

## 2015 Food Access Overview

World PEAS Food Hub aims to build long term economic self-reliance and food security among farmers in eastern Massachusetts and their communities, and to expand access of healthy and culturally appropriate foods in underserved areas through production of locally-grown foods. To expand access to fresh produce, World PEAS establishes relationships with area community partners who then distribute our produce to historically underserved clientele. Our partners range from childcare centers, homeless shelters, and senior centers across the Greater Boston area.

### Sales and Clients Served

In 2015, World PEAS worked with a dozen organizations serving low-income clientele that we categorized as our “Food Access Partners”. These organizations graciously distributed World PEAS produce to their clients through farmers markets, produce featured in meals cooked on-site, homebound senior CSA deliveries, and more. The World PEAS Food Access sales grew significantly in 2014 and that growth continued in 2015. In total we distributed \$92,648 worth of produce to our Food Access Partners and contributed \$11,096 in subsidy to leverage their purchasing power (Chart 1). In total we served low-income and low-access clientele through 14 different distribution points.

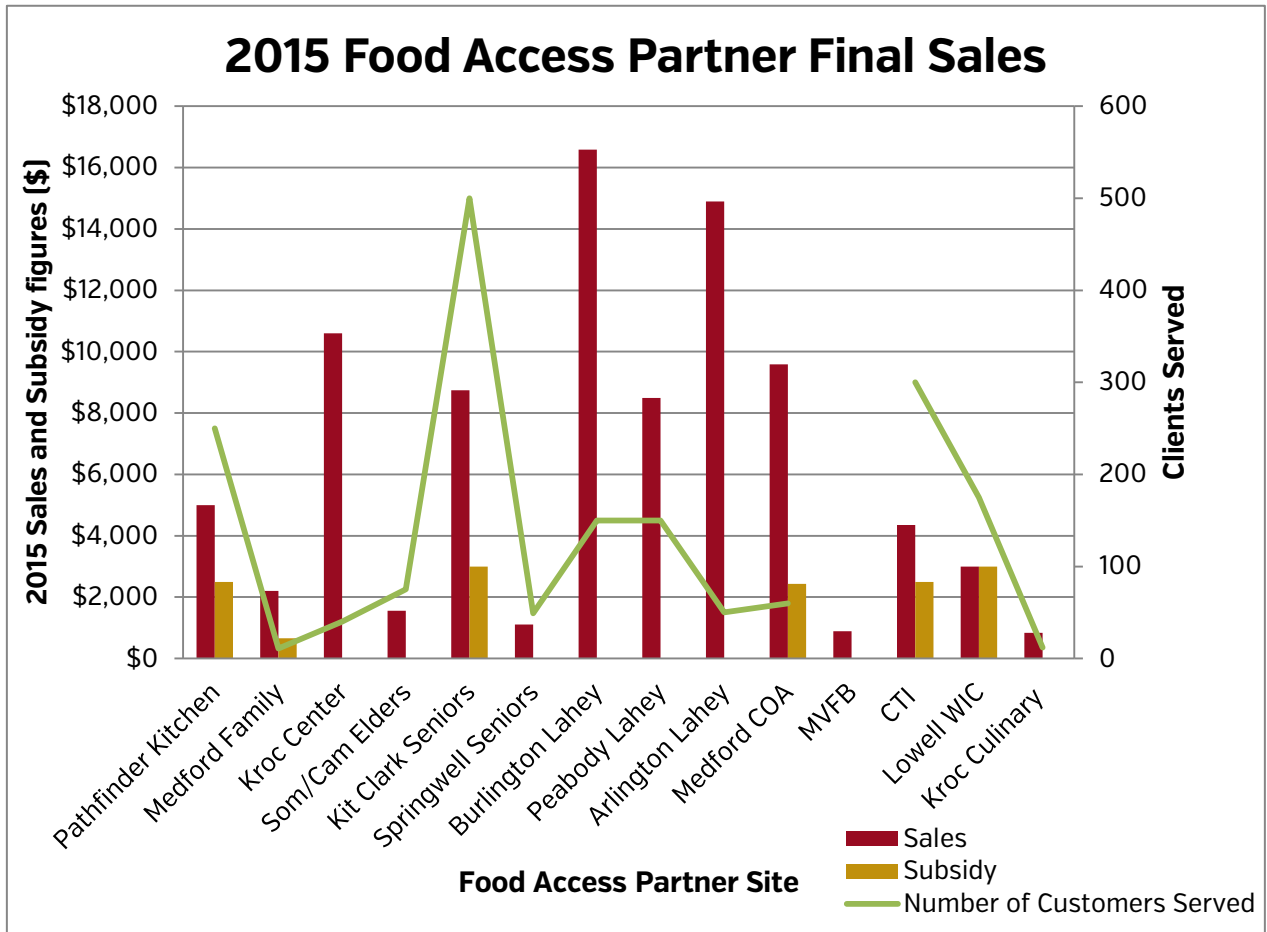


Figure 1. 2015 Food Access Partner Final Sales Numbers

In 2015, World PEAS produce reached the tables of approximately 1,800 people in some capacity. This number is lower than the 2,900 people served in 2014, but there may have been errors in the approximation of clients served in 2014. A breakdown of clients served at each location appears in Figure 1. Some clients were served in a higher capacity than others, depending on the partner distribution site. Table 1 breaks down the different capacities of clients served and the number of clients served in each bracket.

**Table 1. Breakdown of Capacity of Clients Served**

<b>Capacity of Client Served</b>	<b>Number Served</b>
Weekly Farmers Market [16 or 20 weeks]	311
One-time Homebound Senior CSA delivery	274
One Time Farmers Market	N/A*
On-site kitchen meals	1,050
WIC Drop-in clients	175

\*Approximation not available

### **Staff Feedback**

The staff at our Food Access Partner sites is critical to the success of the program as a whole. Historically, staff completed all the outreach and oversaw the distribution of the produce at their site. The success of a particular site is very dependent on staff capacity and how committed such staff is to our mission and serving their clients fresh local food. This year, with the VISTA position there was more capacity to perform visits and answer questions clients had about specific produce items on site.

In 2015 a formal End of Season Evaluation was sent out to the staff at partner sites. Feedback was overwhelmingly positive. All staff respondents were happy with the quality, variety, and delivery of the produce. The expectations of staff prior to the 2015 season all centered around connecting their clients to fresh, local produce to increase healthy habits. The evaluation revealed that not only were staff expectations met, they were exceeded. Staff at sites receiving weekly deliveries commented on the social aspect of the program as well. They felt that their clients truly enjoyed every aspect of the fresh produce program.

The overwhelmingly positive feedback came from the sites operating a farmers market style distribution suggesting that this may be the most effective outlet to connect clients to produce in a higher impact way. The newsletters were also a very important communication tool because staff could give clients resources on how to prepare the items as well.

Suggested improvements included: Tailoring recipes/produce amounts for seniors to feed 1 person (no mammoth squash), limiting amount of spicy vegetables, increasing fruit, greens with lower vitamin K.

## Food Access Impact Assessment Overview

Our success can be measured in total sales or pounds of produce delivered, but there are other social considerations in order to fully understand the impact of the fresh produce on the customer. In order to measure that impact, World PEAS staff sought customer feedback at food access sites through a paper survey tool (Appendix A).

In total, 124 responses (33% response rate) were recorded from 6 separate partner sites including Medford Produce in a SNAP, Medford Family Share, Arlington, Burlington, Springwell Inc., and Kit Clark Senior Services. Customers filled out the survey about 4 weeks before the end of their respective distribution end dates at Medford, Arlington, and Burlington. Springwell and Kit Clark clients returned the survey by mail after their Senior Home-bound CSA box delivery.



### **Key findings:**

- Average age of respondent was 74
- 74% of customers had never participated in a similar fresh produce program.
- Clients would eat more fresh produce if...
  - o They cost less - 90%
  - o They had knowledge to prepare produce - 82%
  - o They had more time - 72%
  - o They had all the ingredients - 80%
  - o If produce stored longer - 80%
  - o If client was physically able - 72%
  - o If produce was easier to purchase - 91%
- Only 26% of respondents found it difficult or very difficult to purchase produce in their neighborhood, while 73% found it very easy, easy, or neutral.
- The largest barrier to accessing fresh produce was physical disabilities (Figure 2).
- Most customers ate an average of 3 servings of fruits and vegetables a day and only cooked at home 5 times per week.
- 77% of respondents consumed everything in their distribution. Of the 22% that did not, it was mainly due to unfamiliarity with produce items or that the produce went bad before use.
- 57% of respondents did not receive any federal nutrition benefits (Table 1).
- Respondents wished for simpler recipes in the newsletter but overall were happy with the newsletter.

### *Outcomes of Fresh Produce Program*

- 94% of participants ate more fruits and vegetables

- 90% of participants self-reported that they would purchase and consume fresher produce in the future
- 94% of participants will cook more fresh it

Table 2 Client Eligibility for Federal Nutrition Benefits

Federal Benefit	% of respondents eligible
SNAP	23%
FMNP	13%**
WIC	3%
None	57%

\*\*Inaccurate self-report

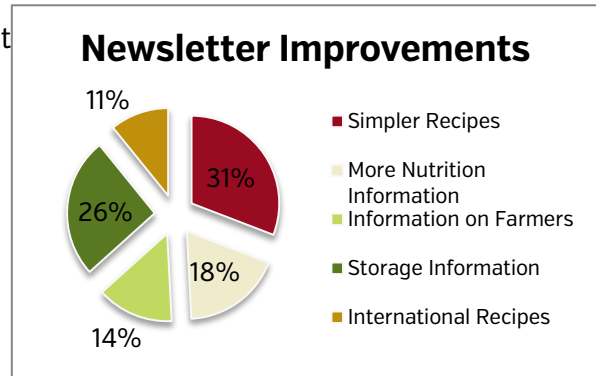


Figure 2. Suggested Newsletter Improvements based on participant feedback

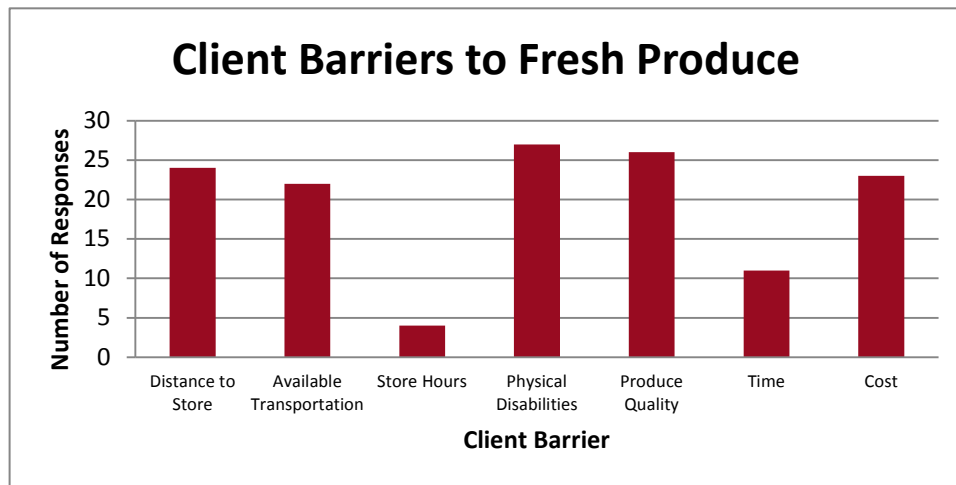


Figure 3. Client Access Barriers to Fresh Produce

## Trends

The impact assessment data exposes trends that can be relevant for future decisions regarding food access work. Most importantly, the data suggests that clients would be consuming more fresh produce on a regular basis if barriers to access were decreased. Specifically, physical disabilities and cost are the greatest barriers for respondents. Transportation was also a limiting factor, which may be related to physical disabilities and age.

Contrary to expected results, almost  $\frac{3}{4}$  of respondents found it easy to access fresh produce in their community. Respondents may have confused the question's language because the same survey respondents also cited multiple barriers to access yielding conflicting data trends.

Once analyzed, the data regarding client eligibility for federal nutrition benefits suggests inaccuracy of respondents answers. Only 13% of respondents reported that they received Farmers Market Nutrition Program Coupons [FMNP]. We know, through data tracking,

that at least 47% of respondents are eligible for the FMNP benefits. However, two partners collect the FMNP coupons on behalf of their clients and therefore clients may be unaware of their eligibility.

Overall, clients overwhelmingly felt that the fresh produce program made them eat more vegetables and clients will continue to eat more fresh items even after the distribution ends. Greater consumption of fresh produce is ultimately the goal of the food access program so data verifying the goal is extremely promising.

### **Selected Testimonials**

"It has made me consume vegetables that I would not purchase on my own."

"I want to thank Lahey Clinic for giving us this farmers market. I thoroughly enjoy everything you gave me. I also enjoy the history about the farmers and where the produce comes from. I also like your recipes. I hope they do it again next year. Thank you again. "

"I actually enjoy trying the new and unfamiliar items because it forces me to think outside of the box and try new things"

"Some items are strange to me but I cooked with them. The newsletter is very helpful with info on veggies, farmers and recipes. This week I made lemongrass tea and used leeks in potato soup"

"Very excellent program. It has helped me keep up good nutrition through the summer and I have enjoyed the produce I did not know about."



