

From Prison Bus to Mobile Market: Driving Out Obesity in DeKalb County, GA

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At A Glance

As of July 2015, at least 52,000 people living in food deserts across DeKalb County, GA, have better access to healthy food options. Through partnerships with the DeKalb County Board of Health and DeKalb County Government, the DeKalb County Extension converted a former prison bus into the DeKalb Mobile Farmers' Market. The bus makes 10 weekly stops in low-income areas, where fruits and vegetables are often difficult to find and purchase. This allows residents to buy fresh produce for less than what they'd pay at grocery stores far from home.



Public Health Challenge

DeKalb County has some of the highest rates of obesity in the state of Georgia. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), almost a third of adults and nearly 1 in 5 high school students in DeKalb County are obese. Factors that contribute to the county's high obesity rates include lack of access to healthy and affordable food and lack of resources. In these types of communities, commonly known as food deserts, many people may not have easy

access to grocery stores or have the resources to purchase healthier food options. Many of the food deserts in DeKalb County are located in low-income African American communities. Although the county has multiple farmers' markets that provide fresh produce, the majority of them are located in areas that are not considered food deserts. To shop and eat healthier, people need access to affordable fruits and vegetables where they live.

Find Out More

For more information about the mobile farmers' market in DeKalb County and how to get involved, visit www.dekalbmobilemarket.com. The DeKalb County Extension is currently accepting submissions for new stops. This project is supported by CDC's Racial and Ethnic Approaches to Community Health (REACH) cooperative agreement.

Everyone should have the opportunity to eat healthier no matter where they live. This market moves us closer to that goal in DeKalb County. I'd like to see it be year-round and to include schools and students in our mission.

- Rebecca Hardeman,
Operations Manager, DeKalb
Mobile Farmers' Market

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Approach

The DeKalb County Extension used CDC funding and partnerships with the DeKalb County Board of Health and DeKalb County Government to roll out a creative solution for families living in food deserts. A former prison bus operated by the DeKalb County Sheriff's Office was remodeled to function as a mobile farmers' market. The DeKalb Mobile Farmers' Market makes weekly stops at recreation centers, apartment complexes, churches, and other community hubs in low-income areas across the county. Customers can purchase fresh, affordable produce using Electronic Benefit Transfer cards, checks, credit cards, and cash. Community members also receive food preparation tips, healthy recipes, and samples.

Results

With 10 weekly stops in food deserts across DeKalb County, this initiative has increased access to healthy food options for 52,000 residents. Since the mobile farmers' market launched in July 2015, 3,000 customers have purchased produce and 9,800 pounds of fresh produce have been distributed. That's enough people to fill a standard-size bus, like the one used to run the market, at least 55 times. Community members who could not access fresh produce before have gained exposure to new foods and healthy recipes through cooking demonstrations at each stop. The mobile farmers' market has also benefited two local charities. During its first season, the mobile farmers' market made weekly donations of quality fruits and vegetables to the Ronald McDonald House and the Metro Atlanta Task Force for the Homeless.

What's Next

To ensure the DeKalb Mobile Farmers' Market continues to succeed, the DeKalb County Board of Health and the DeKalb County Extension are actively applying for additional funds through other funding mechanisms. The goal is to double the number of stops by September 2017 with better marketing efforts and more personnel. While previous advertising was limited to word-of-mouth, flyers, and electronic mailing lists, a local radio broadcasting network will be used to promote upcoming seasons. Organizations that are approved to become new mobile market stops will be required to supply volunteers.