



**Manitoba
Community
Food Currency
Program**

2022 Program Evaluation

Background

Program Overview

The Manitoba Food Currency Program, piloted in 2020, distributes community food currency to people with barriers to accessing healthy, whole foods. People can use the currency to purchase food directly from participating farmers' markets and food hubs across Manitoba.

In 2021, the program was expanded again to serve 230 households.

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

2022 Program Evaluation methods included:

- tracking of food currency distributed by community organizations and cashed in at the farmers' market
- online surveys with program participants (n=110)
- online surveys with farmers' market coordinators (n=6).



DIRECT FARM — MANITOBA —

Direct Farm Manitoba is a member owned cooperative of direct marketing farmers and farmers' market. Direct Farm supports members to achieve fairness in the industry and maximize opportunities for economic sustainability. By helping farms and farmers' market, Direct Farm helps Manitobans make better decisions about the food on their tables.

Program Partners

Participating farmers' markets partner with community organizations who are connected with people who could benefit from access to fresh, local food.

Participating Community Organizations:

- Behavioral Health Foundation
- Carman Food Security Network
- Fort Garry Women's Resource Centre
- Lord Roberts Community Centre
- Mrs. Luccis
- Many Hands Resource Centre
- NorWest Community Food Co-op
- South Winnipeg Family Information Centre
- West Central Women's Resource Centre

Participating Farmers' Markets:

- Carman Farmers' Market
- Lac Du Bonnet Farmers' Market
- Morden Farmers' Market
- South Osborne Farmers' Market
- St. Norbert Farmers' Market

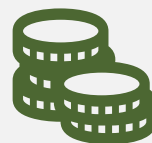
How does it work?



Farmers' markets **partner with community organizations** who are connected with 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 their local market, using their food currency voucher.

Evaluation Findings

Findings are based on administrative data tracking and surveys completed by 110 participants. Surveys were distributed by six of nine participating community organizations.

Who accessed the program?

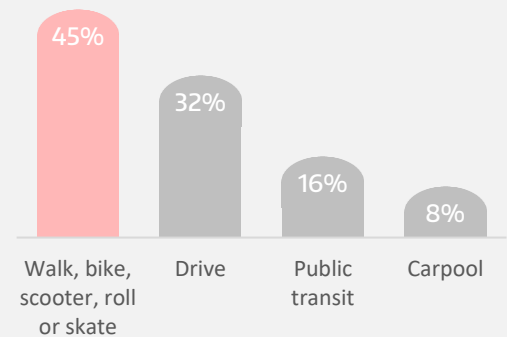
A total of 17,027 three-dollar food currency vouchers were distributed and spent at five farmer's markets, representing \$51,081 spent at markets. An additional \$5,712.00 were distributed and spent by West Central Women's Resource Centre and \$7,056.00 by Nor-West Co-op – these organizations had a separate budget to order directly from farms for their clients. Altogether, \$63, 849 in food currency vouchers were spent at farmers' markets.

Most survey respondents received food currency vouchers to support their family (75%). Several participants were seniors (22%) and 2% were pregnant. Eighty-two percent of survey respondents identified as female, 15% as male, 1% as non-binary. Eleven percent were Indigenous and 5% Metis.



Over **80%** of respondents are female.

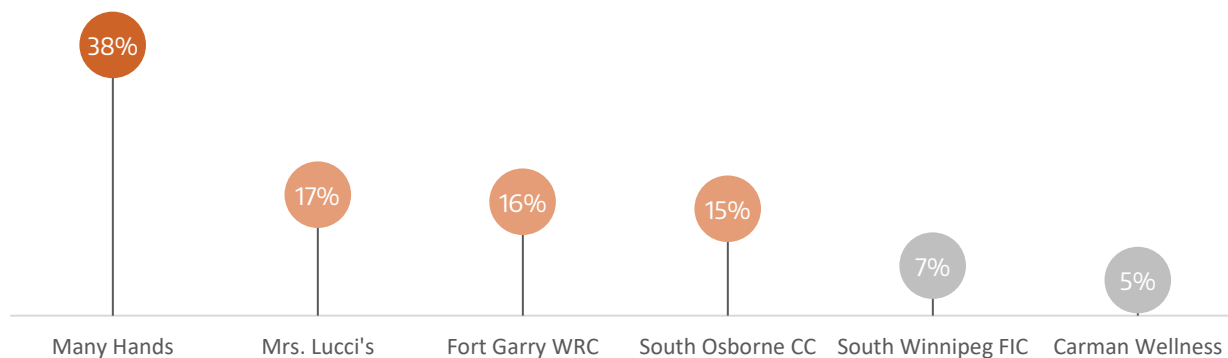
Most participants use **active transportation** to get to farmers markets.



17,027 three-dollar vouchers were distributed and spent at five farmer's markets.

Most survey respondents (n=42) received community food currency from **Many Hands Resource Centre**.

Another 54 received currency from either Mrs. Lucci's, Fort Garry Women's Resource Centre, or South Osborne Community Centre.



Impact

How did the program benefit farmers and markets?

Nearly all (93%) food currency vouchers distributed were redeemed. The program brought new customers to the market, with 55% of participants reporting they never or rarely shopped at the farmer's market prior to becoming involved with the currency program – and nearly all participants spent money in addition to the vouchers at their visits to the market (89%).

In 2022, farmers markets redeemed a total of

\$63, 849

in food currency vouchers

““ *This is a great program, and to see the smiling, very appreciative faces of the participants makes it all worthwhile.*

Market coordinators emphasized that the program was simple to implement and positively affected their markets, bringing in new and diverse customers. Coordinators reported the program required little staff/volunteer program to facilitate (2 respondents said two hours per week, 1 respondent said less than 1 hour and 2 respondents less than 1 hour per week).

““ *[The currency program] was very easy to implement, vendors understood the program, and were very willing to participate.*

Coordinators noted that program participants frequently attended the market with their families, making it an outing for the family and an opportunity to socialize and build connections with vendors and other market goers.

““ *I have noticed people who may not have ever come to the market, or leave empty-handed, coming back to the market each week to do their grocery shopping just like everyone else.*

We saw more diversity at our market and customers who normally would not go to a farmers' market attend each week to buy locally grown goods.

These folks were returning weekly and filling their bags and wagons with local food. We noticed that some participants had large families and made the market a weekly family outing where they would come to shop and socialize.



How did the program benefit participants?

Participants shared overwhelmingly positive feedback about their experience with the program. When asked what they like best about the program they said:

- **Access to healthy food**
Many participants said increased access to fresh and healthy food is the biggest benefit of the program (68 mentions).
- **Community connection**
Nearly 80% of participants said they felt more connected to their community as result of being involved with the currency program. The social aspect and sense of community at the market was identified by many as one of the main strengths of the program (22 mentions).
- **Supporting local farmers**
Participants appreciate that the program directly benefits local farmers (8 mentions).
- **Choice and respect**
The dignity in choosing products that meet their family needs, and the non-judgmental vendors were mentioned (4 mentions).



This program has helped my son and I with accessing high-quality vegetables and meats, enhancing our diets and lives. Costs are challenging today so I appreciate this program as it benefits all involved."

"Most of the vendors were non-judgmental and accommodating when I used the vouchers and didn't treat me as lesser than someone who can afford the market."

"The best part is spending nothing to feed my daughter. This is very helpful to me as a single parent."

I LOVE this program! SO helpful for our family. Life is WAY TOO expensive now-a-days.

Overall impact

On a scale of 0 (no benefit) to 10 (huge benefit), participants across all markets gave the program an average score of 9.5/10. 77% of participants said they hugely benefited from participating in the program (10).

Thirty-six percent of participants often have trouble accessing healthy food and 42% sometimes have trouble – nearly all participants (91%) said they were able to eat a greater amount of healthy food as result of using the community food currency program.

How could the program be improved?



→ **Vendor signage** and listing of participating vendors would help participants navigate the market and select eligible products (12 mentions)



→ **Price listing** at vendor kiosks would help participants choose products within their budget (2 mentions)



→ **Expansion of eligible items**, including eggs, bread and grains, and vegetarian proteins (6 mentions)



→ **Transportation support**, including bus tickets and shuttles (2 mentions)



→ **Gathering spaces at the market** (2 mentions) to create more opportunity for socializing and connecting



→ **Expand the program** to more families for longer periods of time throughout the year (3 mentions)

Supporting Evidence

The Manitoba Food Currency Program is modelled after the well-established British Columbia Association of Farmers' Markets Coupon Nutrition Program (BCAFM), which has been running for over a decade. Multiple evaluations of the BCAFm over the years have shown that the program increases participants access to fresh local foods while enhancing community connections and resulting in increased foot traffic at markets and support for the local economy. **Participation was found to have a lasting impact, increasing participants' awareness of where and how to access local foods, knowledge of local foods, and community connectivity.** Evaluation of Nova Scotia's recently implemented 'market bucks' coupon program (2019) has shown similar benefits.

This report was prepared by

**Leading
4iMPACT**

"This is such a great program, and we are big fans of how far the reach of this program is. Good local food is getting into homes in a dignified way!"