returning to the market on a weekly basis.

Participant survey responses further support these observations. When asked whether they attended their local farmers' market more often as a result of the program, most participants indicated increased attendance.

Most participants **Strongly Agreed** or **Agreed** that the program led to increased market attendance.

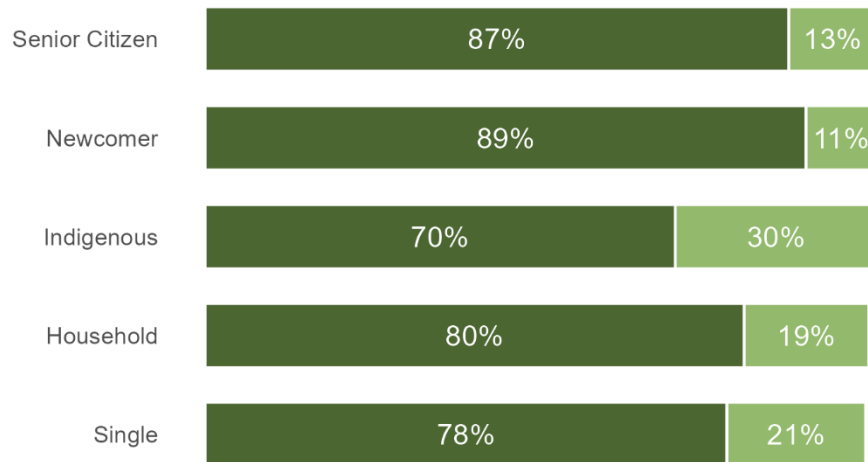


However, differences were observed across demographic groups. Indigenous participants were significantly less likely to report increased market attendance compared to non-Indigenous participants. Specifically, 88% of Indigenous participants reported attending markets more frequently as a result of the program, compared to 98% of non-Indigenous participants.

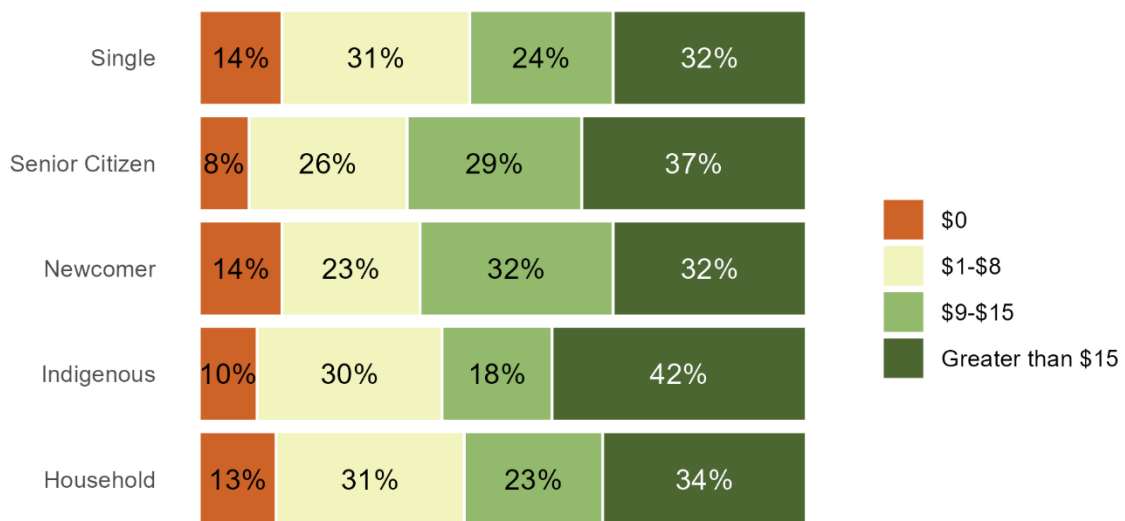


Overall, 99% of survey respondents agreed (17.6%) or strongly agreed (81.2%) that they were happy to support the local farmers' market through the program. There was no significant difference across demographic groups.

Most participants **Strongly Agreed** or **Agreed** that they were happy to support local farmers and the farmers' market.

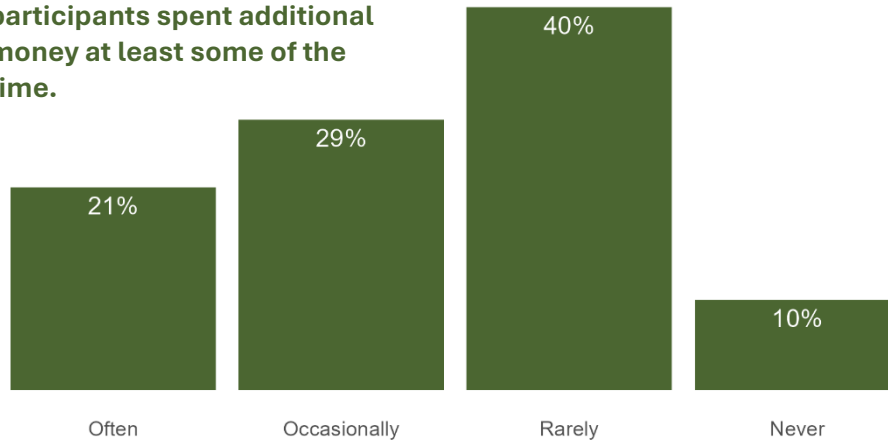


Eighty-eight percent of respondents said they spend additional money at the market. Over one-third (35.5%) spend more than \$15 more on average. The amount of additional spending did not vary significantly across demographic groups. Senior citizens and Indigenous participants were slightly more likely to make additional purchases.



All surveyed vendors (100%) observed increased sales as a result of the food currency program. When asked how frequently participants spent additional money when purchasing food with vouchers, 50% said “often” or “occasionally”.

According to vendors, 90% of participants spent additional money at least some of the time.



Market coordinators described the food currency program as strongly beneficial to the market noting that the program contributed to a more vibrant, inclusive, and financially sustainable market environment. Coordinators observed that the program brought in many first-time shoppers and individuals who might not otherwise access the market, often encouraging them to return regularly and to bring friends or community groups along with them.

Program Improvements

Participants, vendors and market coordinators indicated that the program was easy to use and highly beneficial. When asked how the program could be improved, market coordinators provided minor suggestions for improvement, including:

- **Provide short, accessible videos for vendor training:** Several respondents highlighted videos as a helpful or preferred format for training vendors. One suggested a short vendor-specific video explaining how the program works, particularly to support vendors with limited English or limited time to read handouts.
- **Increase number of protein vendors:** Meat vendors were the most frequently mentioned gap, including specific interest in chicken, eggs, fish, and more meat options overall.
- **Balance market capacity and increase in vendors:** While some markets expressed a clear desire for additional vendors, others felt their current mix of primary producers was already strong and cautioned that adding more could risk diluting existing vendors’ sales.
- **Provide additional participant education:** Ongoing confusion among some participants raised concerns that some currency may go unused or be misunderstood in terms of where, how, or when it can be spent.

When asked what would make the program better, participants offered positive feedback, expressing gratitude and saying the program is great as is. Emerging themes around program improvements based on participant feedback included:

- **Expand eligible products:** The most consistent request for improvement was to allow more types of food to be purchased, particularly bread and baked goods, jam, pickles, milk, eggs and ready-made foods. Many participants felt current restrictions are too limiting and would like greater flexibility in how vouchers can be used.
- **Increase the amount or frequency of support:** Many participants indicated that higher levels of support would improve the program, particularly in the context of rising food prices. Suggestions included increasing weekly amounts, providing more vouchers overall, scaling support based on family size, offering larger budgets for bigger families, introducing smaller denomination coupons (e.g., \$1 or \$3) to reduce lost value, and distributing vouchers more than once per month.
- **Extend the program duration:** Participants expressed a strong desire for the program to run longer, with many calling for year-round availability. Requests included extending the program through the winter months (especially for staple foods), continuing later into the fall or through Christmas, and removing expiry dates or allowing vouchers to be used until the end of the year. Improved winter access to meat and healthy foods was a recurring concern.
- **Increase vendor participation and product variety:** Many participants felt the program would benefit from more participating vendors and a wider range of products. Frequently mentioned needs included additional fruit and produce vendors, more meat vendors (especially poultry), greater overall variety, more vendors accepting vouchers, inclusion of Indigenous farmers, and better balance across vendors to prevent early sell-outs or disproportionate benefits to a single vendor.
- **Improve access and program logistics:** Participants identified several logistical changes that could make the program easier to use, including providing parking passes or transit support, reducing long lineups during voucher distribution, staggering distribution days, offering more market days or longer hours (especially for full-time workers), improving weather comfort through shade or shelter, introducing online or virtual coupons, sending reminders via email or text, and providing clearer lists of vendors who accept vouchers.
- **Address fairness and vendor experience concerns:** A smaller but important theme focused on participant experiences at the point of purchase. Some participants reported feeling judged when using vouchers, confusion around changing eligibility rules, frustration with items being displayed but unavailable (“reserved”), concerns about high prices, and suggested spending limits per visit to prevent stockpiling and ensure fair access for all participants.
- **Expand access to more people:** Some participants emphasized the importance of broadening the program’s reach by expanding eligibility, serving more families, giving new participants an opportunity to join, and increasing awareness so more people know about and can benefit from the program.

Conclusion

In 2025, the Manitoba Food Currency Program continued to demonstrate strong reach, high redemption rates, and meaningful impact for participants, vendors, and markets. Over the past 3 years, almost 300,000 vouchers valued at close to \$1 million have been distributed, with consistently high redemption rates averaging 92% . In 2025 alone, almost 115,000 vouchers were distributed across 12 farmers' markets, generating significant economic activity while expanding access to fresh, local food for households facing financial barriers .

Findings from participant, vendor, and market coordinator surveys point to overwhelmingly positive experiences. Participants reported improved access to fresh vegetables, fruit, and meat, reduced financial stress, and enhanced dietary quality. The program was rated highly, with an average benefit score of 4.8 out of 5. Importantly, participants also described strengthened community connection, dignity, and belonging through regular engagement at local markets . Vendors and coordinators similarly emphasized ease of implementation, increased repeat attendance, and positive market impacts .

Beyond individual benefits, the program contributes to broader community and economic outcomes. Nearly all participants expressed satisfaction in supporting local farmers, and many reported spending additional money at the market beyond their vouchers . Vendors unanimously observed increased sales as a result of the program , reinforcing the program's dual role in addressing food insecurity while strengthening Manitoba's local food economy.

While feedback suggests opportunities to expand vendor variety, increase support levels, and extend the program's duration, overall findings affirm that the Community Food Currency Program is a highly valued, effective, and sustainable initiative. Continued investment and thoughtful program enhancements will further strengthen its ability to reduce food insecurity, promote healthy eating, and foster inclusive, vibrant farmers' markets across Manitoba .