

Measuring Effects of Mobile Markets on Healthy Food Choices
Report of Focus Group Results
Fresh Moves mobile market, Chicago, IL
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Project Overview

To expand marketing of agricultural products, the US Department of Agriculture (USDA) Agricultural Marketing Service (AMS) funds mobile produce markets in low-income food deserts where access to fresh produce is limited. The purpose of this research project is to (1) understand who does and who does not use mobile markets and why and (2) investigate whether mobile produce markets facilitate healthy food choices in those communities, and if so, how. The focus group study involves four sites served by USDA AMS funded mobile produce markets. At each site, two focus groups are conducted: one with food shoppers who use the mobile markets and one with those who do not. The research questions include: why do people use or not use the mobile market? What factors facilitate or impede use? How does the presence of a mobile food market affect food access and choices? Are there spillover effects on food choices at other venues?

Study Site in Chicago, IL

Fresh Moves is a non-profit organization that operates a mobile produce market in low-income west side Austin and North Lawndale neighborhoods in Chicago, IL and began serving Chicago's south side Fall of 2012. At the time of the focus groups Fresh Moves operated a single bus as a mobile produce market, as of December 3, it added a second bus to serve Chicago's south side and plans to add a third bus in spring of 2013.

Austin is Chicago's largest neighborhood with a population in 2000 of 117,527, of which 90.2% were African-American. The median household income of \$33,663 was \$10,000 less than Chicago's median income. About a quarter of Austin's population lived in poverty and 90% of the children who attend Austin public schools are poor. North Lawndale had a population of 41,768 in 2000, of which 93.8% were African-American and 4.54% were Hispanic. In 2000 about 45% of the population in North Lawndale was below the poverty line, 13.5% were unemployed and median household income was \$18,342. Nearly 60% of residents 20-24 year olds were unemployed and over a third of these young people have not completed high school or obtained a GED. Compared to other Chicago residents they are more likely to smoke, binge drink, be obese, not exercise and lack health care (University of Illinois).

Neither neighborhood is served by a supermarket, although a real estate website (see appendix) indicates that Austin has three convenience stores and eleven small grocery stores, while North Lawndale has seven convenience stores and seventeen grocery stores. Note that liquor stores are

included in this list to show the absence of stores that sell fresh produce. The convenience stores and small groceries tend to offer convenience foods and very limited (if any) fresh produce. Given the lack of supermarkets, which tend to have a full array of fresh produce, the Austin and North Lawndale neighborhoods in Chicago are considered food deserts.

Fresh Moves is dedicated to bringing affordable fresh produce year round to Chicago's food deserts. Fresh Moves operates out of a refitted city bus that is covered with bright red wrap featuring the Fresh Moves logo. Inside, the seats have been removed and replaced with shelving for produce, new floors were installed, and a registry system was installed. Shoppers are greeted by Fresh Moves staff, can select whatever produce they like and proceed to the check-out, where cash, credit/debit cards, and Link cards (food stamps) are accepted.

The bus has a regular weekly route, making three stops a day, Monday through Friday between 10am and 3pm (see www.freshmoves.org). The locations include schools, public buildings, hospitals and senior centers, with the goal to provide access to affordable produce throughout neighborhoods where many people do not have transportation. While organic and local options are available, the emphasis is on affordability and variety to encourage purchase of fruits and vegetables. Hence Fresh Moves features a wide variety of fruits and vegetables at prices that are generally lower than most supermarkets. Fresh Moves also offers cards with simple recipes advising how to use the produce.

Focus Group Recruitment and Process

It should be noted that given their small size, focus groups are not representative of the larger population; they do however provide in-depth perspectives of individuals. In addition, they allow probing answers and asking follow-up questions. Two groups of participants were recruited: those who shop at Fresh Moves and those who do not. The shoppers were recruited with flyers placed in the Fresh Moves bus. The non-shoppers were recruited using flyers posted at the Austin City Hall. Snowball recruiting was also used; both groups of participants were encouraged to pass on information about the focus groups to people they knew. All participants contacted the researchers to request being included in the study and screened to ensure they were 18 or older and food shoppers living in the area.

Both focus groups were conducted at the Austin City Hall from 1-3 PM; the group that shopped at Fresh Moves (shoppers) met on Thursday, October 25th, while those who did not (non-shoppers) met on Friday, October 26th. The participants at each session were offered fruit for refreshment. The moderator first explained the purpose of the study to the participants, their role in it, reviewed an informed consent script, asked for permission to record and quote the participants anonymously, and finally asked for oral consent to proceed. The participants then filled out a short survey asking about their fruit and vegetables shopping habits and consumption and demographic information. Each focus group session consisted of asking each participant to respond to a set of open-ended questions and was recorded. A graduate assistant took notes so that the transcribed recordings could be annotated. A representative of the USDA AMS was present to observe the focus groups.

Focus group participants were asked to describe a typical meal, their meal preparation goals, where they shopped and in particular where they shopped for produce. Participants who shopped

at the farmers market (shoppers) were asked about their experiences: when and how they heard about the market, how often they shopped there and what they bought, whether these foods were available to them elsewhere, whether their meals or food choices elsewhere had changed since shopping there and how, what improvements they would recommend, the reputation of the market, and recommendations to encourage others to use it, as well as to eat more produce. Participants who did not shop there (non-shoppers) were asked what they knew about the market, whether the location and timing was convenient for them, why they did not shop there, the reputation of the market, suggestions for encouraging people to shop their and to eat more produce. The recordings of the two focus groups were professionally transcribed, checked for accuracy by the researcher and graduate student, and annotated. All names were replaced with numbers to protect the participants' anonymity.

Focus Group Results

Comparison of Shoppers and Non-shoppers

There were nine participants in the shoppers group and eleven participants in the non-shoppers group. However, one of the participants in the non-shopper group actually shopped at the mobile market before and is included as a shopper, therefore there are ten shoppers and ten non-shoppers for all further comparisons.

While we do not have information on household income, there was a difference in the number of participants who used a Link card (9 non-shoppers and 6 shoppers), however, it was not statistically significant at $P > 0.05$. This would imply that there was no significant difference in incomes between mobile market shoppers and non-shoppers.

Fresh Moves shoppers on average consumed significantly more servings of fruits and vegetables every day, 2.6 versus 1.1 servings for non-shoppers ($P > 0.01$). However, when asked to describe their previous dinner, only four shoppers mentioned they ate vegetables, although many of them mentioned legumes. None of the non-shoppers mentioned any produce in their meal; typical answers were meat and a starch or a 'TV dinner'. When asked about their perceptions of their fruit and vegetable consumption, four shoppers thought that they ate enough of fruits and vegetables; three said they did not, and three did not indicate either way. Explaining why they thought they ate enough, a common reason given was they liked fruits and vegetables or knew they were 'good for them.' One shopper said his consumption was based on 'doctor's orders.' Explanations for why they did not eat enough produce included preferences for fried foods and perceptions of healthy foods being expensive. Within the non-shopper group, only two people thought they ate enough fresh produce. The rest of participants did not think so, with the most common explanations given that they did not like them and/or lacked time. Out of the eight non-shoppers who said they do not eat enough produce, only three said they would like to eat more, mostly for health associated reasons. There was no significant difference in the presence of lifestyle related diseases: four shoppers and two non-shoppers indicated suffering from overweight, obesity, type II diabetes, heart disease, stroke, or food allergies.

Almost all of the participants, shoppers and non-shoppers, enjoyed cooking. Only one shopper and four non-shoppers said they liked to cook sometimes as opposed to always; no participant said they did not like to cook. The shoppers and non-shoppers also had similar shopping

frequencies, shopping for food 2.5 and 2.1 times over a two-week period, respectively. In terms of distance to grocery stores and Fresh Moves stops, the shoppers lived significantly closer to a Fresh Moves stop than to a grocery store ($P>0.01$) while non-shoppers live significantly closer to a grocery store than to a Fresh Moves stop ($P>0.01$) (Table 1). The distance from a grocery store between shoppers and non-shoppers is not statistically significant; however, the shoppers lived significantly closer to a Fresh Moves stop than non-shoppers ($P>0.001$).

Table 1. Mean distance (in minutes) to a grocery store and Fresh Moves stop for Fresh Moves shoppers and non-shoppers

Group	Grocery Store	Fresh Moves stop	P value
Shoppers	12.8	4.1	0.0354
Non-Shoppers	9.2	17.1	0.0430
P value	0.2110	0.0095	

With respect to household composition, non-shoppers lived in households with significantly more adults than shoppers (2.7 versus 1.5 respectively, $P>0.001$). However, there was no significant difference in the number of children under 18 years (1.5 vs. 0.6 respectively, not statistically significant at $P>0.05$).

Fresh Moves Shoppers Results

In general, the shoppers indicated that they liked fruits and vegetables. Only three of them believed they were not getting enough. When shopping, the most salient goals were cooking meals that were enough for everyone or for multiple days (5), making sure their kids are healthy/full (2); satisfy craving and eat healthy (1) and cook tasty meals (1); only one participant said she did not cook.

All the shoppers were very enthusiastic about Fresh Moves. They mentioned the environment was pleasant (clean bus (3); positive attitude of the staff (7)). Four said they said they shopped there because the bus was very convenient. They believed the prices were reasonable and affordable (6) and the produce was good quality (4). In addition, the fact that Fresh Moves accepts Link was very important to some participants (4). Two participants enjoyed the cards with the recipes. The group felt very strongly that the bus was especially valuable for seniors. One of the participants described Fresh Moves visit to a senior center said that all the seniors loved it and that the bus made shopping for produce very easy for them.

There were only a couple of suggestions for improvements; these were mostly related to improving convenience for seniors. Four participants suggested that a portable Link machine that could be brought into the senior center along with produce would make it easier for seniors unable to walk all year round and for all seniors in the winter. Three participants added that stocking some basic food items, like milk, oil, flour, sugar, would be helpful because they are too heavy for the seniors to carry them from grocery stores. Three participants were concerned about the length of time they spent in line and suggested adding another cash register. Two participants wanted to more stops at different locations.

Most participants agreed that advertising would help to spread the word – they suggested advertising in the free local newspapers, on the radio, using fliers that would be delivered to

homes, and using a loudspeaker on the bus. Two participants suggested the fliers include locations and hours.

Fresh Moves Non-Shoppers Results

Non-shoppers consumed very little fruits and vegetables; four participants did not have a single serving the previous day. The goals for food preparation and consumption of non-shoppers are very distinct from those of shoppers: nine out of ten participants said they prepared food that would make them full and one participant was concerned about cooking something ‘kids would like’.

Almost all participants had heard of Fresh Moves (7). After describing what Fresh Moves does, most of the participants had very positive reactions; only two indicated that they would not shop there because they had mixed feelings about buying food from a bus. For them, shopping on a bus was novel and they preferred grocery stores because it was more familiar. In general, the non-shoppers perceived Fresh Moves as making produce shopping more convenient (4), its purpose is to bring fresh produce into neighborhoods with no supermarkets (1) and improve shoppers’ health (4). They also believed Fresh Moves made shopping very convenient for seniors (3). One participant who had encountered the bus but did not shop there said it had very reasonable prices and that they appreciated the attitude of the staff.

During the discussion, most participants said they would be willing to shop there. They believed people do not shop on the bus because it has insufficient stops (4) or because they were not aware of Fresh Moves (4). Almost everyone (8) agreed that more advertising would be helpful to make people aware. They suggested advertising in newspapers, using fliers delivered to homes, on TV, via the internet, using a loudspeaker on the bus that played a jingle, and billboards. Several people suggested that the bus should be less ‘dull’ and have some signs or lights to make people realize that it is not just a normal public transportation bus. They would also like to see samples set up in front of or inside the bus (7), receive coupons (1) or fliers with information about what products are available and their prices (2).

Conclusions

These results pertain to a small sample and therefore cannot be generalized to the population. However, the results from the two groups indicate differences in produce eating habits and offer some suggestions about how to increase use of Fresh Moves. People who shopped at Fresh Moves ate significantly more servings of fruits and vegetables than those who did not (although still far below the recommended five to nine servings a day). Shopping frequency and attitudes towards cooking were not significantly different between Fresh Moves shoppers and non-shoppers. Nor was use of Link cards. However, non-shoppers households had more adults than those of shoppers. Notably, while both groups lived a similar distance from the closest grocery store, Fresh Moves shoppers had a Fresh Moves stop located significantly closer to them. The convenience of a close stop is therefore a very good predictor of shopping at Fresh Moves. Taking into account that many non-shoppers said that they do not eat more fruits and vegetables due to leading very busy lives, convenience is an important facet of grocery shopping for them. Thus, it is likely that adding more buses and stops will increase awareness and attract more shoppers.

In general, Fresh Moves was perceived positively by both those who had experience with it, and those who did not. The comments of those who had been on the bus indicate that the biggest assets of Fresh Moves were the professionalism of the staff, competitive prices, high quality of produce, and also the perception that Fresh Moves is involved in the community, for instance by serving seniors at retirement homes. Emphasizing these aspects in outreach, advertising and news stories could help bring more attention and appreciation within the community.

One of the biggest obstacles appears to be that non-shoppers do not know enough about the Fresh Moves organization and its mobile market. Many of the suggestions about advertising would be expensive and out of reach for Fresh Moves. However, it is important to note that the non-shoppers often indicated they had seen the bus and thought that it was just a normal city bus. They indicated that the bus should be more apparent, especially when parked. A relatively low cost solution is to have a banner next to the bus inviting people to shop there. In addition, providing local residents with information about what products are available might be helpful to encourage them to shop on the bus. While distributing flyers listing products and prices might be effective, it would be costly; a cheaper solution would be to have placards on the sides of the bus with lists of products and prices. Both shoppers and non-shoppers were very excited about the idea of having a Fresh Moves song or 'jingle' that the bus could play when arriving at a location. They thought this would be a good way to let those who already shop there know the bus is coming, but also let those who never shopped there know about it. Similarly, having food demonstrations in front of the bus might produce the spectacle needed to arouse curiosity among people, which would bring them in to shop. These are small and perhaps not too expensive ways that Fresh Moves can attract more customers.

References

Food Deserts in Chicago: A Report of the Illinois Advisory Committee to the United States Commission on Civil Rights October 2011 <http://www.usccr.gov/pubs/IL-FoodDeserts-2011.pdf>

University of Illinois at Chicago Community Engagement and Neighborhood Health Partnerships, information on Austin and North Lawndale neighborhoods:
<http://www.uicni.org/page.php?section=neighborhoods&subsection=northlawndale>
<http://www.uicni.org/page.php?section=neighborhoods&subsection=austin>

Appendix. Convenience & Grocery Stores in Austin and North Lawndale Neighborhoods

Austin Convenience Stores

- [1Stop N Save](#)
- [2Joyce LLC](#)
- [3ATM \(Lorel Avenue Food Mart Inc\)](#)

Austin Grocery Stores

- [1Good Guys Grocery Inc](#)
- [2Sanford Foods](#)
- [3Best Food Grocery](#)
- [4Bargain Foods](#)
- [5Augusta Food](#)
- [6Adam Foods](#)
- [7Austin Food Mart](#)
- [8Super Low Food](#)
- [9Ftex Foods](#)
- [10Ray Ray Food Mart](#)
- [11Austin Grocery Market](#)

North Lawndale Convenience Stores

- [1M & S Gas & Food](#)
- [2Super Nick Food & Liquor](#)
- [3Adams Food Mart Plus](#)
- [4All in One](#)
- [5Rozay's Quick Stop](#)
- [6Milky Way Food Mart](#)
- [71 Stop Food Mart](#)

North Lawndale Grocery Stores

- [1Lena Washington's Food & Shelter Foundation](#)
- [2Big Daddy Food Inc](#)
- [3Sixteenth Foodmart Inc](#)
- [4Hampton's Miller China & Glass](#)
- [5Fine Fair Food & Liquors](#)
- [6Lewis Fuller Grocery](#)
- [7Nad Food Mart](#)
- [8Mountain 1 Foods](#)
- [9All in One](#)
- [1016th & Millard Food](#)
- [11A & D Food Market](#)
- [12Lawndale Food Market](#)
- [13Kumo Elnamer Inc](#)
- [14Osama Foods & Cellular](#)
- [15Eighteenth Street Food Mart](#)
- [16Sunshine Food](#)
- [17Roosevelt Food & Dollar Plus](#)

Source: Baird & Warner Real Estate 2012 http://www.bairdwarner.com/our_neighborhoods/community/