

Farmers' Market Nutrition Program Landscape Scan Report



Executive Summary

Introduction

For over 50 years, the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) has supported low-income families by providing access to nutritious food, breastfeeding support, and nutrition education. The WIC Farmers' Market Nutrition Program (FMNP), established in 1992, furthers this mission by connecting WIC participants with fresh, locally grown produce while supporting farmers. Despite its benefits, barriers such as transportation challenges, limited market hours, and awareness gaps hinder program effectiveness and redemption rates.

To address these challenges, the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) has invested \$390 million in modernizing WIC and FMNP through expanded electronic options (eFMNP) and increased adoption of the Cash Value Benefit (CVB) at farmers' markets. This report examines the implementation of FMNP, eFMNP, and CVB, identifying facilitators and barriers to success.

Guided by an equity-focused, mixed-methods approach, this evaluation draws on data from the National WIC Association's Farmers' Market Landscape Analysis Survey with responses from 32 WIC Agencies across 27 states and in-depth interviews with 26 WIC stakeholders across 6 states. By synthesizing quantitative and qualitative insights, the report highlights promising practices that can enhance program accessibility and improve redemption rates.

Key Findings

The findings are organized into three sections - FMNP, eFMNP, and CVB - each outlining facilitators that enhance implementation and redemption, barriers that limit effectiveness, and promising practices that offer solutions and pathways to success.

Farmers' Market Nutrition Program (FMNP)

Facilitators

- **Funding:** All FMNP sites receive USDA administrative dollars, with 91% securing additional funding from state-match dollars, ARPA grants, or USDA e-solution grants.
- **Farmer & Market Authorization:** States that authorize both farmers and markets have broader participant access.
- **Farmer & Participant Outreach:** Personal engagement, pop-up markets, and WIC staff presence at markets improved recruitment and redemption.

Barriers

- **Farmer Enrollment Challenges:** Farmers cited lack of awareness, complex processes, and administrative burdens as deterrents to participation.
- **Voucher Distribution Issues:** Staffing constraints and participant scheduling challenges made distributing paper vouchers difficult.
- **Access Issues:** Transportation limitations, inconvenient hours, and a shortage of authorized farmers' markets hindered redemption.

Promising Practices

- **Education & Incentives:** Culturally relevant food demonstrations, cooking supplies, and multilingual resources enhanced engagement.
- **On-Site Distribution:** Providing vouchers at farmers' markets or WIC clinics increased convenience and accessibility.
- **Community Engagement:** Involving WIC community coordinators and trusted local partners fosters culturally relevant outreach and strengthens trust among participants.

Electronic Farmers' Market Nutrition Program (eFMNP)

eFMNP Facilitators

- Farmer Outreach: Personalized engagement methods, such as how-to videos, in-person training, and text messaging, were highly effective in recruiting and retaining farmers.
- Technology Benefits: QR codes streamlined transactions, reduced administrative burdens, and improved efficiency.
- Community Champions: Trusted local leaders and experienced farmers played a critical role in farmer education and outreach, increasing program participation.
- State & Local Outreach: WIC mobile app push notifications, pop-up markets, text messaging, and in-person interactions at farmers' markets were effective outreach strategies.

eFMNP Barriers

- Farmer Resistance to Technology: Hesitancy toward digital banking and difficulty with account setup slowed adoption.
- Limited Internet Access: Poor connectivity at farmers' markets led to transaction delays, system malfunctions, and frustration among participants and vendors.
- Participant Awareness Gaps: Many WIC participants were unaware of eFMNP benefits or how to use them.
- Operational Challenges: Staffing constraints, funding limitations, and contract re-procurement hindered implementation efforts.

eFMNP Promising Practices

- Comprehensive Training & Ongoing Support: Ongoing, multilingual training for staff and farmers—including webinars, on-site technical assistance, and dedicated hotlines—helped streamline the transition to eFMNP.
- Farmer-to-Farmer Advocacy: Experienced farmers shared success stories to encourage peers to enroll.
- Expanded Outreach: WIC staff presence at markets, text reminders, and community partnerships increased awareness.

Cash Value Benefit (CVB)

CVB Facilitators

- Personalized Farmer Outreach: Phone calls, mailed flyers, in-person meetings, and virtual trainings were effective outreach strategies.
- Integration: Some states streamlined transactions by integrating FMNP and CVB, allowing farmers to accept both benefits, thus increasing participant access.
- Participant Engagement: WIC mobile app push notifications, text messaging, and staff presence at markets improved awareness and redemption.

CVB Barriers

- Farmer Hesitancy & Technology Challenges: Complex sign-up processes and device costs discouraged participation.
- Limited Access: A shortage of farmers' markets accepting CVB, especially in the off-season, restricted redemption.
- Participant Confusion: WIC participants did not fully understand CVB rules and struggled to distinguish CVB from FMNP.
- Operational Constraints: Lack of capacity, funding, and state-level buy-in were barriers.

CVB Promising Practices

- Clear Participant Education: Proactive outreach, such as statewide promotion campaigns and clear benefit explanations, helped participants better understand and utilize CVB.
- Expanded Market Access: Leveraging larger WIC resources and dual-benefit providers improved accessibility, ensuring that all WIC participants—not just FMNP recipients—could purchase fresh produce at farmers' markets.
- Optimized Benefit Use: Prioritizing FMNP transactions before CVB maximized available funds.

Recommendations

1. Strengthen Funding & Community Partnerships

- Expand funding sources to support farmer recruitment, participant education, and improved technology infrastructure.
- Leverage community partnerships by engaging trusted local leaders, volunteers, and organizations to enhance outreach and program accessibility.

2. Improve Farmer Recruitment & Support

- Simplify enrollment processes and provide multilingual, hands-on training to increase farmer participation.
- Address technology barriers by offering step-by-step guidance, how-to videos, and on-site troubleshooting to help farmers adopt eFMNP and CVB systems.
- Build trust with farmers through peer advocacy, clear communication on benefits, and ongoing support.

3. Enhance Participant Awareness & Access

- Expand voucher distribution options (e.g., mailing vouchers, on-site distribution at farmers' markets) to improve FMNP accessibility.
- Strengthen participant education through mobile app push notifications, text reminders, and in-person WIC staff support at markets.
- Address misconceptions about farmers' market pricing and increase culturally relevant food offerings to boost engagement.

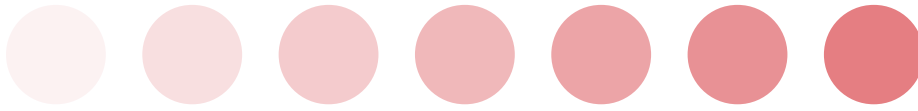
4. Optimize Market Access & Program Integration

- Expand farmers' market participation by addressing transportation barriers, extending market hours, and piloting mobile markets or food delivery options.
- Integrate FMNP and CVB transactions to streamline processes, improve efficiency, and maximize participant benefits.
- Improve digital infrastructure by ensuring reliable internet access at markets and providing real-time payment processing solutions.

Conclusion

The findings highlight the successes and challenges of FMNP, eFMNP, and CVB. While funding, farmer engagement, and outreach strategies have strengthened the programs, persistent barriers - including technology adoption, limited market access, and participant awareness gaps - continue to hinder full program utilization. Efforts to modernize FMNP through eFMNP and CVB show promise in improving efficiency and accessibility. However, successful implementation requires ongoing farmer and participant education, streamlined processes, and stronger infrastructure support to ensure equitable access to fresh, locally grown produce for WIC participants.

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Acknowledgments

The National WIC Association (NWA) is the nonprofit voice for the 12,000 public health nutrition service provider agencies that support over 6.7 million mothers, babies, and young children through WIC. NWA provides education, guidance, and support to WIC staff; and drives innovation and advocacy to strengthen WIC as we work toward a nation of healthier families. For more information, visit www.nwica.org.

In 2023, NWA received a grant from the Elevance Health Foundation to launch the *Increasing Access to Healthy Food Through Farmers' Markets* initiative, a groundbreaking “food as medicine” program. This three-year project aims to expand access to fresh, nutritious foods for low-income families by enhancing their ability to use the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) benefits at farmers' markets. The initiative focuses on increasing participation in the Farmers' Market Nutrition Program (FMNP) and the core WIC fruit and vegetable Cash Value Benefit (CVB).

We would like to extend our heartfelt gratitude to all those who contributed to this report. First and foremost, we thank the survey respondents and interviewees (WIC participants, farmers, farmers' market managers, and WIC sites), who generously shared their time and experiences. Their open, honest, and reflective feedback added richness to this report, making it a valuable resource for understanding the lived experiences of those these programs serve.

A sincere thank you to Elevance Health Foundation for funding this transformational work. Your support of this three-year project has made it possible for us to explore the challenges and opportunities within these programs, paving the way for future improvements.

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Introduction

For over 50 years, the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) has been helping families access healthy food, breastfeeding support, effective nutrition education, and referrals to social and health services. WIC currently serves almost 7 million women, infants, and children across the United States and is regarded as the original “food as medicine” program. WIC furthers this mission by expanding access to fresh, local produce through initiatives like the Farmers’ Market Nutrition Program (FMNP).

WIC FMNP was first established by Congress in 1992 to address two critical needs: improving access to fresh, locally grown produce for low-income families and supporting farmers through increased sales at farmers’ markets. The program provides annual benefits ranging from \$10 to \$30 per participant during the farmers’ market season, which can be used to purchase fresh fruits, vegetables, and herbs from authorized farmers, farmers’ markets, and roadside stands.¹ In fiscal year 2017, FMNP served approximately 1.7 million participants, authorized 16,815 farmers, 3,312 farmers’ markets and 2,367 roadside stands, generating about \$17 million in revenue for farmers.² By 2021, farmer’s income had increased to \$29.8 million from WIC FMNP and \$23.7 million from Senior FMNP.³ Currently, FMNP operates across 49 states, six Indian Tribal Organizations (ITOs), and Puerto Rico.⁴

WIC FMNP plays a pivotal role in promoting health equity by serving low-income pregnant women,

postpartum and breastfeeding mothers, infants, and young children. Research suggests that participation in FMNP can increase fruit and vegetable consumption among low-income women. However, barriers such as limited transportation options, inconvenient market hours and locations, and lack of awareness about the program can contribute to less program effectiveness and low redemption rates.^{5 6} These challenges highlight the need for targeted interventions to ensure equitable access and utilization of benefits.

The United States Department of Agriculture’s (USDA) Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) has invested \$390 million from the American Rescue Plan Act of 2021 to modernize and improve WIC and WIC Farmers’ Market Nutrition Program.⁷ This investment aims to increase enrollment and retention, address disparities in program delivery, and ensure more equitable access to nutritious foods.⁸ Guided by extensive stakeholder input, key strategies include developing a national outreach campaign, implementing participant-centered design in program processes, and expanding electronic benefit options.⁹ The focus of these modernization efforts is to address barriers through the implementation of electronic solutions for the Farmers’ Market Nutrition Program (eFMNP) and Cash Value Benefits (CVB) at farmers’ markets.

This report examines the implementation of FMNP, eFMNP, and CVB programs across the nation, focusing on key facilitators and barriers to success. The landscape scan included an analysis of existing research, survey data, and in-depth interviews with

WIC participants, farmers, and WIC staff at the state and local levels. This thorough process allowed us to identify promising practices for improving redemption rates and overcoming challenges. Our goal is to provide a comprehensive understanding of the current state of these programs while offering actionable insights that can guide future improvements and innovations.

WIC FMNP

What is WIC FMNP?

WIC FMNP is a federal initiative designed to enhance the nutritional well-being of low-income women, infants, and children. The program serves a dual purpose to:

- 1) improve participant health by facilitating access to fresh, locally grown fruits and vegetables, and
- 2) support local economies by increasing awareness and patronage at farmers' markets.

Through FMNP, WIC participants receive benefits to purchase fresh, nutritious produce directly from authorized farmers, farmers' markets, and roadside stands. This approach not only ensures that underserved populations have access to fresh, nutritious, locally grown fruits, vegetables and herbs while supporting local agriculture and sustainable food systems. By bridging the gap between nutrition assistance and local food production, the WIC FMNP exemplifies a holistic approach to addressing food insecurity while fostering community development.

How does WIC FMNP work?

WIC FMNP operates through a coordinated system involving multiple stakeholders. At its core, the program relies on collaborations between key groups including administrators, farmers, and WIC participants. State Agencies must submit a detailed plan for program implementation, operation, and delivery, with funding covering 100% of food costs and 70% of administrative costs (the remaining 30% requiring a match). As a discretionary program,

funding is determined annually by Congress. The USDA Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) provides guidance on submitting amendments to WIC FMNP State Plans, which require approval from the FNS Regional Office and may include operational changes like transitioning to electronic solutions. The process continues with farmer approval, where interested growers must meet USDA and State Agency requirements to participate. Simultaneously, WIC staff undergo training to effectively distribute benefits and explain the program to eligible participants. WIC staff educate participants about the types of produce available and the locations of approved farmers' markets. This education extends beyond information sharing and often includes nutrition education, cooking demonstrations, and promotional events to encourage participation, with the overall goal of improving and expanding diets to include fresh fruits and vegetables.

The redemption process entails participants using their vouchers with approved vendors to purchase fresh, local produce. Farmers then either stamp paper coupons for reimbursement or use electronic systems for direct deposit. This interaction between farmers and participants is more than a transaction; it's an opportunity for community engagement and education about different types of produce and food preparation methods.



Throughout the entire process, communication and collaboration remain key. The program not only provides nutritional benefits to low-resourced populations but also supports local agriculture and fosters community connections. **By design, FMNP creates a sustainable cycle of health and economic benefits, exemplifying how thoughtful policy can address complex social issues while strengthening local food systems.**

Effectiveness of WIC FMNP

FMNP has demonstrated broad-reaching benefits across multiple areas, including improved nutrition, increased accessibility of fresh produce and engagement in the program, economic gains for farmers, and strengthened community partnerships. One key success is FMNP's role in enhancing fruit and vegetable consumption among WIC participants. Across studies, participants reported that the program helped supplement their family meals with fresh produce, leading to an increase in fruit and vegetable intake, particularly among mothers who learned new food preparation and storage techniques.^{10 11} In a study examining Georgia's WIC FMNP, nutrition education emerged as a key factor in improving dietary habits, with 59% of participants learning new ways to store fresh produce and 57% of participants learning new ways to prepare fresh produce.¹² Anderson et al. (2001) found that low-income families in Michigan who received FMNP combined with nutrition education saw greater increases in fruit and vegetable consumption than those who received only one of these benefits.¹³



Another key success is program accessibility and engagement, which directly relates to FMNP redemption rates and continued participation. Participants expressed positive perceptions of the program, noting the WIC program was an important and trusted resource. A study conducted with WIC participants in Washington, DC and Charlotte, NC demonstrated that women with previous experience receiving and redeeming FMNP benefits had higher rates of using farmers' markets.¹⁴ Innovative strategies such as text message reminders and the "Grab Bag" program (where participants picked up pre-packaged produce at WIC offices) successfully increased voucher redemption and improved access to fresh produce.¹⁵

Beyond the benefits to participants, FMNP has also had positive economic impacts for local farmers. A study done in the early 2000s stated farmers gained 7-9% more than the coupon redemption value through additional purchases, and the net economic welfare gain was 20-30% of the coupon redemption value.¹⁶ Additionally, collaborative community partnerships played a crucial role in program success, such as state and local leadership involvement, agencies serving low-income families, and connections with other local agriculture to expand beyond produce.¹⁷ Efforts such as hosting satellite markets, increasing state-level collaboration, and launching new educational programs help ensure that the program remains responsive to community needs. The combination of education, accessibility, and strong community partnerships has proven integral to the continued success and expansion of FMNP.

Challenges to WIC FMNP's Effectiveness

Research indicates WIC FMNP faces a range of challenges that impact its effectiveness and redemption rates. These issues span from participant, market, and administrative domains, creating a complex landscape for program implementation.

On the participant side, accessibility and transportation remain significant hurdles, with many WIC families struggling to reach farmers' markets due to inconvenient locations or lack of transportation options.^{18 19} This is compounded by time constraints, as market hours often conflict with work schedules or personal responsibilities, particularly challenging for low-income families with young children.²⁰ Knowledge gaps and lack of confidence also play a role, with many participants unsure about market locations,

available produce, and how to effectively use their FMNP benefits.^{21 22}

Market-related challenges can further complicate achieving high redemption rates and successful implementation. Some participants perceive farmers' market prices as higher than conventional stores, deterring them from shopping there.²³ Limited variety of produce or lack of culturally appropriate options can also discourage participation from diverse communities.^{24 25}

Administrative challenges add another layer of complexity for State and Local WIC staff. Noted is the need to standardize processes and informational materials across sites and between stakeholders to improve implementation.²⁶ Funding limitations constrain program implementation, expansion, and marketing efforts.²⁷ Additionally, WIC Agencies conducting nutrition education may lack appropriate facilities for cooking demonstrations, limiting their ability to provide comprehensive nutrition education.²⁸

Addressing these multifaceted challenges requires a comprehensive approach that considers the intricate interplay between participant needs, market realities, and administrative capabilities to achieve meaningful improvements in program effectiveness and redemption rates. Three major strategies have been identified to strengthen WIC FMNP: educating participants on how to use FMNP benefits, ensuring market accessibility, and improving farmers' market quality.

CVB

What is WIC Cash Value Benefit (CVB)? How does it work?

The WIC Cash Value Benefit/Voucher (CVB/Voucher) is a fixed monthly dollar amount provided to WIC participants in addition to their regular WIC benefits, allowing them to purchase fruits and vegetables from authorized vendors. This benefit aligns with WIC's mission to improve nutrition among low-income families and promote eating a varied diet with an array of local, fresh fruits and vegetables. Recently, State Agencies have begun exploring the implementation of CVB at farmers' markets, though this presents unique challenges due to differing requirements and guidelines compared to WIC FMNP.

In March 2021, Congress temporarily increased the CVB amount to \$35 per child per month, a boost that many participants fully utilized.²⁹ In September 2021,

this temporary increase was extended, contributing to "a quarter-cup per day increase in fruit and vegetable consumption by WIC-enrolled children".³⁰ Recognizing the positive impact, the 2024 revised food package made CVB benefits permanent, with annual adjustments for inflation.³¹ This update aligns with the latest Dietary Guidelines and reflects recommendations from the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine (NASEM) originally published in 2017. Beyond the financial adjustment, the revised food package also enhances flexibility for participants by expanding the selection of eligible WIC items. As of 2024, CVB amounts are set at \$26 for child participants, \$47 for pregnant and postpartum participants, and \$52 for those who are mostly or fully breastfeeding.³²

Effectiveness of CVB

Shortly after the CVB increase took effect, it was linked to improvements in diet quality.³³ Caregivers overwhelmingly supported the increase, noting that it enabled them to purchase a greater variety and quantity of fresh produce, significantly enhancing their families' diets.³⁴

The majority of CVB redemptions occur at stores rather than farmers' markets. For example, in 2014, participants in California—the nation's largest WIC program—redeemed \$73,000 of the \$87.6 million in CVB benefits at farmers' markets.³⁵

Challenges to CVB's Effectiveness

While participants have reported high satisfaction with the CVB increase, limited data exists on its impact on fruit and vegetable (FV) redemption, as well as the facilitators and barriers WIC Agencies face in implementation.³⁶

Using CVB at farmers' markets presents a unique set of challenges distinct from FMNP. Stakeholder feedback has highlighted both overlapping and distinct concerns. For example, in 2014, California farmers' market managers and farmers surveyed reported that CVBs present more challenges than the benefits issued through FMNP.³⁷ Specific difficulties include a higher administrative burden, increased training requirements for farmers on CVB authorization, complex reimbursement processes, and a shorter window for benefit redemption.³⁸ As implementation evolves, further research is needed to identify promising practices to improve program effectiveness.

Methods

This evaluation was designed to provide a comprehensive understanding of the Farmers' Market Nutrition Program (FMNP) and Cash Value Benefit (CVB) within the context of farmers' markets, using the facilitators and barriers identified in the literature as a foundation. The aim was to offer actionable insights and recommendations for equitable improvements to these programs.

Evaluation Questions

- 1) What facilitators do WIC State Agencies experience when implementing FMNP (voucher and eFMNP) and CVB usage at farmers' markets?
- 2) What barriers do WIC State Agencies experience when implementing FMNP (voucher and eFMNP) and CVB usage at farmers' markets?
- 3) What are the facilitators of increased FMNP and CVB redemption at farmers' markets?
- 4) What are the barriers to FMNP and CVB redemption at farmers' markets?
- 5) What are some promising practices for FMNP and CVB implementation and redemption that can be utilized by Local and State WIC Agencies?

Evaluation Design

The Urban Metrics Consultants (UMC) evaluation team employed an explanatory mixed-method design with a strong equity focus to conduct this landscape analysis. Data were gathered from two primary sources: the National WIC Association (NWA) Farmers' market Landscape Analysis Survey and in-depth interviews with stakeholders at various WIC sites. This mixed-methods approach allowed UMC to capture the full spectrum of WIC stakeholder experiences, combining the breadth of quantitative findings with the depth of qualitative insights. By initially collecting quantitative data through surveys and then following up with qualitative interviews, the evaluation team was able to elaborate on key findings and explore underlying factors influencing program effectiveness.

Phase One

Phase One consisted of conducting a review of the literature on WIC, FMNP, and CVB to identify existing knowledge and insights. The UMC team reviewed both academic and grey literature – non-scholarly, but legitimate publications – to understand the breadth of experiences within WIC. This literature review provided a solid foundation for understanding the facilitators, barriers, and promising practices associated with FMNP and CVB, offering valuable context for the subsequent phases of the evaluation. It also highlighted a dearth of information on current and actionable promising practices. Therefore, this report will fill a gap in the literature by offering State and Local WIC staff practical promising practices that can aid in the successful implementation of FMNP.

Phase Two

Phase Two of the project involved reviewing and analyzing preexisting data from the National WIC Association's Farmers' Market Landscape Analysis Survey. This survey was distributed via email to all 88 WIC Agencies. The survey collected data on states' participation in FMNP and CVB at farmers' markets, use of paper vs. electronic benefits, FMNP benefit redemption data, and successful approaches to boost awareness and redemption of FMNP and CVB benefits.

Phase Three

The information and data obtained in Phases One and Two informed Phase Three, which involved in-depth interviews with key FMNP stakeholders. During the landscape data analysis, three site types stood out as exemplars for exploring facilitators, barriers, and promising practices related to FMNP and CVB programs:

- 1) non-implementer sites
- 2) high redemption paper voucher sites
- 3) high redemption eFMNP sites

For non-implementers, state-level staff were interviewed about their perceptions of FMNP, each payment type, and barriers to implementation.

For high redemption paper voucher and eFMNP sites, interviews were conducted with staff at State and Local WIC Agencies, local farmers, farmers' market managers, and WIC participants to gather a comprehensive view of implementation, redemption and promising practices. Interviews with stakeholders from paper voucher sites focused on barriers and facilitators to eFMNP and CVB implementation based on perception, while at eFMNP sites they focused on barriers and facilitators to CVB implementation based on experience.

CFIR Framework

The evaluation team used an updated version of the Consolidated Framework for Implementation Research (CFIR) to guide the qualitative data collection aspect of this evaluation. The CFIR provided additional context for understanding the implementation of FMNP, focusing on both the implementers' experience of executing the project and the WIC participants' utilization of the WIC farmers'

market benefits. The CFIR helped to capture the complexities of effective program implementation using a set of constructs organized into five domains: intervention characteristics, outer settings, inner settings, characteristics of individuals, and process.³⁹

Data Analysis

Quantitative Data Analysis

Quantitative analysis was conducted using SPSS. Frequencies, descriptives, and cross-tabulations were employed to identify trends and relationships in the data. This analysis enabled the identification of patterns related to the adoption of electronic benefits, barriers faced by states, and facilitators contributing to positive implementation and higher WIC participant redemption rates.

Qualitative Analysis

For the qualitative key stakeholder interviews, a semi-structured interview guide was developed based on data from the Landscape Survey and CFIR constructs. The guide included open-ended questions to explore experiences with FMNP payment options, benefit redemption, challenges and facilitators to implementing the program. Key stakeholders interviewed included WIC participants, farmers' market managers, farmers, and State and Local WIC staff.

Interviews were conducted on Zoom. Transcripts were created from Zoom recordings, reviewed for quality, and uploaded into MAXQDA, qualitative data management/analysis software. The data were analyzed using thematic analysis, a flexible approach that helped identify key themes and insights. A codebook was developed with deductive, inductive, and logistical codes, as well as codes based on the Consolidated Framework for Implementation Research (CFIR)⁴⁰ and interview dialogue. The evaluation team collaboratively applied the codes, and in the final stages, the lead qualitative evaluator identified recurring patterns in the data, developing key themes that reflected stakeholders' experiences and insights. Once the qualitative data were analyzed, the findings were integrated with the quantitative data.

Limitations

While this evaluation provides valuable insights into the implementation and effectiveness of WIC FMNP, eFMNP, and CVB, several limitations must be

considered when interpreting the findings.

Limited sample size. The data collected for this evaluation was derived from a limited number of sites and stakeholders. Although the survey was distributed to 88 sites, only 32 sites responded, resulting in a 36% response rate. Additionally, the interviews focused on a distinct, but small sample locations. Given the small survey sample size and the focus on specific sites to collect qualitative data, it is possible that the experiences of certain regions or types of implementation efforts were underrepresented. Therefore, the findings may not fully capture the range of challenges or successes encountered across the diverse geography of the program.

Use of self-report data. The data used in this study relied heavily on self-reported information from surveys completed by state-level WIC staff and interviews with WIC participants, farmers and farmers' market managers, as well as State and Local-level WIC staff. While these perspectives provided valuable insights, they are inherently

subjective. Respondents are likely influenced by personal biases or experiences, which may have shaped their responses and impacted the objectivity of the findings.

Lack of complete data on amounts issued and redeemed. Very few survey respondents reported data on the amount of money issued and redeemed related to FMNP vouchers, eFMNP benefits, and CVB. As such, there is limited view of strategy impact. This lack of comprehensive data points means that certain aspects of the program's impact could not be fully evaluated, limiting the depth of the analysis. Moreover, the FMNP, eFMNP, and CVB programs are still evolving, with ongoing efforts to modernize and streamline processes.

These limitations highlight the need for continued research and evaluation to further refine FMNP and its associated benefits. Future studies could address these gaps and help enhance the program's impact and effectiveness.



Results

Participant Demographics

Survey Respondents

The Landscape Survey was emailed to the 88 State, Indian Tribal Organizations (ITO), and U.S. Territory WIC Agencies between May and June 2024. A total of 32 WIC Agencies completed the survey, representing a 36% response rate. Over two months, NWA collected survey data from 32 WIC Agencies; 26 were State Agencies and 6 were Indian Tribal Organizations. These agencies represented 27 states and all seven WIC regions.

Figure 1. Map of the sites the responded to the Landscape Survey.

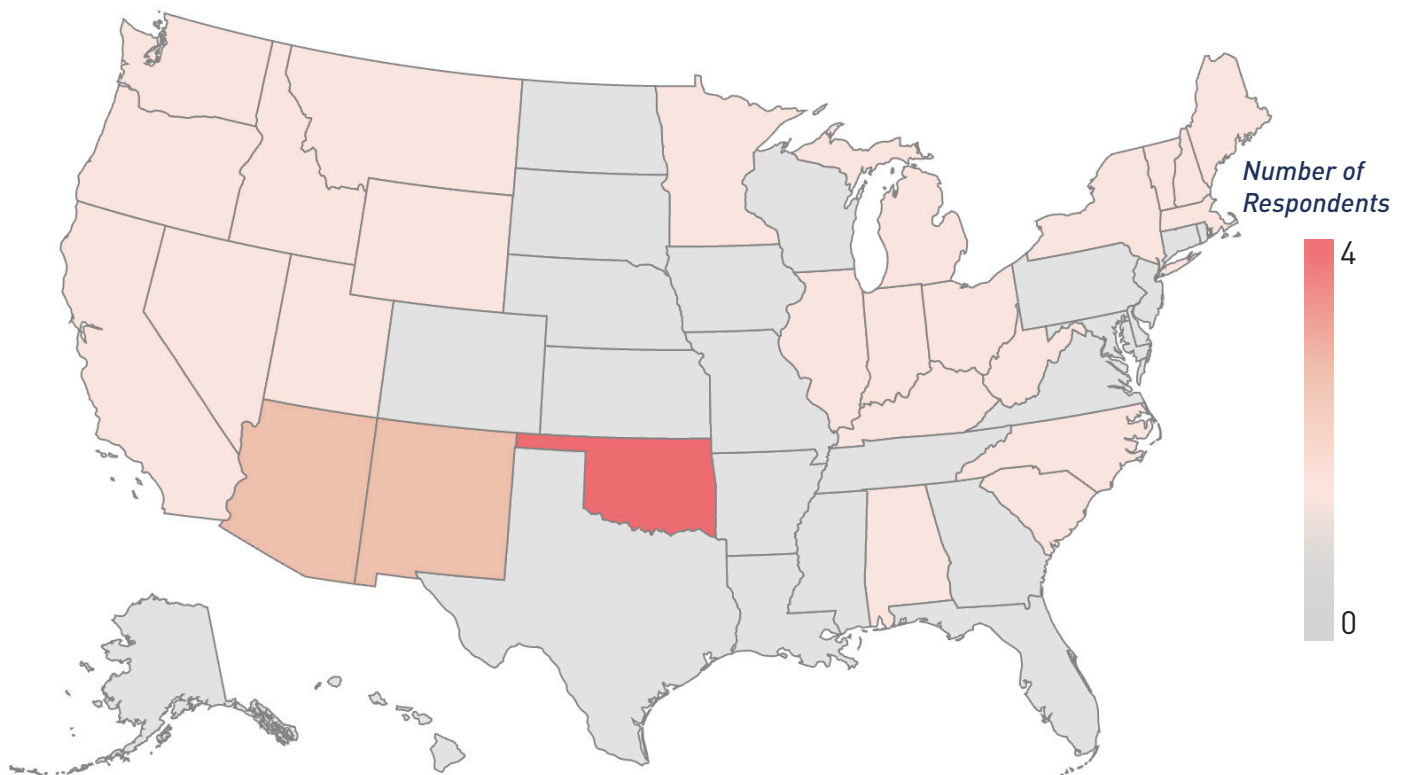


Table 1. Regions represented in the Landscape Survey.

| Regions | N |
|------------------------|----|
| Mid-Atlantic Region | 2 |
| Mountain Plains Region | 2 |
| Mid-West Region | 5 |
| Northeast Region | 5 |
| Southeast Region | 4 |
| Southwest Region | 9 |
| Western Region | 5 |
| Total | 32 |

When respondents received the survey, they were encouraged to share the survey questions with their WIC FMNP Vendor and Department of Agriculture colleagues. As such, although there was only one survey per site, it was possible for multiple people to provide their insights.

- Nineteen sites had one person completing the survey.
- Seven sites had two people completing the survey.
- Six sites had three people completing the survey.

Therefore, a total of 51 individuals provided their insights into the submission of the 32 surveys.

Interviewees

Interviewees represented three groups: non-implementers, high redemption FMNP paper voucher implementers, and high redemption eFMNP implementers. The interviews were conducted in multiple states and territories, including Connecticut, Idaho, Massachusetts, New Mexico, Oklahoma, and Washington State. A total of 23 interviews were conducted with 26 individuals. A detailed description of the interviewees by role and site type is listed in the table below.

Table 4. Interviewee roles at each site type.

| | Non-Implementers | High Redemption FMNP | High Redemption eFMNP |
|-------------------------|------------------|----------------------|-----------------------|
| State Employees | 4 | 2 | 4 |
| Local Employees | -- | 3 | 4 |
| Farmers/Market Managers | -- | 3 | 4 |
| FMNP Participants | -- | 1 | 1 |
| Total | 4 | 9 | 13 |

Table 2. Agency type represented in the Landscape Survey.

| Type of Agency | N |
|-----------------------------|----|
| State Agency | 26 |
| Indian Tribal Organizations | 6 |
| US Territory | 0 |

Table 3. Roles of respondents of the Landscape Survey.

| Role | N | % |
|----------------------|----|-----|
| Division Chief | 3 | 6% |
| FMNP Program Manager | 15 | 29% |
| FMNP Vendor Manager | 15 | 29% |
| Nutrition Specialist | 4 | 8% |
| State WIC Director | 14 | 28% |

Outcomes

This section presents the integrated qualitative and quantitative results of the NWA Farmers' Market Landscape Analysis Survey and stakeholder interviews. The results are organized by FMNP paper vouchers, e-FMNP, and CVB payment methods, with an additional section focusing on advancing health equity. Additionally, we summarize the facilitators, barriers, and promising practices related to these specific payment methods. It's important to note that in some instances, we highlight the perceptions of non-implementers concerning the facilitators, barriers, and promising practices of the payment options. This contrasts with implementers, who offer insights based on their actual experiences with FMNP and the relevant facilitators, barriers, and promising practices.

FMNP Implementation

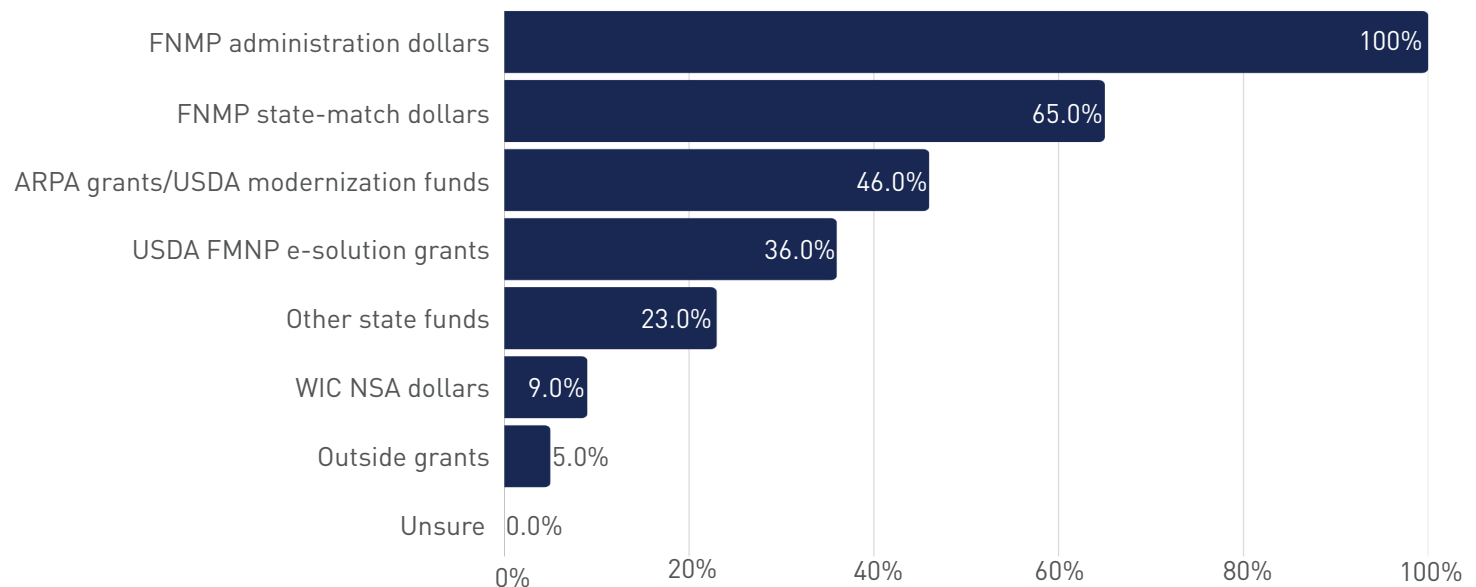
In the Landscape Survey, each site was asked whether their state participates in the WIC FMNP. Almost 70% (n = 22) of respondents implemented either WIC FMNP or both WIC and Senior FMNP and over 30% (n = 10) had not implemented WIC FMNP.

Facilitators of FMNP Implementation

Funding

Among the 22 sites that reported participating in WIC FMNP, 80% of sites first implemented paper vouchers in the 1990s. All sites are funded by FMNP administrative dollars. More than half (64%) received additional funding from FMNP state-match dollars, almost half (45%) received additional funding from ARPA grants/USDA modernization funds, and 36% received additional funding from USDA FMNP e-solution grants.

Chart 1. Sources of FMNP Funding.



Three other sources of funding mentioned in open-ended responses were:

- Local funds and program income.
- Senior FMNP ARPA grant to support the development of an eFMNP solution.
- Welches Cost Relief Grant.

Survey data indicated that all FMNPs receive FMNP administrative dollars from the USDA Food and Nutrition Service (FNS). Moreover, 91% of sites receive additional funding to run their programs. The number of additional funding sources ranged from 0–4, with sites having an average of two additional funding sources. While most sites received state-match dollars, the sites that did not receive state-match funding received funding from ARPA and USDA FMNP e-solutions grants.

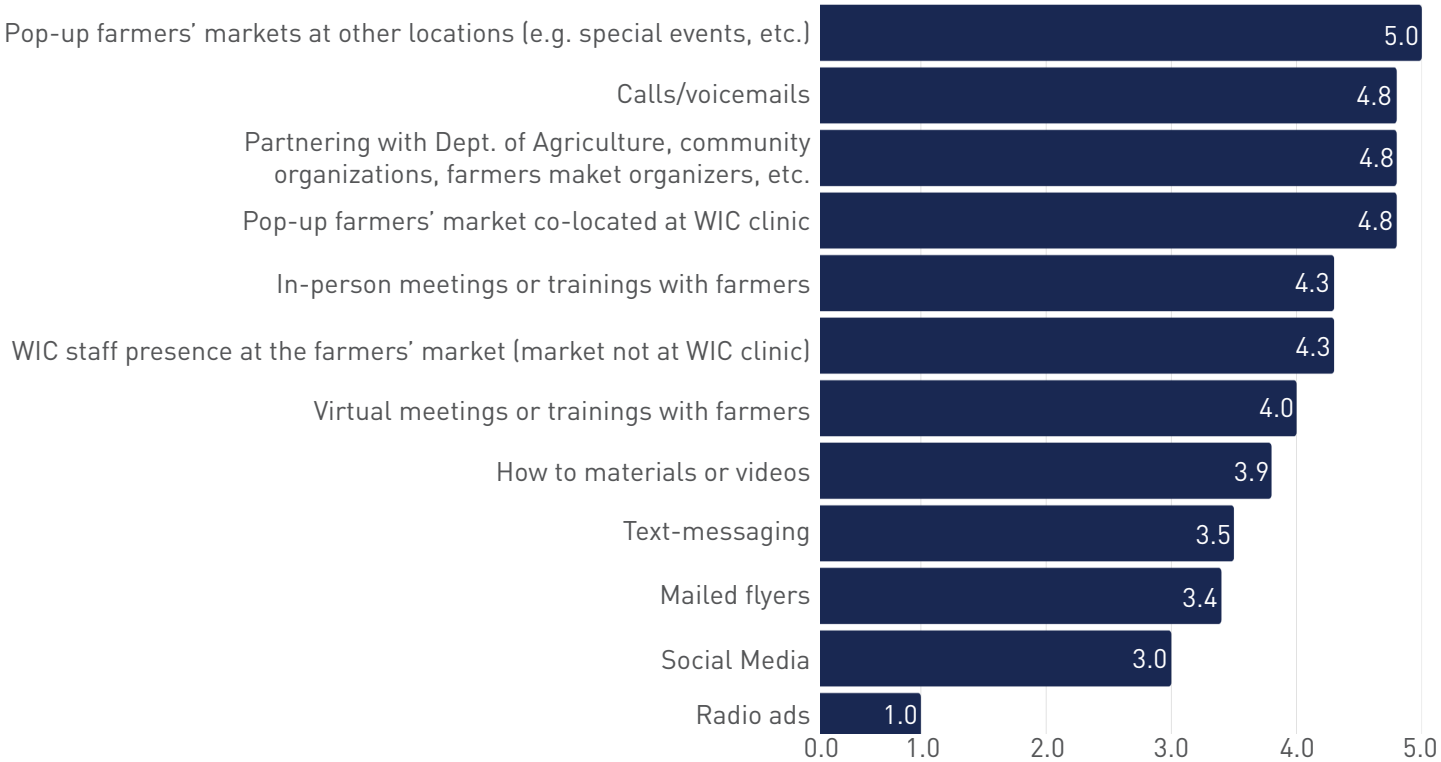
Authorization of Farmers and Farmers’ Markets

In addition to funding sources, proper implementation of FMNP requires committed farmers and farmers’ markets. These farmers and markets must regularly apply for and receive authorization to participate in FMNP. Some states authorize farmers, while others authorize both farmers and farmers’ markets. A farmer is defined as an individual authorized to sell produce at participating farmers’ markets and/or roadside stands, while a farmers’ market is defined as an association of local farmers who assemble at a defined location for the purpose of selling their produce directly to consumers. Among the 22 respondent sites that implemented WIC FMNP, half authorize both farmers and farmers’ markets, while the other half (45.5%) authorize farmers only. Ideally, to have maximum participant accessibility, a state should have the ability to authorize both farmer’s and farmers’ markets.

Outreach and Retention of Farmers and Farmers’ Markets

State and Local WIC Agencies utilize a host of outreach methods to recruit and train farmers. In the Landscape Survey, respondents were asked to rate the effectiveness of outreach strategies for recruiting and training farmers to accept FMNP paper vouchers on a scale from 1 (unsuccessful) to 5 (very successful). The most effective strategies involved personal engagement with the farmers. The most successful strategies included pop-up farmers’ markets at special events (M = 5.0), calls and voicemails to farmers (M = 4.8), and partnering with the Department of Agriculture, community organizations, and farmers’ market organizers, etc. (M = 4.8). The remaining outcomes are shown in the chart below.

Chart 2. Effectiveness of strategies used to boost awareness of FMNP among farmers.



This outcome was evident in the qualitative data, as both farmers and WIC staff highlighted a theme that emerged was **the importance of the WIC Agency and peer relationships with the farming community**. At in-person events, farmers not only witness their peers benefiting from the vouchers but also gain a better understanding of how the program works. These gatherings also provide a valuable opportunity for farmers to ask questions directly to WIC staff, fostering clearer communication and deeper engagement with the program.

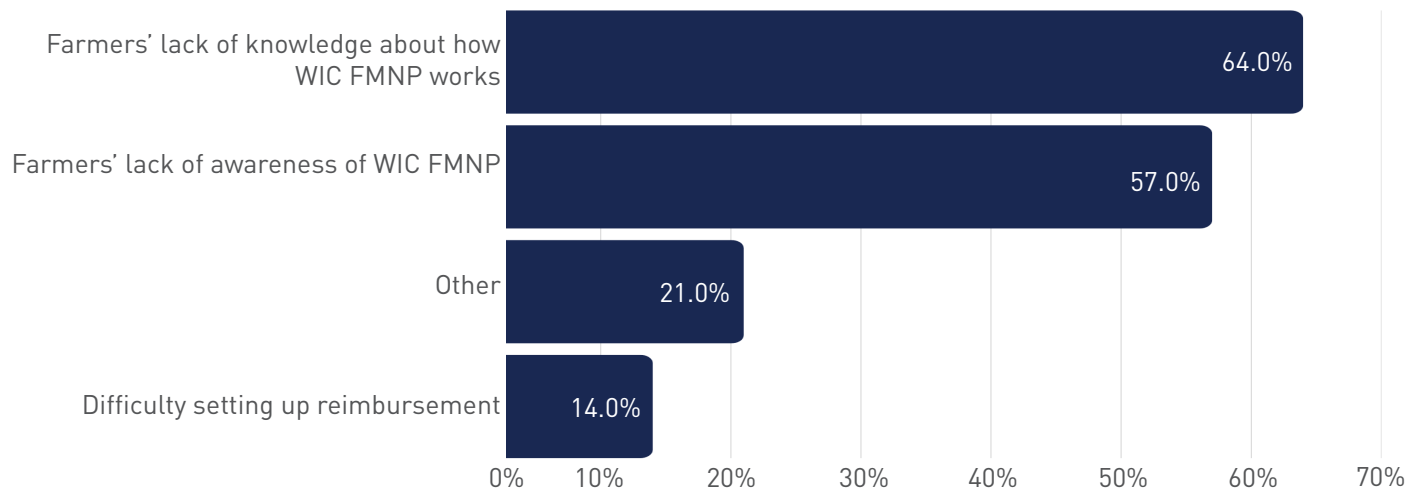
Furthermore, **WIC staff coordinate with farmers’ market managers to learn about new vendors or vendors who do not accept the voucher**. They recommend that the managers share their contact information with the vendor if they wish to learn about becoming certified and accepting the voucher. Also, to recruit farmers, **program staff have included information about the program in the farmers’ market report** that is distributed bi-monthly and reaches a few thousand people.

Barriers to FMNP Implementation

Increasing Farmer Participation

Survey respondents were asked to identify the greatest barriers to increasing participation in FMNP among farmers. The two most common barriers were farmers' lack of knowledge about how WIC FMNP operates (64%) and their lack of awareness about the existence of WIC FMNP (57%).

Chart 3. Barriers to increasing participation in FMNP among farmers.



There were two primary “other” barriers mentioned in open-ended responses: market managers acting as gatekeepers and farmers' negative perceptions of FMNP enrollment and engagement process. Regarding market managers, survey respondents indicated that some market managers were not informing eligible farmers about FMNP, possibly due to reluctance to handle the administrative burden or the “paperwork.” The other barrier highlighted was farmers' belief that the process of getting authorized and trained for the program is time-consuming and cumbersome. One Landscape Survey respondent noted, “They don't work at a desk; they are in the fields,” pointing to how the administrative responsibilities tied to applying for and receiving reimbursement for FMNP participation discourage farmers from participating in the program.

A theme that emerged from the qualitative data is that **administrative and resource constraints serve as barriers to FMNP implementation**. Local Agency staffing shortages are an example of a common challenge experienced during the summer months—when farmers' markets are most active. Although agencies coordinate to ensure coverage during FMNP distribution days, some remain understaffed due to vacations and other resource constraints. Staff shortages leads to low visibility of WIC staff at farmers' markets and missed engagement opportunities. Limited staff resources also inhibit agencies from providing consistent support in-office and at markets.

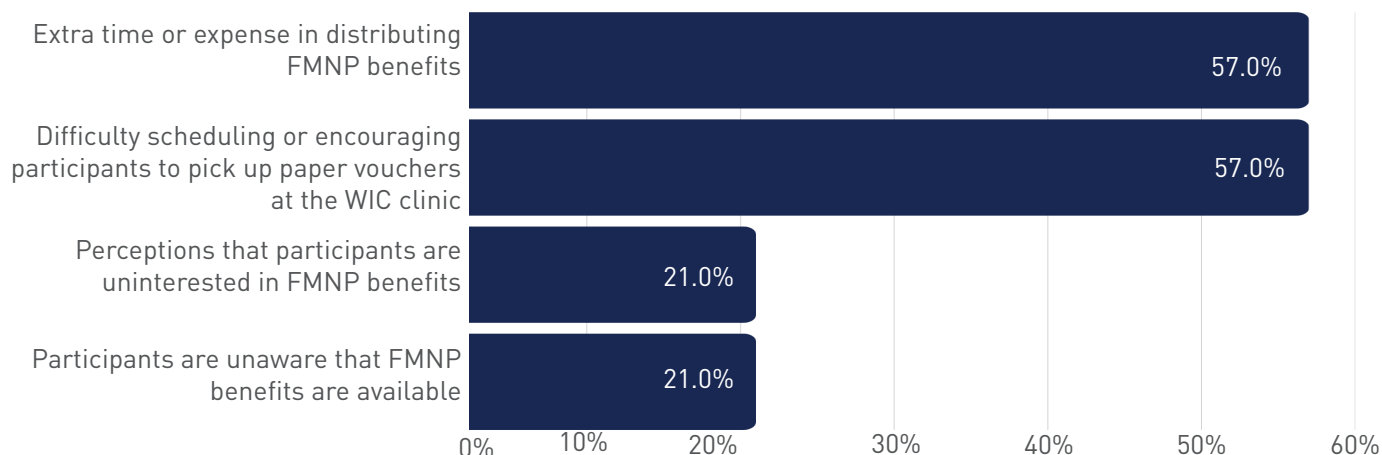
Technology constraints are also a challenge for Local WIC staff, particularly when verifying participant eligibility for benefits at farmers' markets. This can be due to unreliable internet or cell service and a lack of electrical outlets for charging electronic devices at markets. These logistical issues slow down operations and create inefficiencies.



Distributing Vouchers to Participants at the Local Level

As mentioned earlier, the original FMNP involves paper vouchers that must be distributed to WIC participants. Survey respondents were asked to identify the three largest barriers faced by Local Agencies when distributing FMNP paper vouchers. The most common barriers are the additional time or expense associated with distributing FMNP benefits (57%), difficulties in scheduling or encouraging participants to pick up paper vouchers at the WIC clinic (57%), the perception that participants lack interest in FMNP benefits (21%), and participants being unaware that FMNP is available (21%).

Chart 4. Barriers to distributing FMNP paper vouchers at Local Agencies.



A theme that emerged from the qualitative data is **that innovative outreach and distribution of FMNP vouchers are essential responsibilities for an already overburdened staff.** It is the Local WIC staff who ensure that eligible WIC participants receive FMNP vouchers. According to qualitative data, this sometimes involves scheduling a special event for FMNP voucher distribution. Engaging in this extra work can be challenging for Local WIC offices operating at low capacity. Staff from a State Agency commented on the dedication of the staff in difficult circumstances; they said,

“They did a lot. Yeah, they did a lot. And I’m very proud of our staff here in [State] because they go above and beyond to help the participants out in any way they can. During COVID we even had some of our staff go and actually bring the farmers’ market coupons to our families to make sure that they got them.”

(State Agency Staff – Implementer)

In addition to scheduling and hosting events, sites must also encourage WIC participants to pick up their paper vouchers in person. This adds another level of coordination necessary to ensure that WIC participants receive these benefits. Lastly, there is a perception that WIC participants are either uninterested in or unaware of these additional benefits.

A theme that emerged from the qualitative data from the WIC participants’ perspectives highlighted that various distribution methods and increased voucher benefits are essential for the successful implementation of FMNP voucher system. WIC participants expressed that extending benefit availability beyond a one-time distribution would allow for more consistent access to fresh produce. They also mentioned considering distributing the voucher via mail for people who are unable to attend the scheduled distribution days. They also commented that the benefit amount should be increased as the current values may not be enough incentive for recipients to buy at farmers’ markets instead of grocery stores. One participant who received an FMNP voucher commented about distribution options; they said,

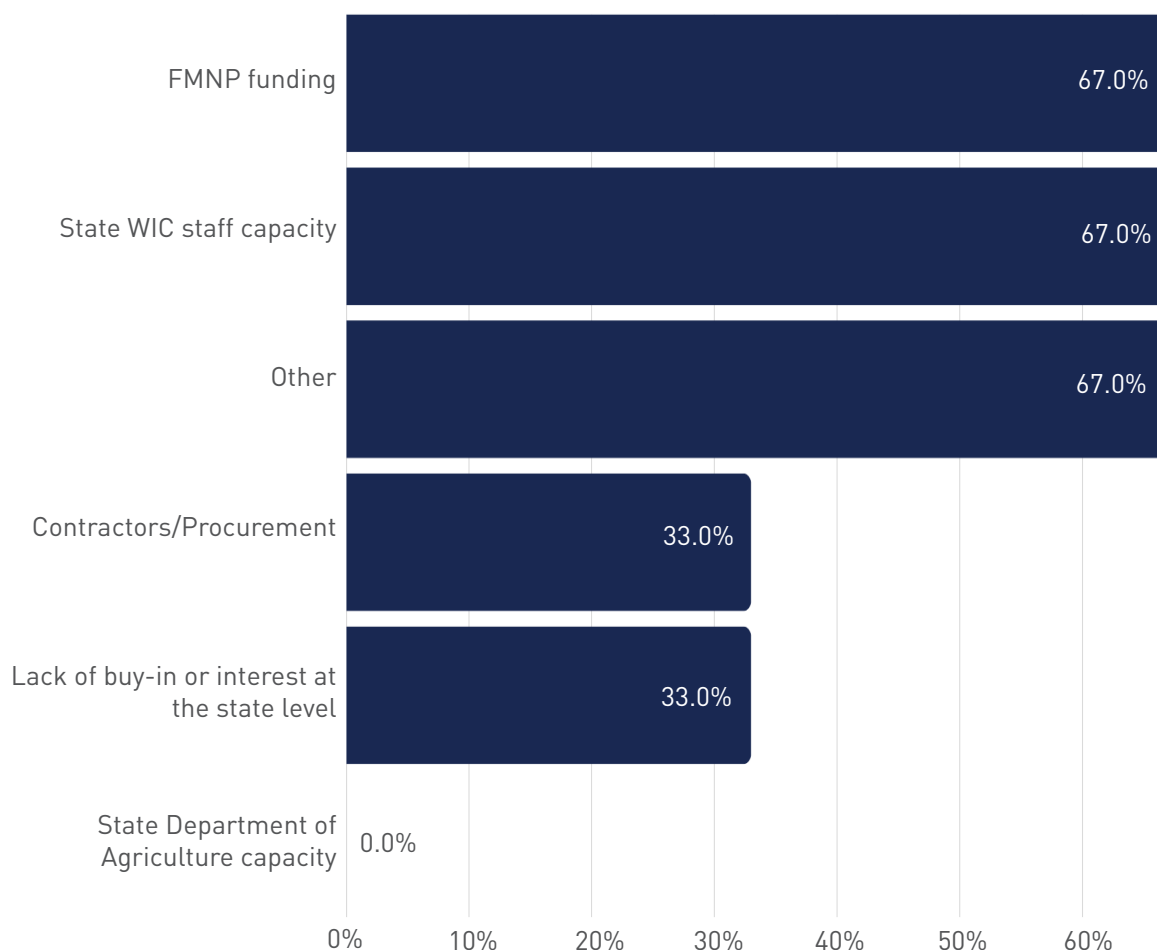
“So maybe that is the thing that should be changed...So, I remember in COVID it was, they would send [the voucher] by mail. You had to register. You get the message, you have to register, and then you would get [the vouchers] by mail. That was a good thing, for example. Nice thing to send it.”

(WIC Participant)

General Barriers to FMNP Implementation

Six agencies stated that they were not planning to ever implement FMNP. When asked to report their barriers to implementation, most of the sites referenced FMNP funding (67%) and State WIC staff capacity (67%).

Chart 5. Reasons agencies will not implement FMNP.



The qualitative response to the “other” response was inadequate farmers’ markets, lack of WIC participant interest, funds provided too late for the local growing season, lack of match funding, and the lack of a well-tested e-payment solution.

The interview data revealed similar barriers faced by the non-implementers interviewed. A theme that emerged from the qualitative data highlighted that **operational concerns related to the payment infrastructure posed a barrier to FMNP implementation.** Many non-implementers contemplating the implementation of FMNP vouchers, eFMNP, or CVB program discussed their understanding of the FMNP voucher and the barriers they perceived in using the voucher system. They expressed a desire to advance and implement the electronic payment option instead of reverting to

traditional, voucher-based alternatives. For example, a State Agency employee stated,

“We recently switched in 2020 from paper vouchers for WIC to a card. And looking at the potential of participating in FMNP, in addition to the funding and administrative concerns or barriers, there are some operational barriers as well. And not wanting to go backwards into a check-based operations system and looking at a card-based system.”

(State Agency Staff – Non-implementer)

FMNP Redemption

In the Landscape Survey, WIC Agencies who have FMNP sites were asked about their experience with paper vouchers. More specifically, they were asked to report on the statewide average in 2023 or the last year in which paper vouchers were used. On average, sites issued \$749,164.00 in paper vouchers, and on average, \$369,498.13 was redeemed, resulting in an average redemption rate of 49%.

Redemption rates are impacted by several factors, such as receipt of the benefit, participant awareness of the program and its purpose, and participants' knowledge of its intricacies. For example, it is important for participants to understand the food covered by the program, the farmers' market locations, and, most importantly, the total amount of their benefits.

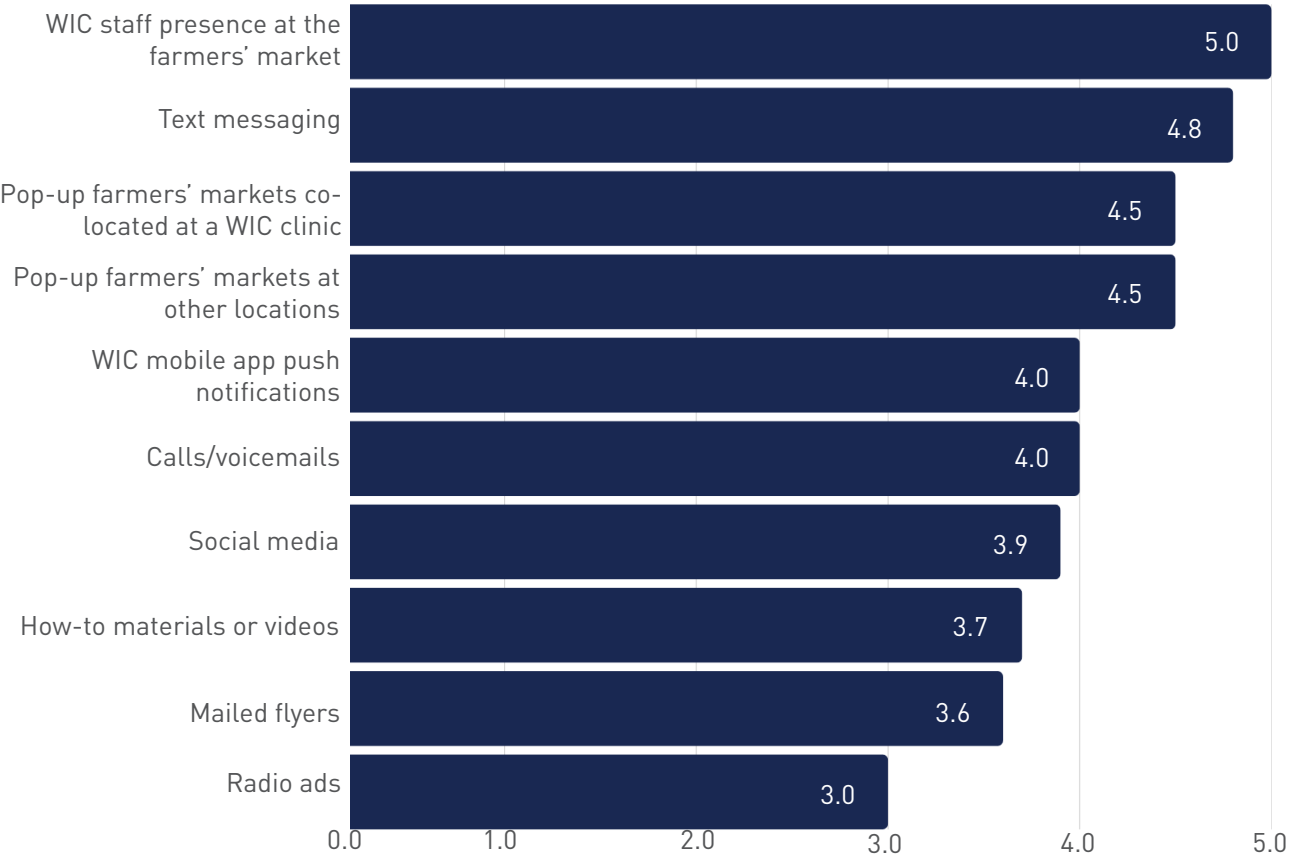
Facilitators of FMNP Redemption

Participant Outreach

At the state and local level, staff engage in several strategies to raise WIC participants' awareness and redemption of FMNP paper vouchers. In the Landscape Survey, respondents were asked to

rate commonly used strategies on a scale from 1 (unsuccessful) to 5 (very successful). The highest rated strategies were WIC staff presence at the farmers' market (market not at a WIC clinic) (M =5.0), texting participants (M = 4.8), pop-up farmers' markets co-located at a WIC clinic (M = 4.5), pop-up farmers' markets at other locations (M = 4.5), WIC mobile app push notifications (M = 4.0), and calls and voicemails (M = 4.0). In the Landscape Survey, when respondents were asked how the State WIC offices evaluated the impact of these strategies, respondents reported they monitored redemption rates, assessed website traffic, conducted surveys with WIC participants, and relied on anecdotal data. To assess the impact of outreach strategies, state staff compared state-level FMNP redemption rates over time. They also made comparisons between Local WIC Agencies on FMNP redemption rates. Another Agency disclosed they assessed website traffic that corresponds to the dates when text messages are sent to WIC participants. Surveys distributed to Local Agencies and WIC participants, along with anecdotal data gathered from their communications with Local WIC staff, are also helpful in assessing the effectiveness of these strategies.

Chart 6. Effectiveness of strategies used to boost WIC participants awareness of FMNP.



Similar to engaging with farmers, WIC staff find that **providing personalized outreach boosts participants’ awareness and eventual redemption of FMNP vouchers**. Survey and interview data indicate that WIC staff’s presence at farmers’ markets results in not only greater knowledge about FMNP among WIC participants but higher redemption rates.

A theme that emerged from the qualitative data underscored that **internal and external coordination, networking, and communication help to facilitate the redemption of FMNP vouchers**. Implementers at State and Local Agencies coordinate internally to learn about farmers’ markets schedules and events so staff can attend the market to distribute vouchers and support educational efforts that might be needed. One staff member commented,

“We have our local program staff reach out to the farmers or the farm managers, farmers’ market managers, market managers, and they communicate and reach out to them to see what days that they could set up a table or are they going to have the availability of maybe some overhead protection, that little, the tents type things. So, they can actually do the distribution at the farmers’ market. That’s a win-win situation because if you’re doing the distribution at the farmers’ market, all of those farmers that are going to be in that market for the day or days, whatever time they pick, the participants are going to go right to them and use them right away.”
(State Agency Staff – Implementer)

They also emphasized having the staff present at the market to help participants feel more comfortable. One State Agency staff member stated,

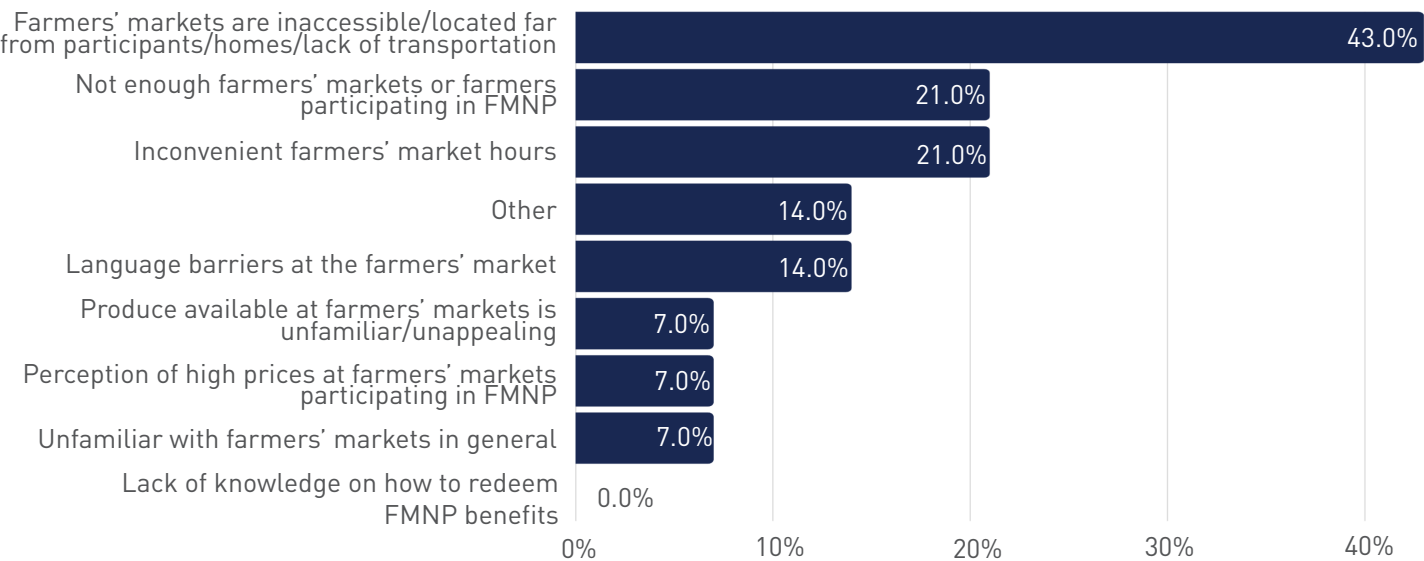
“...our local program staff are intently involved with the market managers and with the farmers to make sure that they have a coordinated service in the presence at the farmers’ markets so that our participants can feel comfortable shopping.”
(State Agency Staff – Implementer)

Barriers to FMNP Redemption

Distributing Vouchers to Participants

The most common barrier to distributing FMNP paper vouchers to WIC participants was their lack of motivation to collect the vouchers, mainly because farmers’ markets were either inaccessible or located far from their homes, along with participants’ transportation issues (43%). The next most common barriers included inconvenient farmers’ market hours (21%) and a shortage of farmers participating at these markets (21%).

Chart 7. Barriers to distributing FMNP paper vouchers among participants.



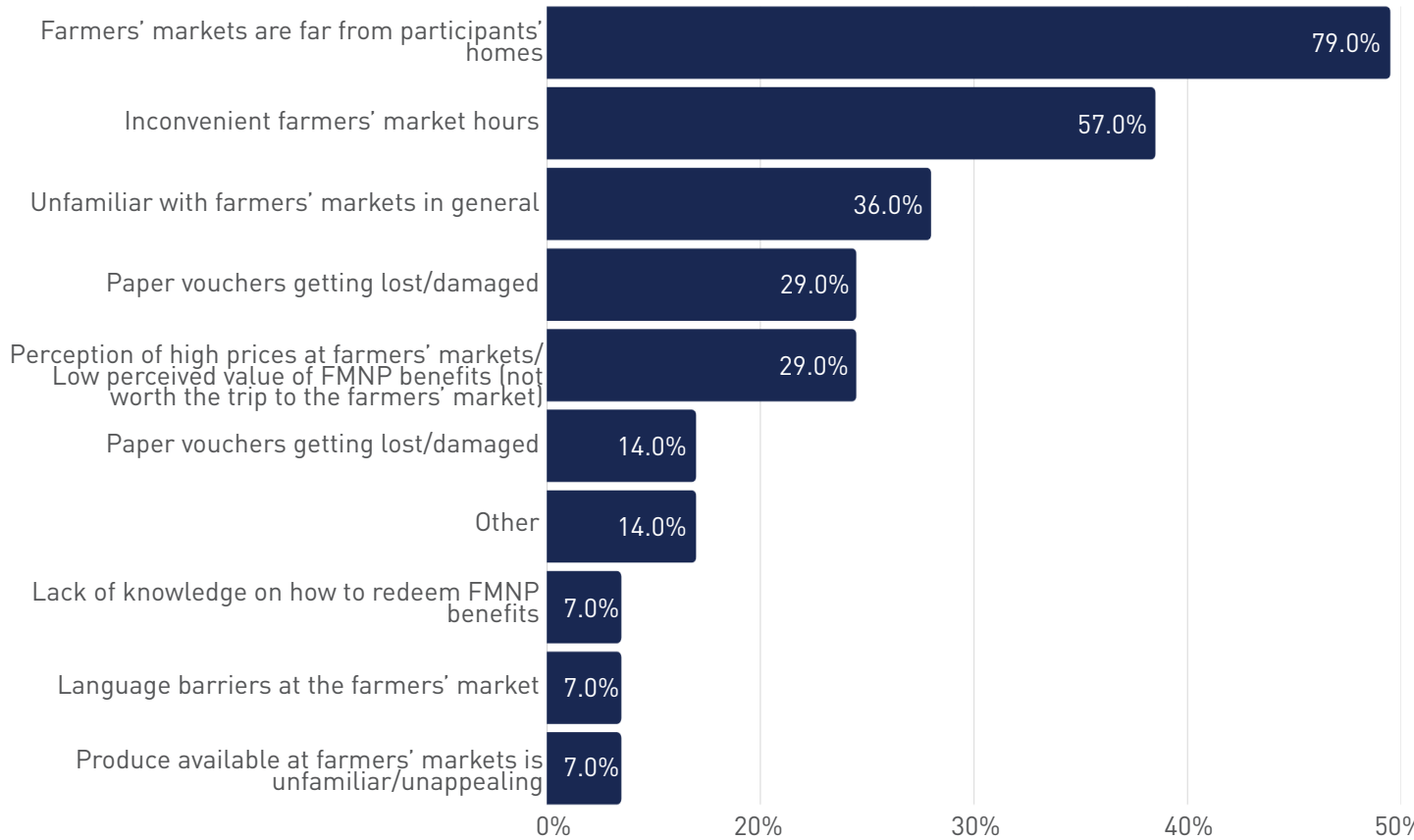
This data indicates that participants do not make the effort to pick up the vouchers because the farmers’ markets are inaccessible, particularly to WIC participants who have limited access to transportation. In an open-ended survey question, one respondent stated, “Families that live near markets and farm stands that participate in FMNP are more likely to make an effort to come pick up the coupons.” Similarly, if there are not enough farmers’ markets or farmers participating in the program, there is limited availability of products. Another barrier identified is the inconvenient farmers’ market hours. Farmers’ markets are typically held in the morning on the weekends; this is often inconvenient for families with young children, particularly if transportation issues exist.

A theme emerged from the interview data that highlights **the intersection of communication and education issues serves as a barrier to distributing FMNP vouchers**. Implementers discussed how there are aspects of the program that WIC participants need to be educated about to fully utilize all program benefits. However, the language barrier that exists makes providing critical information about benefits and how to use them difficult, especially considering many of the WIC Agencies lack the staff to properly implement the program in general. Communication is further complicated when translators are unable to fully translate. Interviews highlighted that sometimes, there are certain words in the English language that do not translate correctly or exist in other languages. Respondents posit that dealing with these issues likely decreases WIC participants’ motivation to continue to pick up vouchers.

Redemption Among Participants

In addition to getting the vouchers to WIC participants, the Landscape Survey asked respondents about the three greatest barriers to increasing FMNP (paper voucher) redemption among participants. Similar to the distribution issue, the most common barrier (identified by 79% of respondents) was that farmers’ markets are inaccessible either because they are located far from participant’s homes or because participants had transportation issues. This was followed by inconvenient farmers’ market hours (57%), unfamiliarity with farmers’ markets in general (36%), perception of high prices at farmers’ markets and low perceived value of FMNP benefits (29%), and paper vouchers getting lost or damaged (29%).

Chart 8. Barriers to increasing FMNP paper voucher redemption among WIC participants.



Two comments that were made in an open-ended survey question were: “Based on anecdotal feedback, challenges with paper vouchers getting lost/damaged, farmers’ markets are inaccessible/located far from participants homes/lack of transportation, and perception of high prices at farmers’ markets, are the challenges observed” and “\$30.00 is not worth the trip.” These responses align closely with the top-rated responses.

A theme from the qualitative interview data highlights that **the mishandling of vouchers and logistical issues serve as barriers to using FMNP vouchers.** According to implementers, paper vouchers present some challenges. WIC participants, particularly younger generations, unaccustomed to handling physical cash, are thought to be at risk of misplacing or losing vouchers. This issue is believed to be exacerbated by the perception that participants will not store vouchers securely in wallets, potentially leading to underutilization of benefits. For example, one Local Agency staff commented about issues with vouchers; they said,

“It depends on the age group that we are serving, but we have both ends, so it’s just [one group] not being so comfortable with technology and being tired of having everything on their phone that you have to pay that way versus, “Oh yes, I prefer to do all electronically.” When you hand them the vouchers, they’re like, “Oh my goodness, how am I not going to lose this?”

(Local Staff- Implementer)

Another area highlighted in the qualitative interview data was concerns related to the cost of produce impacting the redemption of the FMNP vouchers for participants. Participants stated they were likely to use the total allotment in one trip to the farmers’ market due to the high cost of produce.

FMNP Promising Practices

Implementers using paper vouchers of the WIC Farmers’ Market Nutrition Program (FMNP) shared several promising practices for successful implementation.

Participant engagement is enhanced through education and incentives. Providing clear education on where and how to redeem benefits facilitates participants being able to fully utilize the program.

Additionally, food demonstrations featuring seasonal produce and culturally relevant foods help families learn how to prepare new foods. To further incentivize engagement, implementers suggest giving participants practical items like cooking supplies alongside benefits.

“Another thing that we are seeing that’s helping a lot are some of the farmers are having food demos at the farmers’ markets, and that is so cool. And I think that encourages families to really utilize their benefit and come back even when they don’t have the benefits and buy fruits and vegetables using their SNAP benefit or money denomination.”

(State Agency Staff-Implementer)

Intentional distribution at farmers’ markets or on designated days at WIC clinics makes the program more convenient and accessible for families. Accessibility is further enhanced by having multilingual resources and even utilizing translation tools to reduce language barriers for participants. A staff member commented,

“So we do both. We do have the one big distribution day, but then we also give [the vouchers at their] actual nutrition appointment. So both work. In our catchment area, it reaches those that couldn’t make the day, but it also reaches the ones that I don’t know, want to come out and experience the whole outreach or the distribution day and just get the checks and go.”

(Local Agency Staff- Implementer)

Strong partnerships with farmers and market vendors are another cornerstone of the program’s success. Engaging a variety of farmers’ markets and vendors can expand participants’ access to convenient locations with diverse offerings. Building strong relationships with market managers is also essential, as they serve as influential messengers who connect farmers with WIC Agencies and participants while fostering collaboration among all stakeholders. A State Agency staff mentioned how they have the opportunity to meet the farmers; they said,

“...it’s so important that each year, our local program staff, administration staff, senior directors, program directors, and community coordinators,, they’re the ones that always reach out to have meetings with [the market managers]... WIC may not necessarily have the coupons yet, but they can go and meet with them. And the market managers always make sure that the WIC staff get to know the farmers at the farmers’ market.”

(State Agency Staff Implementer)

Community involvement plays a vital role in the program’s implementation. Involving WIC community coordinators and family support personnel in planning strengthens the program’s connection to participants, as these individuals serve as essential links—or “anchors”—for WIC FMNP. Additionally, utilizing community members to promote the program helps build trust and raise awareness in culturally informed ways. Collaboration with community partners further reinforces the idea that WIC is not just about food assistance but a broader effort to support families within their communities. A staff member commented on the importance of community involvement; they stated,

“And many of them, like I said, they live in that community, so they know the population, and they can talk about maybe foods from their background, or the one thing that I really love is when the farmers, they would leave at the end of the season, give a WIC program extra fruits or vegetables, whatever was left over, and then maybe having what we did, we implemented the good food project. I mean, pre-pandemic, it was in, I would say, out of 31 programs, we probably had it in about maybe 28 programs that we did cooking demos, and we gave a certain budget that we were able to do.”

(State Agency Staff-Implementer)

FMNP: Paper vs. Electronic

Respondents of the Landscape Survey fell into three categories: those who implemented eFMNP (25%), those who implemented WIC FMNP and were still using paper (44%), and those who did not implement WIC FMNP (31%). Although at the time of the survey, most sites were still using paper, most of those sites were planning to implement eFMNP in the future.

Table 5. Respondent’s current FMNP/eFMNP usage status and their plans for future implementation of eFMNP.

| | Plans to implement eFMNP | Does not plan to implement eFMNP | Total |
|------------------------------------|--------------------------|----------------------------------|-------|
| Implements eFMNP | -- | -- | 8 |
| Implements WIC FMNP paper | 10 | 4 | 14 |
| Does not implement WIC FMNP | 4 | 6 | 10 |
| Total | 14 | 10 | -- |

eFMNP Implementation

There were eight sites that implemented eFMNP statewide. Three respondents (38%) indicated eFMNP was implemented statewide in 2022, and five respondents (62%) implemented the program in 2023.

eFMNP Transition

The Landscape Survey posed several questions to understand the state’s transition from paper vouchers to electronic transactions. For most sites (n = 5), the transition to WIC eFMNP was coordinated with Senior FMNP¹. During the transition to WIC eFMNP, both WIC and Senior FMNP staff collaborated, often utilizing similar solutions from the same contractor and creating training and educational materials. In most cases, the State WIC office or, specifically, the state FMNP led the transition. However, one site’s transition was led by the Department of Agriculture and another by a tribal council. All sites selected their technology contractors. Half of the sites utilized Custom Data Processing FarmMarket Direct eSolution, 25% of the sites opted for NationsBenefits, 12.5% used Gainwell, and 12.5% chose Solutran.

¹ Senior FMNP is similar to WIC FMNP but focused on low-income seniors. The majority of survey respondents (82%) with WIC FMNP also have Senior FMNP.

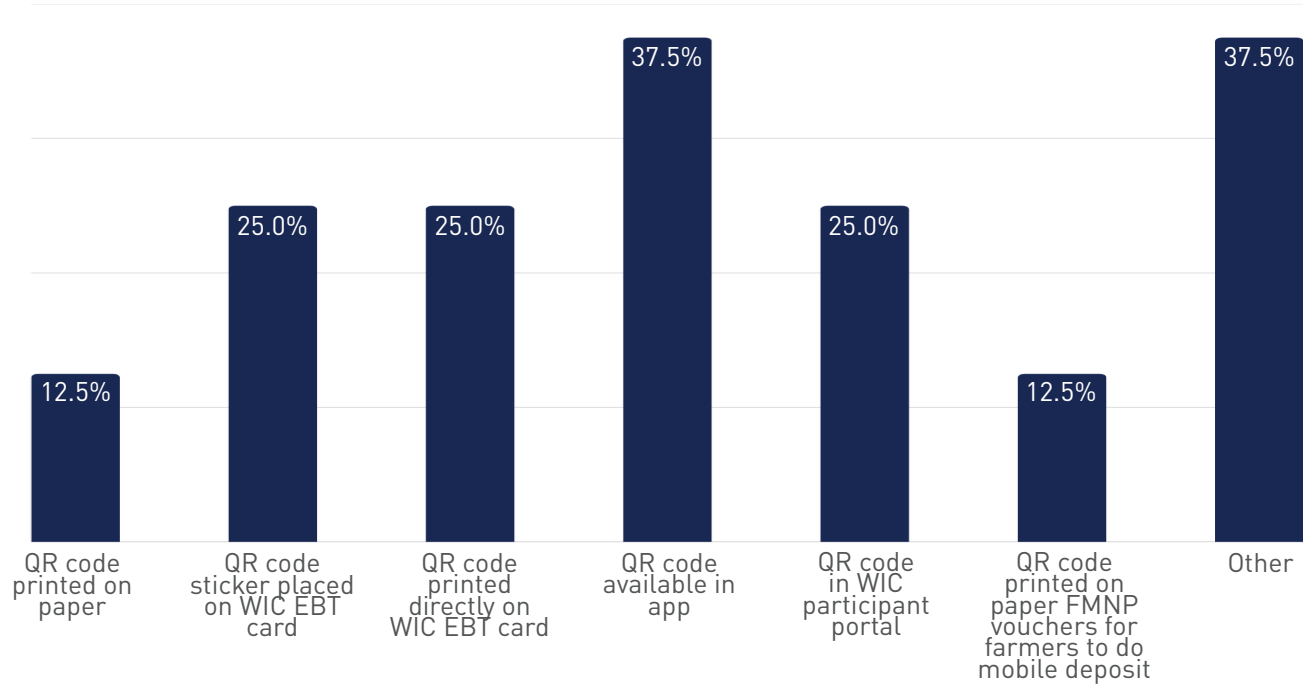
Electronic Solutions Implemented

When asked about the type of electronic solution the state implemented, 25% of sites had FMNP capabilities integrated into WIC MIS, 25% implemented an app-based solution, 12.5% provided hot spots for farmers at markets, and 12.5% established a wireless point of sale, and 25% did not respond to the question.

QR Code Placement

When asked how QR codes were implemented, most sites utilized multiple solutions. The most popular strategies included making QR codes available within the app, printing QR code stickers and placing them directly on the WIC EBT card, printing the QR codes directly on the WIC EBT card, and providing the QR code in the WIC participant portal.

Chart 9. How QR codes are implemented by FMNPs.



Considerations for Equity, Inclusion, and Accessibility

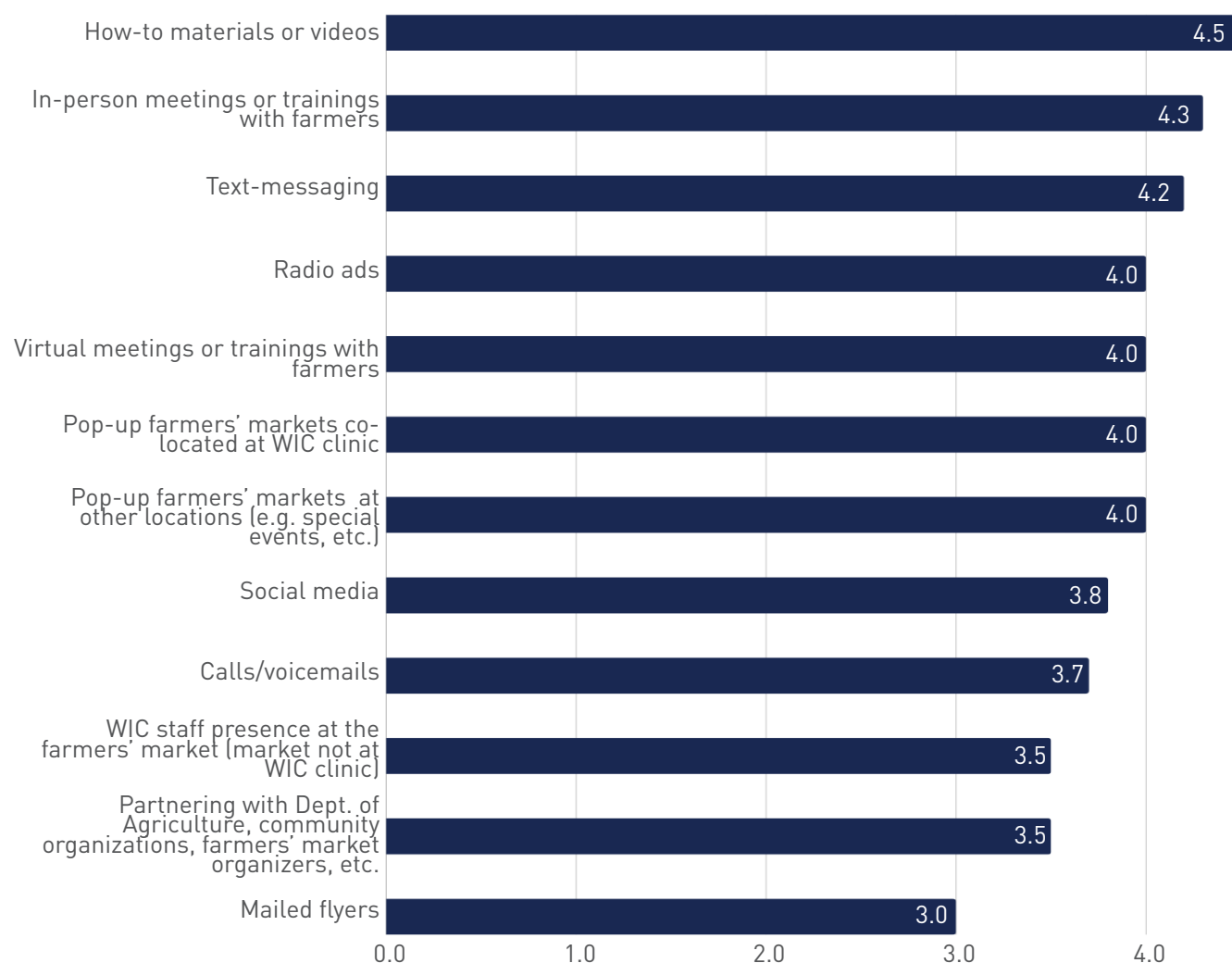
Using an open-ended question in the Landscape Survey, eFMNP administrators were requested to outline any testing or considerations related to equity, inclusion, accessibility, and/or minimizing barriers to use. Two sites focused on accessibility for farmers – by administering farmer feasibility surveys to farmers and markets to gauge technology capabilities, wireless coverage, and interest. However, other sites considered participant accessibility by ensuring it had an easy integration with the eWIC platform, conformed to both WIC and Senior FMNP language specifications (user-friendly and easy to read), and others made sure it was flexible enough to use with or without a smartphone.

Facilitators to eFMNP Implementation

Outreach and Retention of Farmers and Farmers’ Markets

State and Local Agencies engage in outreach methods to boost awareness of eFMNP among farmers in the state. In the Landscape Survey, respondents were asked to indicate the effectiveness of outreach strategies to boost awareness of and participation in eFMNP among farmers on a scale from 1 (unsuccessful) to 5 (very successful). Similar to the most effective strategies to recruit and train farmers to accept paper vouchers, the most effective strategies to boost participation in eFMNP rely on a more individualized and personal engagement with farmers. The most successful strategies were how-to materials or videos (M = 4.5), in-person meetings or training with farmers (M = 4.3), and text messaging (M = 4.2). The remaining outcomes are in the table below.

Chart 10. Effectiveness of strategies used to boost awareness of and participation in eFMNP benefits among farmers.



A theme highlighted in the qualitative interviews is that **providing in-person training on eFMNP is essential for the successful implementation of the program**. Interviewees describe the process of getting farmers to adopt the new electronic system as initially challenging. Hosting these trainings has provided a sense of security and ease during the transition from cash to electronic systems for the farmers and allowed them to understand the new system through hands-on interaction and immediate troubleshooting. One staff member commented on the training and said,

“So one thing we started the very first year, ... we started doing trainings every other week for growers. And we just scheduled them and we held them both in English and Spanish. We told them, “Come as many times as you want. You can hear this over and over.” We’re continuing that into this year as well because what we found is the more information we share, the more people that come to the calls, and the more that they share with each other.”

(State Agency Staff – Implementer)

A theme that emerged from the qualitative interview data is that **using “community champions” as trusted advocates and educators enhances the implementation of eFMNP**. In the interviews, farmers and farmers’ market managers noted that nearly every farmers’ market has a “community champion.” This role can be filled by a religious leader, market volunteer, or a local resident with deep roots and trust within the community. These champions serve as program educators and outreach coordinators, advocating for initiatives to increase program participation. Additionally, farmers affiliated with the program act as advocates and “community

champions”, offering hands-on guidance and support, particularly for those who speak different languages or are unfamiliar with the program.

Another theme that emerged from the data is that **authorized farmers exemplify the community and financial benefits of eFMNP, which helps to increase the participation of new farmers.** In the interviews, respondents noted how authorized farmers were gaining more WIC participants and providing the most underserved community members with healthy fruits and vegetables. Other vendors observed the authorized farmers increased profits. These observations often prompt these vendors to become authorized for eFMNP. A staff member commented on the success of their program; they said,

“I think the success and the growth in year one full launch was because vendors, they see the table next door, they see the other farmer, they see the processing, they see the money that they’re missing out on and the transactions that they’re missing.”

(Farmers’ Market Manager- Implementer)

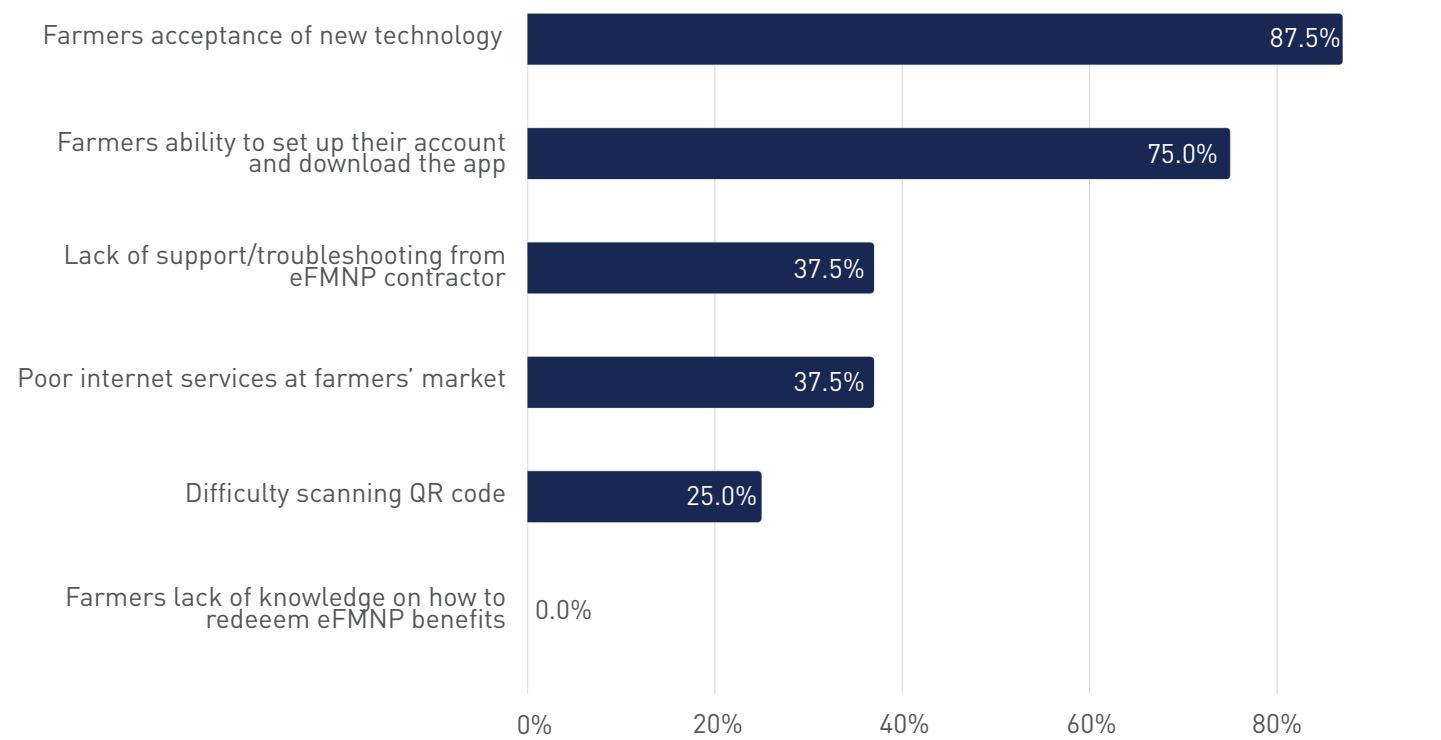
QR Code Technology

A theme that emerged from the qualitative interview data is that QR codes are helpful in streamlining transactions and improving program efficiency. Farmers appreciate the convenience and potential of the technology but require support with implementation and troubleshooting to ensure smooth adoption. Providing guidance and technical assistance is key to maximizing the benefits of this system for all stakeholders. State and Local Agencies appreciate the streamlined aspect of the technology, while participants appreciate the ease of use.

**Barriers of eFMNP Implementation
Increasing Farmer Participation**

Respondents were asked to indicate the greatest barriers to increasing participation in eFMNP among farmers. The most common barriers were farmers’ acceptance of new technology (87.5%), farmers’ ability to set up their account and download the app (75%), lack of support/troubleshooting from eFMNP contractors (37.5%), and poor internet service at farmers’ markets (37.5%).

Chart 11. Greatest barriers to increasing participation in eFMNP among farmers.



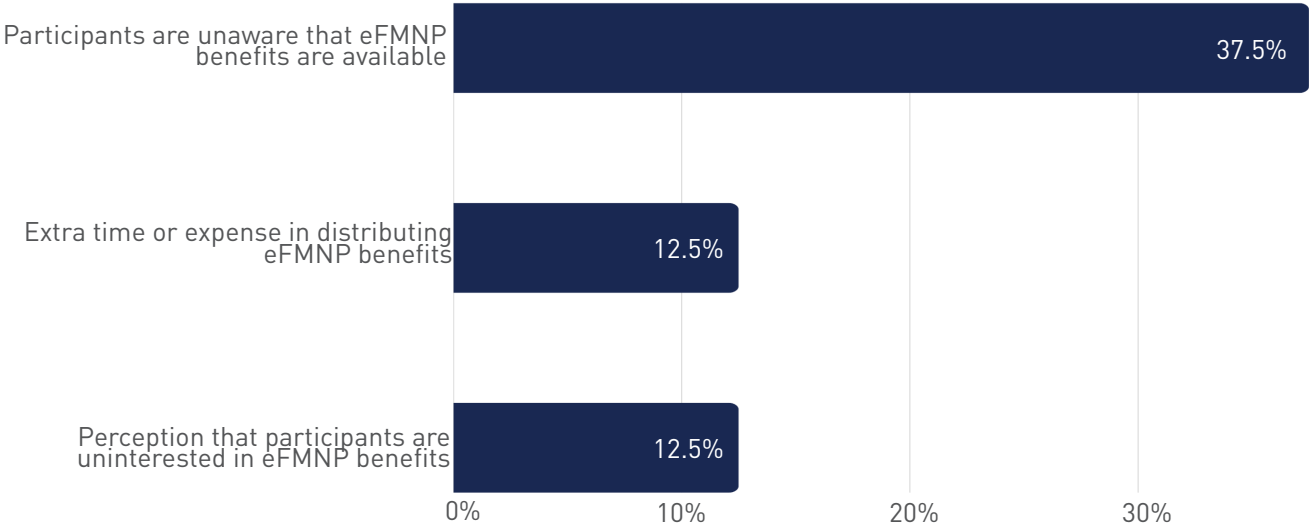
The qualitative data aligns with these findings. A theme that emerged from the data is that **mistrust and hesitancy of new technology impacted the recruitment of farmers to eFMNP**. Interviewees describe resistance from some farmers who distrust sharing their banking information or find eFMNP technology challenging. Farmers and market managers encountered challenges during the pilot stages of the program, especially in getting farmers to trust new technologies. For example, they face administrative issues like providing bank account information for direct deposits and understanding complex operations like the food box initiatives within the program.

Furthermore, at some agencies, low retention rates among market managers due to low pay and high responsibilities complicated farmer’s recruitment and retention for eFMNP.

Distributing eFMNP Benefits at the Local Level

Survey respondents were asked to indicate the three most significant barriers in distributing eFMNP benefits among WIC participants and Local Agencies. The most common barriers to distributing eFMNP benefits among Local Agencies were that WIC participants are unaware that eFMNP is available (37.5%), extra time or expense in distributing eFMNP benefits (12.5%), and the perception that participants are uninterested in eFMNP benefits (12.5%).

Chart 12. Barriers to distributing eFMNP benefits at Local Agencies.



The most common barriers to eFMNP benefits distribution are distinct from the paper voucher program because it is a different process to obtain the benefit. A theme that emerged from the qualitative data focused on **how staffing limits and language barriers complicate Local Agency education efforts**. In moving from the voucher system to the electronic system, it becomes more necessary for local staff to utilize an already limited staff to explain this new benefit and the accompanying QR code to WIC participants. Additionally, the language barriers further complicate staff’s efforts to educate the recipients about the program. One Local Agency staff commented,

“The majority of the population here are Spanish speaking. One of my offices they do have a high volume of refugees, so we have people from Afghanistan. And this all can be a challenge too, because if you don’t speak the language, how do you explain the process, and how do you educate the participants if English is not their first language? So that can be a challenge. We have Vietnamese here, Chinese, people from the Congo.”

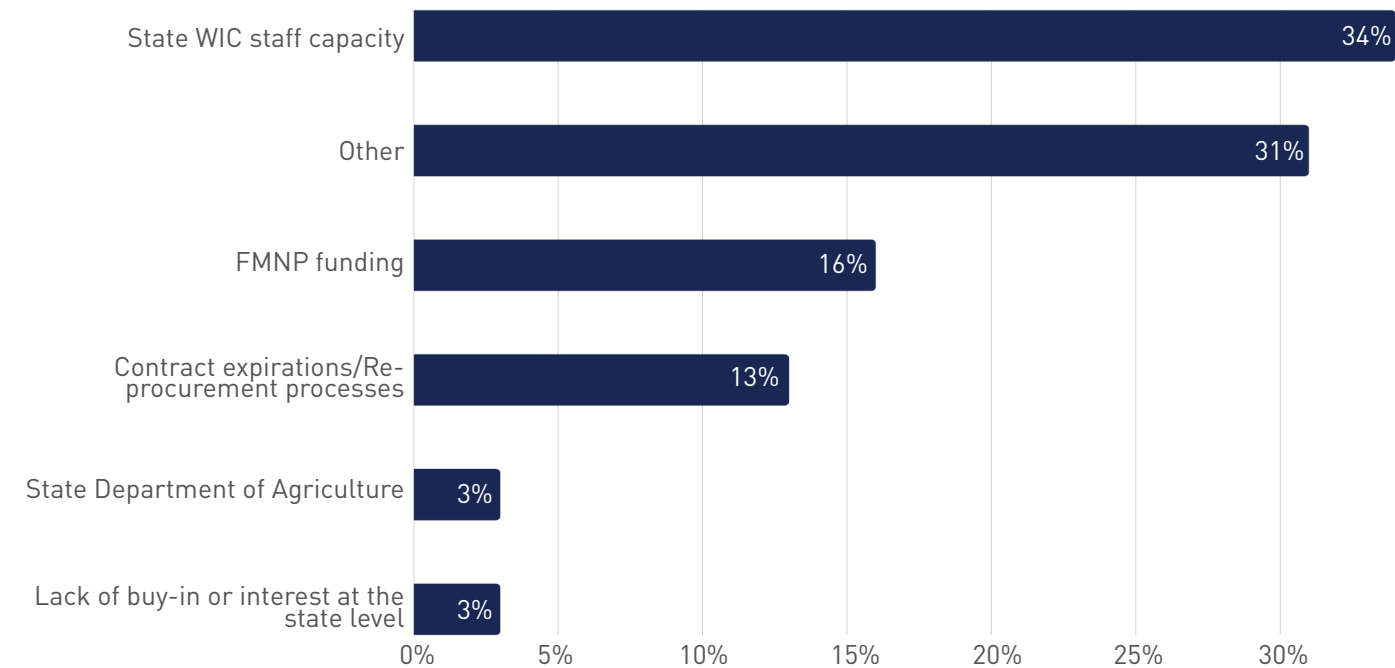
(Local Agency Staff- Implementer)

General Barriers to eFMNP Implementation

Survey respondents were asked to identify the barriers or challenges associated with the implementation of eFMNP. The most common challenges mentioned were State WIC staff capacity (34%), “other” (31%), FMNP funding (16%), and contract expirations/re-procurement (13%). In the survey space provided for sharing

an open-ended opinion or “other” comment, the most common theme was an unwillingness by farmers to change to an electronic system. Related concerns included the lack of consistent cell phone service and the procurement and contracting process as being barriers to eFMNP implementation. Other topics that were discussed included insufficient buy-in from market managers, a lack of matching funds, funding for MIS changes, the absence of farmers’ markets, and competing priorities within WIC.

Chart 13. General barriers to eFMNP implementation.



A theme from the qualitative interview data underscores that **technological and operational challenges plague the proper implementation of eFMNP**. The implementation of e-solutions faces numerous technical challenges that could significantly impact user experience. In alignment with the internet connectivity issue mentioned in the survey data, the qualitative data highlighted concerns about potential slow processing times and compatibility issues during updates, which might frustrate both farmers and WIC participants. A State Agency staff commented,

“I’m going to say the first year our barrier was, the app was slow. Since then, it has changed and it’s a lot faster. A lot of our farmers were very iffy about it at the beginning of the first full year... And you can tell other states that. Be ready for their issues, especially if it’s brand new and it’s barely starting. But yeah, the main thing was our farmers [said], “it’s (the app) too slow, it’s taking forever, it’s going to be too much time on our hands and we’re going to have to hire other staff to do it...”
(State Agency Staff - Implementer)

Operationally, farmers discuss lacking knowledge and feeling unsupported, as verifying eligible items and ensuring correct reimbursement becomes more complex with e-solutions. The stopgaps present in paper vouchers are absent, placing more responsibility on the farmers. Some farmers struggle to explain the program when WIC offices may not have fully informed participants or when confusion arises at the market. This is further complicated by language barriers between farmers and participants, which hinder program explanations.

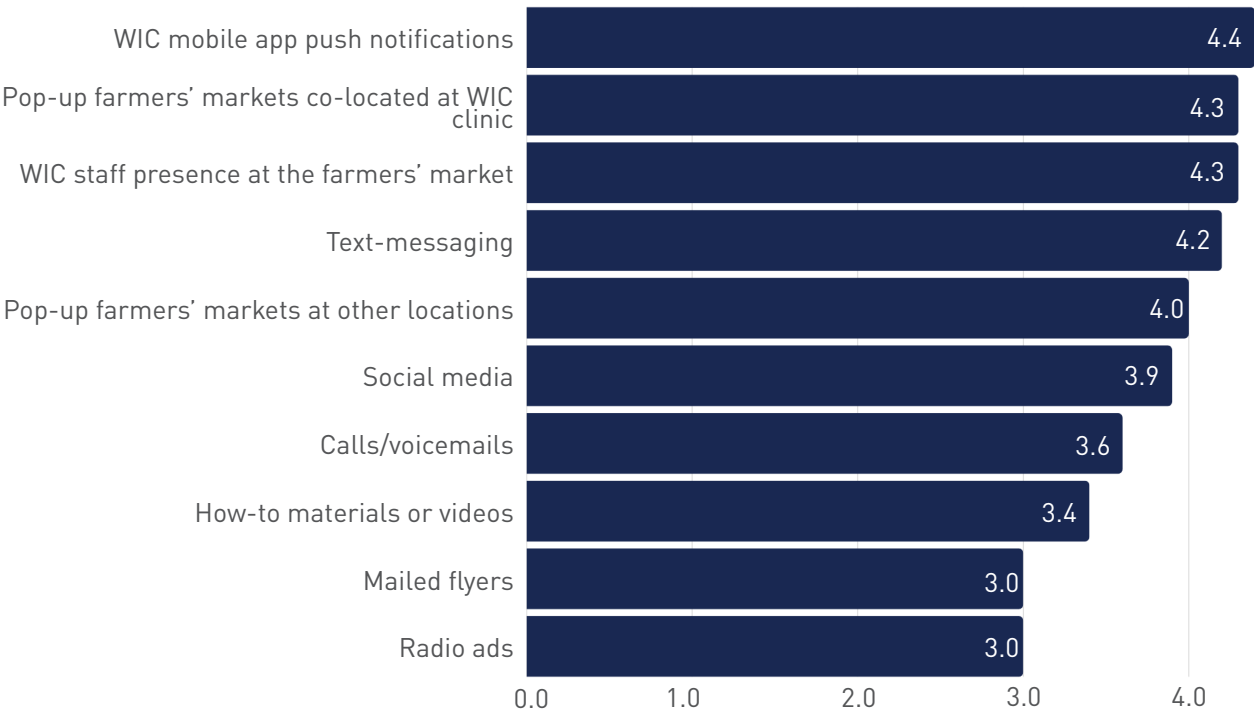
eFMNP Redemption

Facilitators of eFMNP Redemption

Participant Outreach

At the state and local levels, staff implement various strategies to raise WIC participants’ awareness and redemption of eFMNP benefits. In the Landscape Survey, respondents rated commonly used outreach methods on a scale from 1 (unsuccessful) to 5 (very successful). The highest-rated strategies included WIC mobile app push notifications (M = 4.4), pop-up farmers’ markets co-located with WIC clinics (M = 4.3), WIC staff presence at farmers’ markets (M = 4.3), text messaging (M = 4.2), and pop-up farmers’ markets at other locations, such as special events (M = 4.0). Respondents evaluated the impact of these outreach strategies. Several agencies used redemption rates to gauge a strategy’s success, particularly following an event or after communication that was conducted or even conducting a longitudinal review. Other sites reported utilizing findings from WIC participant surveys. One site tracked analytics from app banner ads, and another relied on anecdotal data from WIC staff and participants.

Chart 14. Efficacy of strategies used to boost awareness of eFMNP among participants.



A theme from the qualitative interview data focused on **staff engaging in constant outreach endeavors to farmers and WIC participants supported efforts to boost eFMNP redemption rates**. Qualitative interview data indicate that state and local staff ensured staff members maintained a continuous in-person presence at the farmers’ markets to develop strong relationships with farmers, which allowed farmers to address concerns and encourage participation among recipients and other farmers. Staff also conducted outreach to participants through emails and text messages who hadn’t utilized their benefits, which helped boost redemption rates.

State and Local Agencies have also found **QR codes helpful in streamlining transactions and improving program efficiency**. State and local staff describe a reduction in administrative burden. Participants appreciate the convenience of the technology. Using the QR codes at the farmers’ market is also more precise than using the vouchers. When using the QR code, the benefits are debited in real-time. When asked about the use of the QR code, one implementer stated,

“And we’re excited about the cards having the QR code on them now. That’s going to be a huge benefit for clients that don’t have a cell phone or don’t use the [WIC app].”

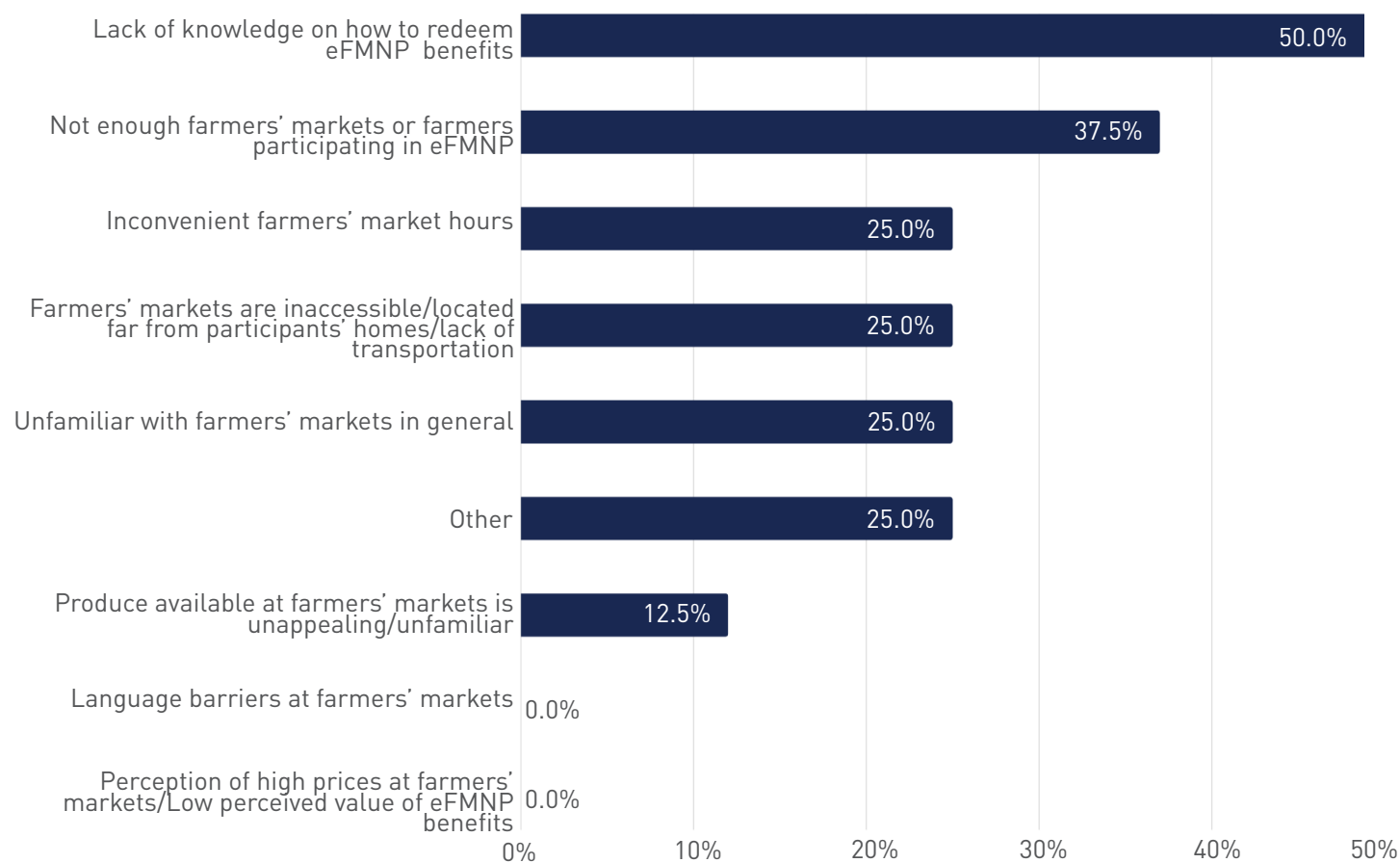
(State Agency Staff - Implementer)

Barriers to eFMNP Redemption

Distributing eFMNP Benefit to Participants

Landscape Survey respondents identify the greatest barriers to distributing eFMNP benefits among participants as lack of knowledge on how to redeem it (50%) and not enough farmers’ markets or farmers participating in eFMNP (37.5%). The subsequent most common barriers were that farmers’ markets are inaccessible or located far from participants’ homes or participants’ lack of transportation (25%), unfamiliar with farmers’ markets in general (25%), and inconvenient farmers’ market hours (25%).

Chart 15. Barriers to distributing eFMNP benefits among participants.



Many of the qualitative themes below reinforce the quantitative findings. A theme highlighted from the qualitative data is that **many WIC families struggle to shop at farmers’ markets due to time constraints and a need for convenient shopping options.** WIC families often have busy schedules and may be unable to shop during limited market hours. The need for convenience also emerged, as participants are less likely to visit multiple locations for fresh produce, which impacts their ability to redeem benefits. A state staff detailed,

“Making a trip to a farmers’ market, there’s other pieces to that, I mean, the cost of the produce is high typically compared to a store. There may be other distractions there. So again, is the mom with the two or three kids in tow going to go to the market as well to spend those benefits or are they just going to go focus on the stores themselves? So, I think I don’t see the markets as being a mainstream place to shop for people financially insecure. That’s what I would see as one barrier.”

(State Agency Staff - Implementer)

Another theme emerged from the qualitative data is that a **lack of local farmers and limited vendor participation are challenges to eFMNP redemption.** Seasonal availability and limited produce selections further constrain participants’ options, while the absence of culturally preferred produce can discourage some families from redeeming benefits. Furthermore, **the benefit money allotted per participant is often not**

enough to cover the higher prices of produce at farmers’ markets also emerged as a theme. This limits WIC families’ ability to purchase adequate amounts of fresh produce.

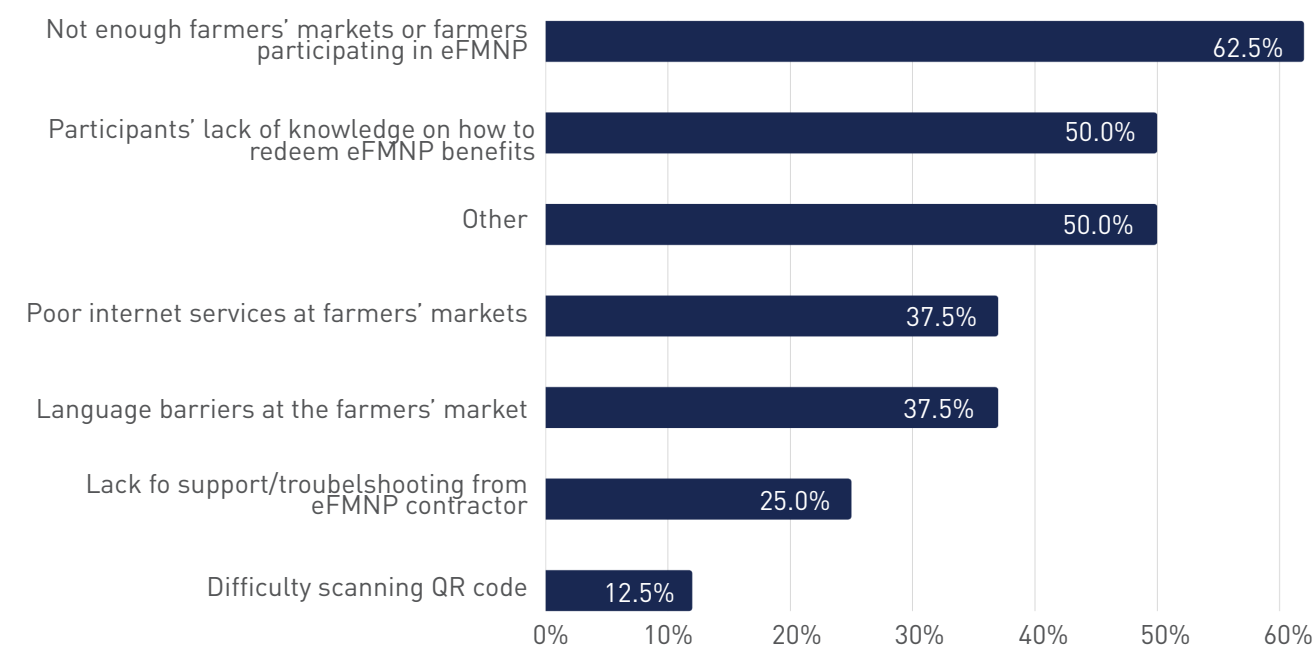
A theme from the qualitative data is that **limited interaction with WIC staff can reduce WIC participants’ support and engagement**. The absence of staff at markets and the distribution of eFMNP benefits in clinics paired with the expiration of the FMNP benefit at the close of summer means some WIC families have limited reminders or opportunities for check-ins, which can negatively affect redemption rates. An additional theme that emerged from the data suggests that **farmers’ non-compliance, such as selectively accepting FMNP benefits, poses an additional barrier to eFMNP redemption**. This situation creates extra challenges for participants and requires WIC staff to spend more time addressing these issues.

The last theme that emerged from the data related to barriers is that **language barriers posed a threat to eFMNP redemption** as well. Language barriers make it difficult for non-English-speaking participants to fully understand program details or navigate the redemption process.

eFMNP Redemption Among Participants

Survey respondents were asked to identify the three greatest barriers to increasing eFMNP redemption among them. The most frequently cited barrier, noted by 62.5% of respondents, was the insufficient number of farmers’ markets or farmers participating in eFMNP. This was followed by a lack of knowledge among participants on how to redeem eFMNP (50%), poor internet service at farmers’ markets (37.5%), and language barriers at these markets (37.5%).

Chart 16. Barriers to increasing eFMNP redemption among participants.



“Other” comments mentioned in an open-ended survey question emphasized that WIC participants are not receiving enough information on eFMNP benefits when they are issued at clinics. Another barrier mentioned was that visiting farmers’ markets had not been incorporated into WIC participant behavior. Finally, transportation was mentioned as a barrier.

A theme that emerged from the qualitative data highlighted how **technology challenges disrupt WIC participant redemption and discourage future engagement with the program**. Similar to the general barriers noted for eFMNP implementation, the qualitative data speaks to the technical challenges with the electronic payment system and broader technology-related issues regarding benefit redemption. System malfunctions, connectivity problems, or the need for separate devices to process vouchers create delays and frustration for both participants and farmers. Additionally, lack of Wi-Fi or unreliable internet access at farmers’ markets can prevent transactions from being completed smoothly. These technological obstacles not only limit participants’ ability to use their benefits but also discourage continued engagement with the program.

FMNP Stats: Paper vs. Electronic

Despite the aforementioned barriers, the transition from paper to electronic payment shows some positive results. Isolating data of the eight eFMNP sites a comparison was made between their last season using paper vouchers and the 2023 season using eFMNP. The results are below:

Table 6. Comparison of paper voucher usage versus eFMNP usage in 2023 at eFMNP sites.

| | Accepted FMNP Vouchers | Accepted eFMNP |
|----------------------|------------------------|----------------|
| # of Farmers | 2444 | 1317 |
| # of Farmers' Market | 354 | 379 |
| Amount Issued | 2,461,337 | 3,063,773 |
| Amount Redeemed | 856,705.31 | 990,082.49 |
| Redemption Rate | 35% | 32% |

The results indicate that eFMNP has the potential to be more efficient than paper vouchers over time. For most sites, 2023 was the first year of implementing this program. Although fewer individual farmers accepted eFMNP, there was an increase in the number of farmers' markets accepting eFMNP, and more importantly, their redemption rates were nearly identical. Building on the firm foundation of FMNP, over time, the transition from paper vouchers to eFMNP could yield overall higher redemption rates. Therefore, it will be essential for State and Local WIC offices to continue creating facilitators, addressing barriers specific to eFMNP implementation and redemption, and implementing the promising practices mentioned below.

eFMNP Promising Practices

Comprehensive and ongoing training and support are essential for the success of eFMNP. This training should happen at the state level. State-level training should be customized for staff and farmers before, during, and after implementation to address different levels of familiarity with the program. This includes webinars, in-person sessions, and multilingual instructional videos covering topics such as processing payments, registering in vendor portals, and completing agreements. Furthermore, sharing these resources widely enables vendors to train their teams independently. On-site technical assistance at markets, supported by demo accounts and troubleshooting sessions, boosts stakeholders' confidence in using the system. Dedicated hotlines that align with market hours offer real-time support for both farmers and participants. Here's an example of a site that consistently provides training.

"I would say the first one would be training. Providing lots of training before, during, and even after. So, pretty much nonstop training is available because what you don't know in this process is where each of the growers is at. Some adopt it early, some may be on the fence, [and] some may have not made up their mind. So, we kept putting information out there in the form of webinars and we did them both in English and in Spanish, and we made it so that we had an opportunity for them to come visit a training nonstop, and they still do. When we rolled out last summer, I think we had seven people that went out that very first month. And we canvassed the entire state. We were in [the] market. We were there with handsets, with information, and to be boots on the ground. And that would be so as the growers were trying to learn how to use this, they may have been struggling. The market managers were trying to figure out what it was that we were using. So, the fact that we were out in the markets on the weekends, we were there, and that was very useful because we had demo accounts; we could allow them to practice."

(State Agency Staff - Implementer)

Community engagement fosters trust and builds relationships among participants, farmers, and market managers. On-site presence at farmers' markets is important as staff visibility allows for direct assistance to participants and farmers. Farmer-to-farmer testimonials also encourage adoption by sharing success stories. Partnerships with community organizations such as libraries, cooking programs, and other local resources create welcoming environments that promote the program while expanding its reach.

"And I think having states or having anybody WIC at the markets to talk to farmers, that's another thing. If you go and become a staple at your market, your farmers are going to know who you are, and they're going to want to talk to you. And as soon as they know who you are, they're going to be like, 'Oh, hey, can you come help me real quick? I have this issue, or I have that problem. Oh, I want to sign up now.' And that's what we've seen."

(State Agency Staff - Implementer)

Accessibility and communication through multilingual training materials enhance program understanding for WIC participants as well as farmers and farmers' markets that WIC Agencies serve. Issuing benefits directly at markets adds convenience for participants while reducing barriers to access. Implementers note transparent communication is key and builds trust among stakeholders. A State Agency implementer noted,

"The resources for training... And the training that was provided, especially for participants, it's available in 17 different languages... So, it takes a lot, but how the QR code works and how to use it for your benefits and for clinics to train their participants, it's available in 17 different languages because especially in [County Name], there's more or less 17 languages that people speak here. But yeah, I think that was key, too."

(State Agency Staff - Implementer)

Operational efficiency, which includes streamlined accountability and dedicated staff roles, was noted for enhancing program efficiency. Having a food access coordinator or similar role within departments

provides invaluable advocacy and expertise. These coordinators leverage their understanding of food access to build connections and foster partnerships, which are crucial for promoting and effectively implementing FMNP across diverse populations and stakeholders. Staff engagement can be further incentivized through morale-boosting activities. Utilizing tracking systems helps identify areas needing additional support and refine approaches over time. A State Agency staff member discussed how data support their program efforts; they said,

"So, when we look at the numbers, we can see how... And this is the other part of electronic benefits, we can see all of the redemptions by grower totals, all of the information. So, we can look across the grower landscape and say, 'Here are all the growers that are taking transactions.' We can put them in order of greatest to least. We can identify those that maybe aren't taking many, and then those are the groups that we go to in the off-season and say, 'We noticed you only took X amount of dollars in transactions. Do you need some help working in the portal?'"

(State Agency Staff-Implementer)

Partnering with state market associations emerged as a key strategy for promoting eFMNP. These associations serve as a unified voice to advocate for the program's benefits within communities and have been particularly valuable in supporting electronic benefit implementation. Their involvement strengthens outreach efforts, ensures cohesive messaging, and helps promote the program effectively across different regions.

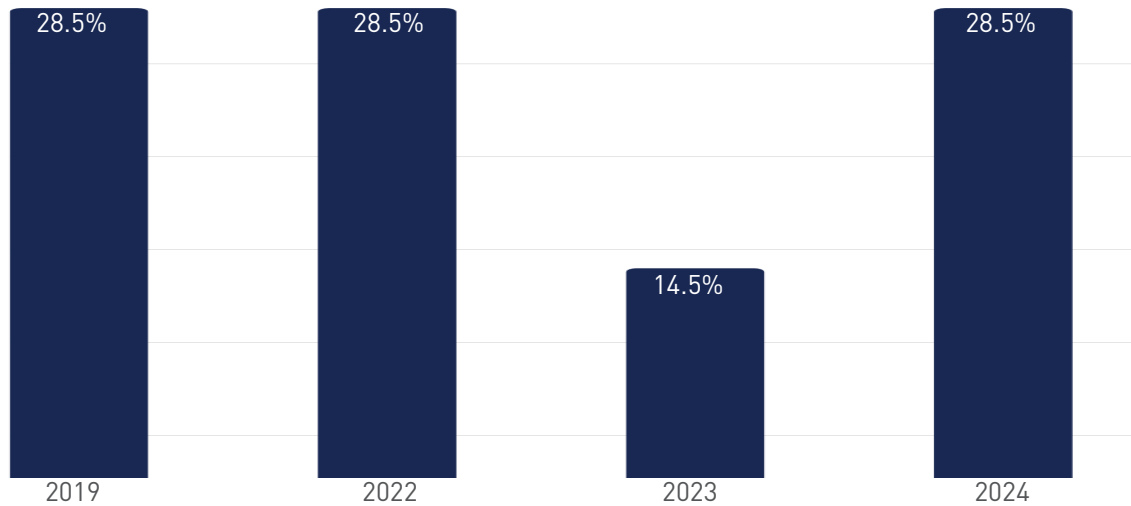
"And I will say involve your association as well. Ours is really active, and they even find grants to get hotspots or supporting the market with coverage too."

(State Agency Staff-Implementer)

CVB Implementation

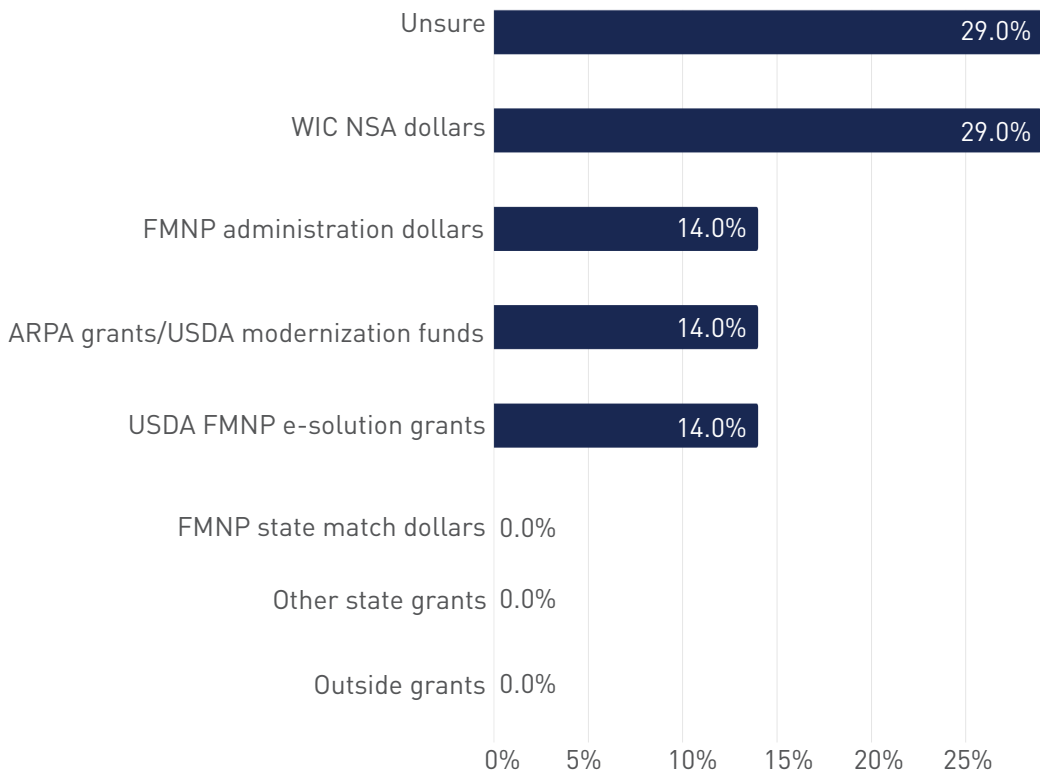
CVB is a benefit type/food category of the WIC food package that can be utilized at the farmer’s market and is redeemed through the electronic system. It is distinct from eWIC. Of the 32 sites that completed the Landscape Survey, only seven (22%) permit CVB usage at farmers’ markets, and another six intend to implement CVB use at farmers’ markets in the future. The years of CVB usage implementation at each site ranged from 2019 to 2024. Most sites (71%) adopted CVB usage after the pandemic.

Chart 17. Year CVB was implemented at farmers’ markets.



The seven sites implementing CVB usage at local farmers’ markets are funding it using WIC NSA dollars (29%), FMNP Administration dollars (14%), ARPA grants/ USDA modernization funds (14%), and USDA FMNP e-solutions grants (14%).

Chart 18. CVB funding sources.



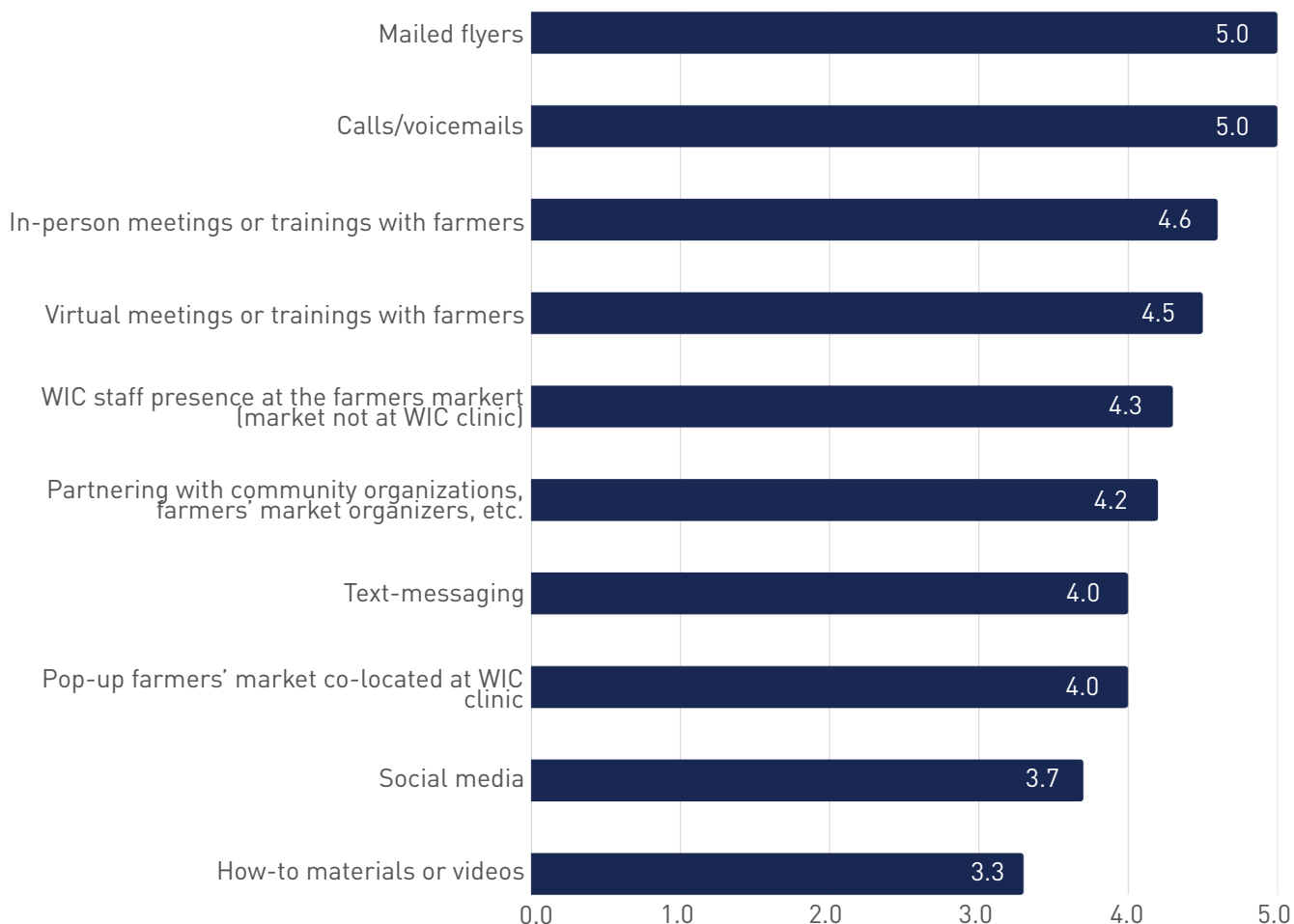
At these sites, during the 2023 market season, a total of 6,143,336 farmers and 245 farmers’ markets accepted CVB benefits.

Facilitators of CVB Implementation

Outreach and Retention of Farmers and Farmers' Markets

When asked to rate the success of outreach methods for recruiting and training farmers to accept eWIC on a scale from 1 (unsuccessful) to 5 (very successful), the highest-rated strategies were calls and voicemails (M = 5.0), mailed flyers (M = 5.0), in-person meetings or training sessions with farmers (M = 4.6), and virtual meetings or training sessions with farmers (M = 4.5).

Chart 19. Effectiveness of strategies to retain and train farmers to accept eWIC.



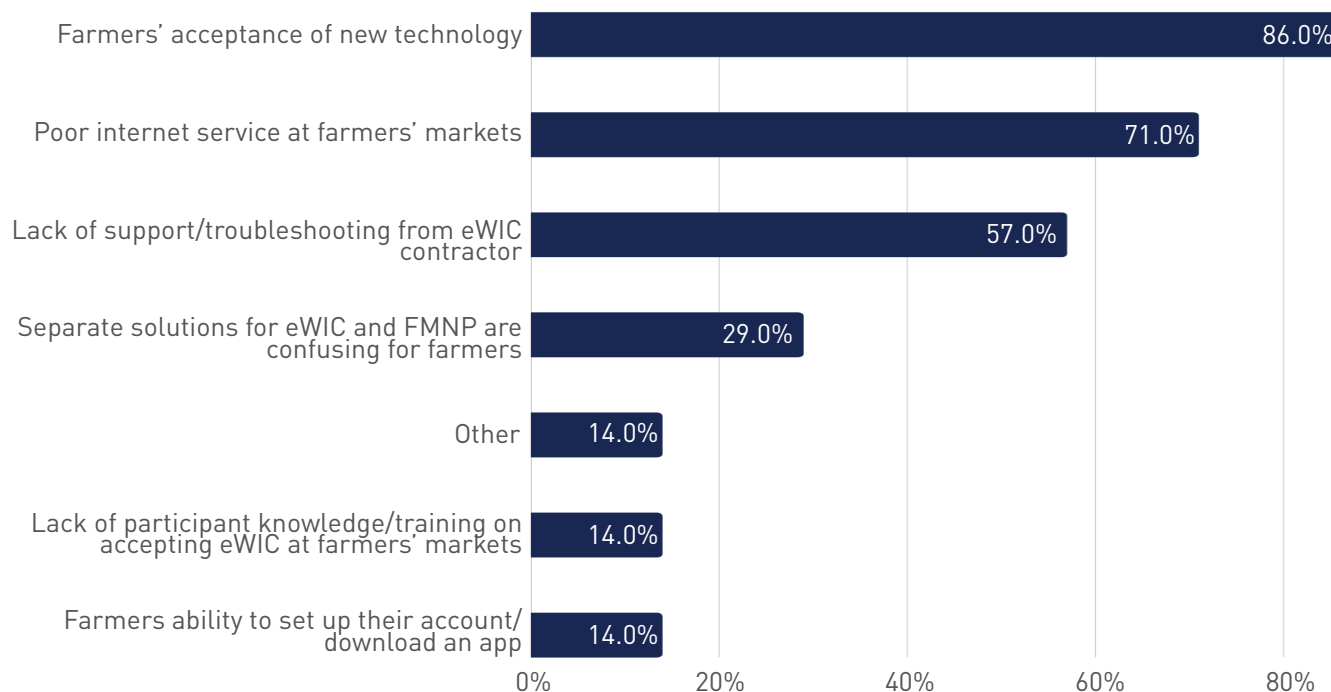
The quantitative data indicates the most successful methods of reaching farmers are analog reminders such as phone calls and mailed flyers. In addition, meetings, both in-person and virtual, are also facilitators to recruit and train farmers.

Barriers to CVB Implementation

Increasing Farmer Participation

Survey respondents were asked to indicate the three largest barriers to increasing eWIC participation of farmers. The barriers most chosen were farmers' acceptance of new technology (86%), poor internet service at farmers' markets (71%), and lack of support/troubleshooting from eWIC contractors (43%).

Chart 20. Barriers to increasing eWIC participation of farmers.



"Other" comments in an open-ended question included, "buy-in from the market managers". Similar to barriers to increasing eFMNP participation, farmers' acceptance of new technology, and lack of support to troubleshoot the program were the most common reasons. Poor internet is also a persistent issue for full adoption of this electronic payment mechanism.

The qualitative interview data revealed various barriers that hinder farmers' participation in the CVB program. Most challenges revolve around understanding the complexities of the program's rules and the use of key technology needed for its implementation. A theme that arose from the qualitative interview data highlighted that **the limited number of authorized vendors who accept CVB are a result of complicated sign-up requirements and denied authorizations**. This is further complicated by fees farmers must pay to participate in farmers' markets, which can deter farmers who may be already struggling financially.

"...now that the CVB is also being able to be used, it would be nice to have those stores outside of the farmers' market period that are eligible. Like this year for example, there's a farm on the way to [specific city], which is about a 45-minute drive, and it's a farm store that's open seven days a week and they're open late. I think they might "be open" even later than 6:00, but they are able to participate in the farmers' market and accept the payments when they're actually at the market, but then their farm store itself wasn't authorized. So outside of those hours, days, and months, [WIC participants] are not able to use them [with that vendor]."

(Local Agency Staff - Implementer)

A theme that emerged from the qualitative interview data is that **technological and operational challenges stem from multiple payment platforms and a lack of appropriate devices necessary for processing transactions for CVB**. A farmer provided details about the technological challenges they face; they said,

“So, that’s the biggest trouble that farmers have is, first of all, now every farmer has to have an electronic device to take in. And it’s got to be always charged. And you’ve got to have enough of them to handle the capacity of the people that are coming.”

(Farmer-Implementer)



“And I know I said this on my survey. I’m not going to lie about it. It scares me to add CVB, not only for our farmers who are barely learning a system and starting to really like it and understand it and implement another system for them that we may lose farmers, especially our smaller farmers. And I’ve been fighting tooth and nail. I’m like, “I don’t know.” But I think allowing everybody to get comfortable with something and then change it, I don’t know.”

(State Agency Staff – Implementers)

Another theme that emerged from the data is that **farmers and participants run into confusion about which items are eligible for CVB**. For instance, raw milk is not approved even though milk is generally eligible. Staff from a Local Agency explained,

“Oh, there’s one of our smaller markets who’s a vendor sometimes comes who sells raw milk. And so participants were confused by that because they saw some of these vendors accept WIC, and WIC provides milk. So, there was maybe a misunderstanding that this vendor who’s selling raw milk at the farmers’ market accepts WIC. They sell a WIC food, which is milk, but raw milk is not one of the WIC-approved foods that [this state] provides.”

(Local Agency Staff - Implementer)

A final theme that emerged from the data related to barriers to increasing farmer participation focuses on how **complex program rules hinder authorized farmers from understanding program reporting requirements or how the program is going to be implemented, and they struggle with differentiating between CVB and FMNP benefits**, as each has distinct rules and processes. Farmers and WIC participants also run into confusion about program timelines.

Another farmer commented how their confusion about CVB had them not accept WIC participant benefits; they stated,

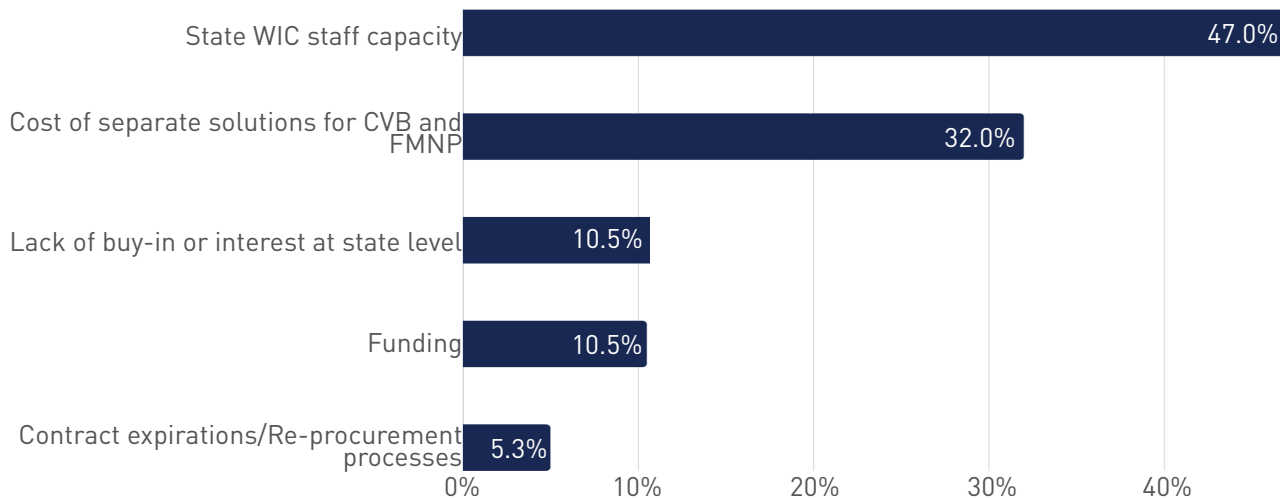
“And the reality was, like I said, it was a bit of just confusion on their end and confusion on our end. And so I actually feel bad that we probably turned away a whole ... when I say a whole bunch of people, I’m probably talking 20, 25 people, not hundreds. Only because there was some real confusion about how that cash value benefit program worked. And like I said, we finally just started scanning them, and if it gave us the go ahead, we just said, oh, great. Wonderful.”

(Farmer - Implementer)

General Barriers to CVB Implementation

Sites that stated they did not plan to implement CVB were asked to identify the barriers or challenges associated with the implementation of CVB. The most common challenges mentioned were State WIC staff capacity (47%), cost of separate solutions for CVB and FMNP (32%), lack of buy-in or interest at the state level (10.5%) and funding (10.5%). The most common qualitative responses to the “other” item were current MIS limitations, lack of farmers’ markets, and lack of reliable cellular service.

Chart 21. General barriers to CVB implementation.



Barriers to the implementation of CVB were also highlighted in the qualitative interview data. One theme that emerged from the data is there is a lack of understanding of the nuances involved in implementing the CVB program. In some cases, farmers are not receiving proper training on CVB, so they are learning as they go. Another interviewee commented that they were trained, but they need the implementation of the program to be operationalized and more clarity about the FMNP voucher, eFMNP, SNAP, CVB, etc., to be able to distinguish between them all. One farmer commented on their confusion with the different programs; they said,

“It isn’t so much training about using CVB as it is information on how that was going to be implemented. Especially, again, I’m in [specific] state, so it’s a [specific] State issue. Here’s the problem we ran into was that I might be confusing SNAP with, maybe I’m confusing SNAP with the FMNP cash value benefit program. One of the problems we ran into is that in [specific] state, in order to use, okay, if you want to be a licensed CVB location, you had to have all sorts of qualifications. It was a crazy thing. Okay. To me, it was a bit crazy. It was things like you had to carry diapers and you had to carry infant formula.”

(Farmer-Implementer)

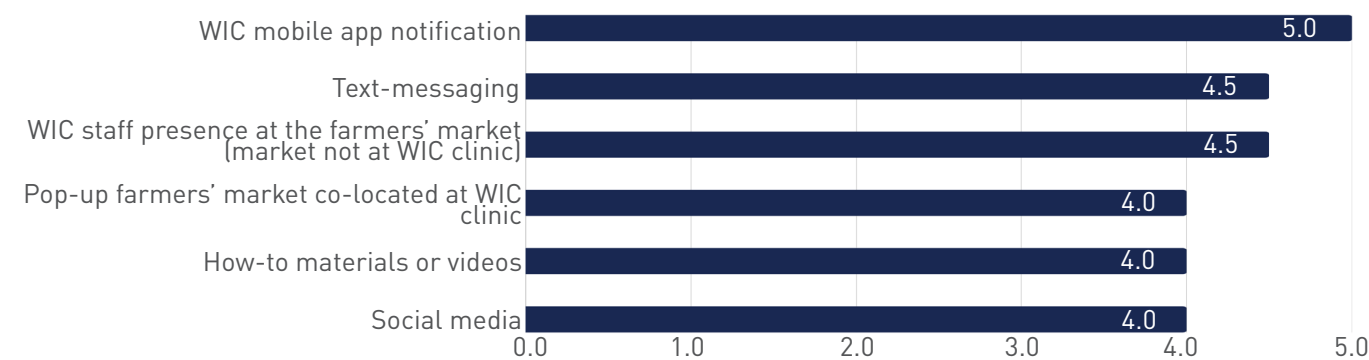
CVB Redemption

Facilitators to CVB Redemption

Participant Outreach

When asked to rate the success of outreach methods for increasing awareness about redeeming CVB at the farmers’ markets among participants on a scale from 1 (unsuccessful) to 5 (very successful), the highest-rated strategies were WIC mobile app push notifications (mean = 5.0), text messaging (mean = 4.5), and WIC staff presence at the farmers’ market (not located at a WIC clinic) (mean = 4.5).

Chart 22. Effective strategies to boost awareness about redeeming CVB at farmers’ markets among participants.



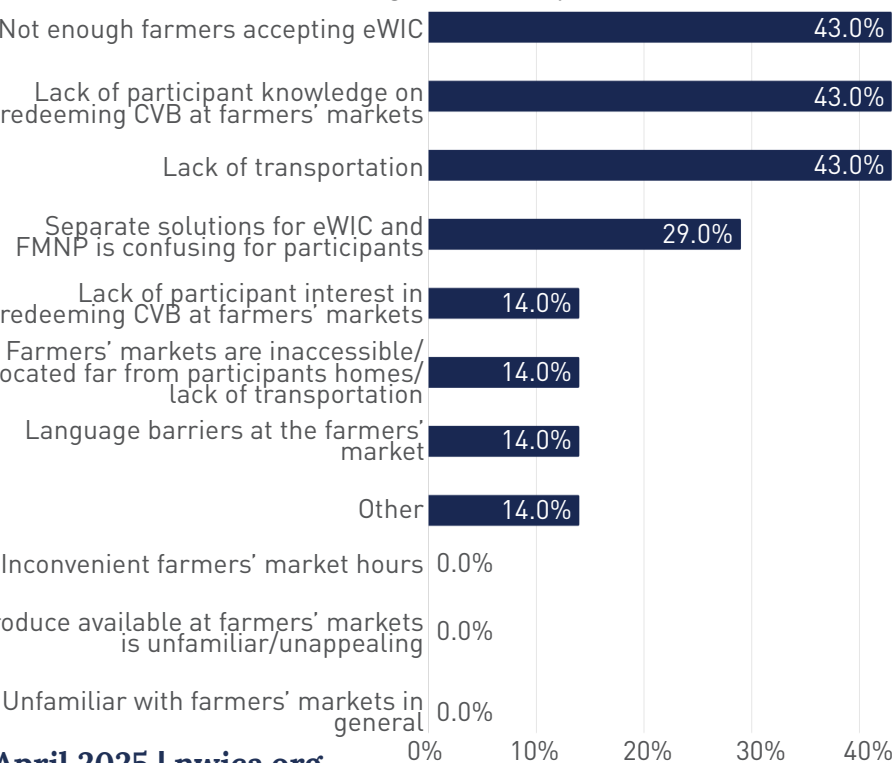
A theme that emerged from the qualitative interview data regarding facilitators for CVB redemption is that **in-person outreach and education strategies are essential for increasing CVB awareness and redemption rates**. WIC staff take on additional outreach and recruitment responsibilities that demand dedicated staff time and effort. They engage in these efforts even when facing resource constraints, such as limited staff size and funding.

Barriers to CVB Redemption

Redemption Among Participants

Survey respondents were asked to identify the three largest barriers to redeeming CVB at farmers’ markets. The barriers most frequently selected were a lack of farmers accepting eWIC (43%), insufficient participant knowledge or training on redeeming CVB at farmers’ markets (43%), and inadequate transportation (43%). The remaining results are provided below.

Chart 23. Barriers to increasing CVB redemption at farmers’ markets among participants.



“Other” comments mentioned in an open-ended survey question was, “getting the word out to ALL clients that CVB benefits CAN be redeemed at authorized growers.”

In the qualitative interview data, State and Local Agencies commented on what they perceived to be barriers to CVB redemption. A theme that arose from the data is a **lack of authorized farmers’ market options for using CVB benefits during the farmers’ market off-season**.

CVB Promising Practices

The integration of FMNP and CVB at farmers' markets aims to extend benefits to both participants and farmers by enhancing access to fresh, nutritious produce and directing more funding into local markets. Interviews with stakeholders have revealed several promising practices and innovative strategies that help modernize and maximize the impact of both initiatives.

Clear explanations of WIC participant benefits are essential to address any questions, and encourage greater participation in farmers' markets, and ensure that recipients understand how to use their benefits. Furthermore, empowering WIC participants with knowledge about where they can use their benefits helps them make informed shopping decisions that best meet their needs. A State Agency staff commented about the importance of promoting the benefits; they said,

"I would say promotion. It being, promoting the program at the State and Local Agency level, letting participants know that these benefits are available. And so, promoting that, advertising the markets that are nearby, so the participants know that they have options for these benefits, but where they can go to spend them, and letting them know that both FMNP and CVB are now accepted there."

(State Agency Staff - Implementer)

Leveraging larger WIC resources by integrating CVB at farmers' markets is instrumental in expanding both FMNP and CVB access. Integration also expands agencies' access to resources essential to implementing the programs. Implementing CVB at farmers' markets ensures that all WIC participants—not only those living in a state that implements FMNP benefits—can purchase produce from authorized markets.

"And we involve a lot of people. As [staff name] mentioned, we have two full dedicated staff [inaudible] two full time. But by including the CVB and taking WIC, we were able to use a lot of the WIC staff to help us in the planning and the implementation and running the program as well."

(State Agency Staff - Implementer)

Streamlining transactions with dual benefit

providers who are capable of processing both FMNP and CVB benefits. States have also focused on the dynamic between FMNP and CVB to maximize the benefit dollars for the recipients. Prioritizing FMNP transactions before CVBs allows limited FMNP funds to be utilized first while still allowing participants to access their year-round CVB benefits.

"... because all the benefits are in the QR code on a card or app. Whenever participants use their benefits, it's going to use the FMNP benefits first and then the CVB. That's what we decided from the beginning, if not ... because the CVB, it's a monthly benefit, probably they're going to be using the FMNP benefits, only the CVB. So we decided, first, they're going to push the FMNP. Whenever the FMNP benefits run out, it will kick in the CVB."

(State Agency Staff - Implementer)

Advancing Health Equity

Qualitative interview data provided insights on ways in which FMNP and CVB usage currently advance health equity and ways in which these programs can enhance their contribution to health equity.

Related to advancing health equity, a theme that emerged from the qualitative interview data is that FMNP and CVB usage expands access to fresh, local produce to many of the most underserved populations through innovative, intentional modalities. Sites are aware that locations, limited hours, and client transportation make access to farmers' markets difficult for some participants. To address these barriers, sites have engaged in activities such as pop-up farmers' markets co-located at WIC clinics or at other locations. There are also sites that engage in food delivery services to ensure that participants with transportation and/or mobility issues gain access. Specifically, one site described efforts used to ensure that families residing in extended stay hotels were able to receive and redeem their benefits. Expanding access by utilizing innovations will ensure that low-resource individuals are being served.

Another theme that emerged related to advancing health equity is **that WIC sites are working to address language accessibility issues**. Some sites described providing training to farmers and WIC participants in English and Spanish. Another site described implementing a training module for WIC participants

that is available in 17 languages. Other sites ensure program staff is available on-site at the farmers' markets to reduce accessibility issues for farmers and participants. These and other efforts are being made to ensure all WIC participants have access to the benefits provided by FMNP.

Interviewees highlighted that **additional forms of culturally inclusive education is needed to expand access for all participants.** Interviewees described the need for informational videos and training in multiple languages to empower diverse communities to navigate the program effectively. Implementer sites also highlighted that providing translation services at WIC sites that don't employ bilingual staff helps ensure all participants fully understand and utilize program benefits. Ensuring that program information is available in multiple languages is also critical to making the program more inclusive and accessible to diverse communities.

For FMNP to continue to advance health equity, program staff suggested **FMNP expand to authorize alternative fresh food vendors within food deserts.** For example, allowing FMNP and CVB benefits to be used at supermarkets, corner stores, and other

vendors offering fresh fruit and vegetables would further expand access for underserved populations.

Another suggestion that was highlighted in the qualitative data was the **utilization of vendor maps to assist participant access and identify gaps in service areas.** State Agency staff highlighted the need to create a vendor location map to assist individuals with mobility challenges, such as seniors, pregnant women, and parents with young children, ensuring easier access to fresh food. Additionally, identifying service gaps and authorizing new stores in underserved areas can ensure broader access to fresh produce.

The qualitative interview data also highlighted the **importance of having a food access coordinator to advocate for participants and strengthen connections within the community.** These staff members are entrenched in the community and work to ensure WIC services effectively meet local needs. These individuals are representative of many types of WIC participants and may assist with outreach to more difficult to reach populations.



Conclusion and Recommendations

The WIC Farmers' Market Nutrition Program (FMNP) has demonstrated its vital role in improving the health and well-being of low-income families by providing them with access to fresh, locally grown produce. By empowering participants, particularly pregnant women, mothers, and young children, FMNP helps to combat food insecurity, supports healthier eating habits, and fosters local economies through partnerships with farmers and farmers' markets. This program is an important tool in advancing health equity, by making nutritious food accessible to those who need it most.

Farmers benefit from the relationship with WIC FMNP, including developing relationships with community members, earning additional revenue through direct sales via benefits, and indirect sales made in the same transaction.

Taken together, though the CVB may appear small, this has directly contributed to strengthening the food security infrastructure of the United States. As such, WIC FMNP and fresh produce benefits are worthy of additional funding and implementation. FMNP is an invaluable asset that has the potential to do even more for the communities it serves. By tackling its current barriers, we are not only improving a program—we are creating a future where more families can thrive, farmers can prosper, and nutrient-rich eating becomes the norm for everyone.

The recommendations outlined in this report highlight some of the promising practices described in the Landscape Survey and qualitative interview data. We know that more will continue to emerge as the Local and State WIC offices develop and customize the implementation to fit their area and participant demographic profile. This is where federal infrastructure meets local ingenuity, for maximum impact.

The remainder of this section will identify challenges of FMNP and CVB and integrate facilitators and promising practices to highlight recommendations that create a path toward more equitable and effective implementation of FMNP.

Challenges and Recommendations

Overall WIC FMNP Challenges and Recommendations

Minimal funding to fully implement FMNP and eFMNP: Most of the sites that implement FMNP use multiple sources of funding to successfully run the program. Additional funding would allow for staff to engage with, support, and train farmers and participants on various aspects of the program,

technology to ensure consistent internet service, and multilingual materials to ensure all WIC participants have access to information to access their benefits. To overcome this challenge it will be important to:

- **Innovate and leverage no-cost natural community partnerships and resources:** As described above, there was one site above that trained multilingual high school volunteers who needed community service hours, to support participants in accessing their benefits. This is a great example of a community-based, tailored win-win that arose from a WIC staff member recognizing and aligning needs in the community.
- **Innovate and look for additional funding sources:** As discussed, 91% of WIC sites receive additional funding to the USDA's FMNP administrative dollars. These funding sources include federal, state, and private foundations.

Inconsistent WIC participant education and motivation: FMNP has strong potential to advance health equity by focusing on the specific needs of underserved populations and addressing the barriers they face. To prioritize this, the following steps are recommended:

- **Enhance access to voucher receipt and utilization:** To improve voucher receipt by participants, various distribution methods and increased voucher benefits are helpful. Extending the availability of benefits beyond a one-time distribution will help ensure more participants receive their benefits. Additionally, mailing vouchers to participants who are unable to attend scheduled distribution days can improve voucher receipt. Increasing the benefit amount is also important, as the current value may not provide enough incentive for recipients to choose shopping at farmers' markets over grocery stores.
- **Address perceptions about produce cost at farmers' markets:** One common barrier to increasing FMNP participation and paper voucher

redemption is the perception of high produce prices at farmers' markets and the low perceived value of FMNP benefits. WIC participants have reported a high probability to use their entire voucher amount in one trip due to the high cost of produce. It is important to inform WIC participants about other incentives available at the farmers' market that will provide additional benefits, allowing WIC participants the ability to afford more fresh produce.

- **Address the specific needs of underserved populations:** Limited variety of produce or a lack of culturally appropriate options can discourage FMNP participation in diverse communities. To boost engagement, education and incentives like food demonstrations featuring seasonal and culturally relevant foods are key. WIC staff can incorporate these demos into their nutrition education efforts while informing participants about the culturally relevant produce available through FMNP at farmers' markets. It's crucial that these sessions highlight food from the local region. Additionally, forming partnerships with community organizations, such as cooking programs, can help create welcoming spaces that promote the program and extend its reach.
- **Provide multilingual training on FMNP:** The language barrier that exists at certain sites makes providing critical information about FMNP difficult. Program sites could offer personalized, multilingual trainings for WIC participants, farmers, and market managers throughout its implementation, ensuring language barriers are addressed. These trainings should also include multilingual instructional videos on key topics that vendors can use to train their teams and improve the program's effectiveness.

Low farmer recruitment and support: Additional farmers need to join FMNP to ensure a greater variety of fresh produce and help make these benefits



more accessible to WIC participants. Many families face barriers such as transportation challenges, inconvenient market hours, or limited locations where benefits can be used. Integrating FMNP into more community settings, such as pop-up markets at other locations, food box distributions, and partnering with community stakeholders, can help bridge this gap. To support these efforts WIC staff should work to:

- **Build stronger relationships with the farming community:** By fostering collaboration and communication with individual farmers, farmers' market managers, and larger farming organizations, WIC staff can better support farmers in navigating program requirements, encouraging participation, and creating a network of trust and shared goals.
- **Identify community champions known and trusted in the farming community:** Finding these individuals within the community who have deep roots and trust who can use their social capital to promote the utility of the program. They can be civic or faith leaders, or farmers who have used the system and received their payments. Farmers who are able to speak to others about their direct experiences with electronic reimbursement and encourage their peers to enroll. Farmers trust one another, and hearing their peers' testimonials can help alleviate concerns. They can also serve as program educators and outreach coordinators who advocate for FMNP.

Insufficient market access: Farmers' market location, transportation, and limited market hours are barriers faced by many WIC participants. Quantitative and qualitative data highlight these as major barriers to FMNP benefit redemption. By implementing promising practices and developing new targeted solutions, FMNP can reach new heights in participation and redemption rates. To support this effort, WIC staff should:

- **Develop innovative strategies to bring fresh, local produce to participants.** Quantitative and qualitative data describe the effectiveness of pop-up farmers' markets co located at WIC clinics or at special events as facilitators for FMNP redemption. Additionally, a few FMNP sites are also piloting a food delivery service to address the transportation barrier.

FMNP Voucher Challenges and Recommendations

FMNP has traditionally provided paper coupons or vouchers to WIC participants, allowing them to

purchase fresh fruits, vegetables, and herbs from approved farmers' markets. This has facilitated access to and increased consumption of fresh fruits and vegetables by families with pregnant and lactating women, and young children. This system of paper vouchers is often preferred by non-English speakers, thanks to the familiarity and accessibility of paper currency.

Inflexibility with distribution methods and spending denominations. When paper voucher distribution requires additional trips to WIC offices, this creates a barrier for families. Higher denomination vouchers limit spending flexibility. This could be addressed in the following ways:

- **Innovate and facilitate opportunities for voucher distribution and ease of use.** Several promising practices highlighted in this report include handing out vouchers on a designated day; and providing vouchers at the farmers' market. Of note, the latter mitigates the reported issue of misplaced and destroyed vouchers.
- **Create greater spending flexibility through development of smaller denomination vouchers:** Farmers are unable to make change with the FMNP vouchers. Thus, with large denominations, participants spend their voucher in one lump, potentially limiting their market choices. Given the perception that farmers' markets have higher costs, lower denominations create greater functionality of spending, and will work working in a versatile manner more similar to cash and potentially lower some related barriers.





eFMNP Challenges and Recommendations

eFMNP was developed to modernize and streamline the administration of the Farmers' Market Nutrition Program. eFMNP presents both opportunities and challenges for farmers and participants. While eFMNP has the potential to streamline transactions and improve access to fresh, locally grown produce, several areas need attention.

Insufficient WIC participant knowledge of eFMNP benefits. eFMNP modernization speaks to the population of English-speaking younger parents, who reported appreciating both the convenience and lower stigma of electronic benefits. There is also an advantage to this mechanism over paper vouchers, as the payments are precise to the dollar cost. However, the shift from paper to electronic benefits highlighted the language barrier issue because participants have to be educated on the electronic system. The voucher system was tactile and may have been easier to explain without translation. Qualitative data confirms that, particularly for international participants, it is difficult to explain eFMNP concept to them; as it is both a language and conceptual barrier. The eFMNP emphasizes language barriers because it forces more nuanced communication between WIC staff and participants to explain the details of the program.

Therefore, WIC staff will need to:

- **Educate WIC participants on the role of eFMNP within the larger social safety net of WIC.** WIC participants represent a myriad of cultures, many of which are unfamiliar with mechanisms of a social safety net. It will be important to provide multilingual training (both in-person and video) and education materials to enhance program understanding for the international WIC participants that agencies serve. For consistency across agencies, self-paced training modules may also be effective.
- **Provide hands-on guidance and technical support for farmers and participants on site at farmers' markets or events.** Having WIC staff or program volunteers physically present at markets to troubleshoot issues in real-time will be crucial in building confidence and addressing concerns as they arise. Both farmers and participants will require patient, step-by-step support to navigate the new system effectively.

Insufficient farmer knowledge of eFMNP revenue potential. The eFMNP mechanism eases farmers' market access for a younger, English-speaking population that prefers electronic payments. At the same time, however, eFMNP requires the farmers take additional implementation steps including 1) learning more about the eligible foods; 2) learning to use and connect new technology to process the

payments; and 3) connecting their bank accounts to process and receive payments. It also requires adequate cellular service, which may be less available in rural areas. To further support farmers, WIC staff should:

- **Build trust among farmers of eFMNP.** There is a sense of distrust among farmers who are hesitant to adopt the new system. Many farmers are unfamiliar with electronic banking technology and worry about its reliability, leading to concerns that it may disrupt their business operations or security.
- **Take an individualized approach to farmer education.** Personalized training sessions tailored to farmers and participants are essential, with WIC staff providing hands-on guidance. Having WIC staff or program volunteers physically present at markets to troubleshoot issues in real-time was found to be crucial in building confidence and addressing concerns as they arise. Addressing complications before they interrupt business flow builds the program's reputation.
- **Create personalized, multilingual training programs for farmers and farmers' market managers.** Conducting ongoing training and outreach efforts that connect farmers with knowledgeable program staff can further enhance the program's effectiveness and ensure its continued success. It is important that in educating farmers about the program, language barriers are considered, and training and materials are offered in multiple languages.
- **Share how-to videos that allow farmers to learn the technology in the privacy and safety of their own space and pace.** In this heavily technology-focused age, the data kept reflecting that farmers may need a more individualized approach in order to adapt to updated technology. Farmers still largely reside in a world where they work with their hands and spend time in their fields. According to the qualitative and quantitative data, many of the farmers do not understand

the new technology. To be inclusive of farmers' needs during the transition to eFMNP, it will be important to explain the technology to them in ways that make them feel comfortable and confident. It is interesting that 'how-to materials or videos' was the most important strategy. Self-paced learning in private settings is effective.

CVB Challenges and Recommendations

Cash Value Benefit (CVB) is a category of the WIC food package, providing participants with funds to purchase fruits and vegetables. To maximize its impact at farmers' markets, it will be important to address:

Low rates of implementation at farmers' markets. It will be important to work closely with states to expand the acceptance of CVB at farmers' markets. Currently, states that allow CVB at farmers' markets are seeing positive results, including increased redemption rates. WIC staff can continue to promote CVB redemption at farmers' markets as they:

- **Collaborate with State Agencies to address logistical barriers and promote the benefits of CVB acceptance.** In order to expand CVB acceptance, logistical barriers must be streamlined and community champions should be identified to promote the program. As additional farmers' markets can be integrated into the program, local food systems are improved along with improved access to nutritious and fresh produce for WIC families.
- **Create personalized, multilingual training programs, and hands-on support for farmers and participants.** Similar to eFMNP, it is important to provide farmers and participants with the knowledge and training to ensure both parties understand how CVB is used at farmers' markets and how the benefits outweigh the drawbacks.

Closing

In closing, the findings from this report underscore the critical role that WIC FMNP, eFMNP, and CVB play in fostering healthier communities and food systems. By connecting low-income families with fresh, locally grown nutritious produce. These programs are more than just food assistance- they are transformative pathways to improve health, bolster local farming revenue, connect communities, and reshape lives. These programs embody the essence of health equity, empowering low-income families with access to fresh, local produce, and contributing to the vitality of both the communities they serve and the farmers who supply them.

While the journey to ideal implementation has its challenges, the potential for growth and innovation is promising. The findings presented in this report underscore the progress that has been made and highlight the growth opportunities. By addressing the barriers that remain and investing in the facilitators that drive success, we have the opportunity to create a system that is not only more efficient, but deeply impactful.

Prioritizing the promising practices and recommendations in this report (e.g., strengthening funding, enhancing outreach, improving technological integration, leveraging community partnerships, and expanding access), can further unlock the transformative impact of WIC FMNP by meeting the evolving needs of farmers, participants, and communities.

We stand at the threshold of something powerful: a future where WIC participants, farmers, and entire communities benefit from a seamless, accessible, and sustainable system. A future where the health and well-being of underserved families is supported by more than just a safety net, but a foundation for thriving.

As we continue to innovate, collaborate, and invest in these programs, we are not just improving access to fresh produce; we are sowing the seeds for a more just and healthy society. The path ahead is filled with possibility, and with collective effort, we can ensure that these programs reach their full potential- transforming lives, communities, and the future of food access for generations to come.

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