

Combating Food Insecurity in Rural America

I. Introduction

A. Purpose Statement: Americans in rural communities are at the highest percent of food insecurity of all communities across the country. A program will be put into place where farmers of their own communities can provide necessary food for people in need, by selling it to this organization. From there the organization can distribute the food among those in the communities who need support.

B. Title: Farmers for their Communities

II. Project Overview

A. With "Farmers to their Communities" our goal is to combat the ongoing issue of food insecurity in rural areas. By creating a system where the farmers of their own communities can be the people to provide for their friends, families, and neighbors, the communities will grow stronger and gain support from one another. This program will purchase the food from the farmers to ensure they are still making money off their work, and from there volunteers working with the program will divide the produce, dairy, and meat evenly into portions for families. Those portions will be picked up by the families in the communities from a central town hall of community center.

B. Both the families in need and the farmers are benefiting from this system. It allows the communities to keep their dignity when needing help, and feel more comfortable getting that help. With the installation of this program we hope to decrease the percent of people within rural areas that are lacking adequate food, and to create a sustainable system for this to continue to work in the future.

People in these communities will always need food, and the farmers will always need someone to purchase their products, so the program is ensured to be feasible.

III. Problem Statement

A. In the United States food insecurity is a major issue, with 10.5% of Americans facing difficulties. Rural communities are especially vulnerable to this problem with about 16.5% of people experiencing food insecurity. This lack of resources and ability to obtain sufficient food in rural communities is due to the lower financial state of many of these people. Communities in rural areas are often much poorer, and do not have as convenient access to food retailers, whether that be due to lack of transportation or proximity to the stores. Many of the food retailers in these rural areas do not even carry fresh or affordable food options. Rural communities are often overlooked because they are less populated, and issues within them are harder to deal with on a larger scale than in cities where the people live closer in proximity. Due to this, rural communities need assistance from this program. The design of the program, where farmers within the communities themselves help those people, allows it to work across more communities without the need for one main location. Similar programs to this have been implemented as well. In response to the corona virus the government sponsored the "Farmers to Families" food drive program. It worked in a similar manner, with surplus of food from farms being shared with communities in need. The program was able to distribute "157,996,398 [boxes] of fresh produce, milk, dairy and cooked meats to disadvantaged Americans across the country." This program has been extremely successful and has been able to help communities

that have applied for the assistance. The government funded SNAP program, formerly known as “food stamps” has also helped to alleviate the difficulties of food insecurity for disadvantaged communities. The success of this program shows that when these people are presented with resources to help, they are used and do make a difference.

IV. Project Goals

- A. Provide access to healthy food for families in rural communities that are lacking in proper nutrition, to combat the lack of resources in those communities.
- B. Improve the stigma around needing assistance in providing food by keeping the source of the food within the community, from the farmers.

V. Project Objectives

- A. Decrease the need for other food supply programs such as SNAP for the families by 30%.
- B. Increase the portion of food consumed by the families that is nutritious and fresh by 1.5 times the amount.
- C. Increase the number of families who accept the food that are in need in these communities by 50%.
- D. Decrease the waste farmers in the communities have of their products over the year by 20%.

VI. Methodology

- A. (One year to make sure to consider all areas)
 - 1. Start by utilizing government resources to identify rural communities that are in the most need. Once Identified, send representatives to each location

to scope out the communities and farmers in the area. Select locations that would work best for the program and begin to plan.

2. In the locations that were chosen, use representatives to speak with local officials to determine where the program could distribute food from, and to ensure it would be beneficial to the community. Once the location is approved by the communities officials, the farmers must be communicated with as well. They will reach out to each farmer via phone or email to list the details.

B. (3 months to go through all of the information and expectations)

1. Send representatives to the farms in the community, making sure to go to dairy, meet, and produce farms so that a balanced supply of food could be provided. Talk with the farmers to see where they are having surpluses of food, or where they have food they could sell, so the program can identify how much exactly they can expect when purchasing from these farmers.

C. (3 months to ensure the information reaches enough people)

1. After all the information is addressed and collected for the community and farms, the programs advertising and team need to begin to be built. A graphic designer must create a fun and exciting logo that is eye catching and memorable so the program gains more initial traction.
2. Once the image of the program is created, the information about the program must also be shared. A publicist must create flyers and pamphlets using the graphic design that can be distributed within the communities to alert families in need of the program.

3. The handouts can also work to gather volunteers. Since the program is a nonprofit all those helping to distribute the food will not be paid so they must volunteer. Flyers and pamphlets can also be sent around in neighboring communities they are less impoverished to gain volunteers that are not in need of food themselves.
4. Use the graphic designer and a digital publicist to create a website to also share all of the information. On the website there can be a place for the volunteers to sign up and share their contact information. As well as a place for the families in need to register to pick up food.
5. The volunteers should all sign up online so they can be contacted with the necessary information on what to expect when they volunteer and what they are expected to do.
6. The families registering on the website helps to keep track of the statistics and have an idea of how many people are utilizing the program for the next time so enough food is gathered. In addition to comparing the changes in the program over time.

D. (2 weeks to one month depending on when a volunteer signs up)

1. Once volunteers are collected and information is distributed, refrigerated trucks will need to travel to the farms to pick up the food that is purchased by the program and bring it back to a central location. That location will vary depending on the community. It is a space that is approved by the local officials that has room for the food to be divided up and made into boxes.

E. (Over the course of one day per distribution day)

1. With all of the food at one location per community, the volunteers will work to create boxes that each contain a little bit of everything so families can have the basics to help feed them throughout the next week or couple of days, depending on how often the program is needed in the community.
2. The families will be scheduled to arrive shortly after the boxes are created so they can be distributed as quickly as possible, since there are perishable items. There will be a drive through as well as a walk up option. Whichever option works best for the family is allowed as long as they check in with one of the volunteers working at the entrances to check to see if they were pre registered. If they are not pre-registered they are still allowed to benefit from the program, but are encouraged to pre-register next time to help the program gather data over time.
3. In the drive through option, volunteers will be ready to put boxes in the back of the peoples cars. The walk up option is available for families who may not have their own transportation, and anyone who chooses to do so.
4. For every person that takes a box, they should also be given two flyers, one so they have all the information to sign up for the next time, and one to share with a family member or friend, so the program can begin to help more people.
5. If there are boxes remaining at the end of the distribution time, then they can be donated to local homeless shelters or police stations to ensure they are distributed to people who will use the food before they go bad.

F. (1 week following the distribution day)

1. After each distribution day, the leaders of each community's program will gather together to communicate with each other and create a document with all the information and statistics from the day that can be shared with the program's officials. All of the information from all of the communities can be compared and used to make necessary adjustments for the next distribution day.

VII. Summary and Evaluation

- A. The effects of the program have been immense. With the implantation of “Farmer for Their Communities,” in many rural communities lacrosse the US, we have seen many families gain access to health food and no longer need to rely as heavily on government funded programs. Due to the overwhelming support from volunteers, the program has been very efficient and worked as planned. The farmers are also benefiting from this program. They have gained a stable and consistent customer in this program, and have benefited from being a part of a good cause for their community. The culture around people receiving the food boxes is also very positive. Since this is a community based program that it is, people do not feel as ashamed to go to the distribution day and receive the food.
- B. To evaluate the effects of the program within a year, the information gathered by the community leaders could be used to see the number of people who attend and the amount of food distributed. Surveys can also be sent out to the families receiving the food and the volunteers helping to see their input on what isn't working and what could be used for fixing for the next time. Gathering

information from each group involved in the program ensures everyone will benefit from the changes and additions.. The farmers could also be surveyed to make sure they way their goods are being bought and their interactions with the program representative are positive and work well for them.

- C. To evaluate the program over a long period of time, the other strategies could be continued yearly to continue to gain information annually to make changes. To see how the program has changed over a long period of time, old volunteers could be contacted and new ones to gain feedback and to compare responses. The communities responses from the current year could be compared to the initial years as well as those of the farmers to see how the responses have changed and to determine if they have become more positive or negative. All of the information and statistics gained over the years can also be used to see how the objectives have been met.
- D. From the one year and multi year evaluations, data can be used to evaluate a number of outcomes. Whether or not the number of people without access to proper food has decreased, and by what percent. How many people no longer need food stamps. If the number of people who are in need and accept food donations increases. If there's a decrease in the amount of waste by farmers. As well as if there is an improvement with the stigma around needing assistance in these rural communities.

VIII.

References

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