

# Fresh Access Bucks Mystery Shopper Project: Results and Findings

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## About Feeding Florida:

Feeding Florida is the state's network of nine food banks working together to provide healthy and dependable solutions to ending hunger in all 67 counties. The network of food banks works with more than 2,400 partner charitable agencies —local churches, charities, schools, and health centers with food pantries —to deliver programs, services, and meals directly to more than 2 million hungry Floridians.

## About Fresh Access Bucks:

Fresh Access Bucks (FAB), an initiative of Feeding Florida, is a statewide nutrition incentive program currently funded through a USDA Gus Schumacher Nutrition Incentive Program COVID Relief and Response (GusCRR) grant. FAB increases access to fresh, affordable produce in underserved communities while supporting Florida's farmers and enhancing local economies. SNAP customers receive a dollar-for-dollar match for fresh Florida-grown produce when they shop with FAB at participating outlets across the state. FAB outlets include farmers markets, produce stands, CSAs, mobile markets, and community grocery stores. The FAB program strategically partners with farm-direct and brick-and-mortar retail outlets in and around food deserts, low-income communities, and along transportation routes. Currently, more than 75 farm-direct and brick-and-mortar retail outlets participate in the FAB program statewide.

## Purpose of Mystery Shopper Project:

FAB piloted a mystery shopper program to collect feedback from shoppers using the FAB program. Mystery shopping is a practice used by organizations to evaluate customer experience and assess operational standards. Mystery shopping uses specially-trained customers, or mystery shoppers, who shop in person or online and provide feedback on their experience.



# Goals:

- Gather shopper perspectives on using nutrition incentives at FAB outlets.
  - Ensure compliance with SNAP and FAB requirements.
  - Identify opportunities for program growth and improvement.
  - Inform training materials and resources for customers, partners, and vendors.
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# Methods:

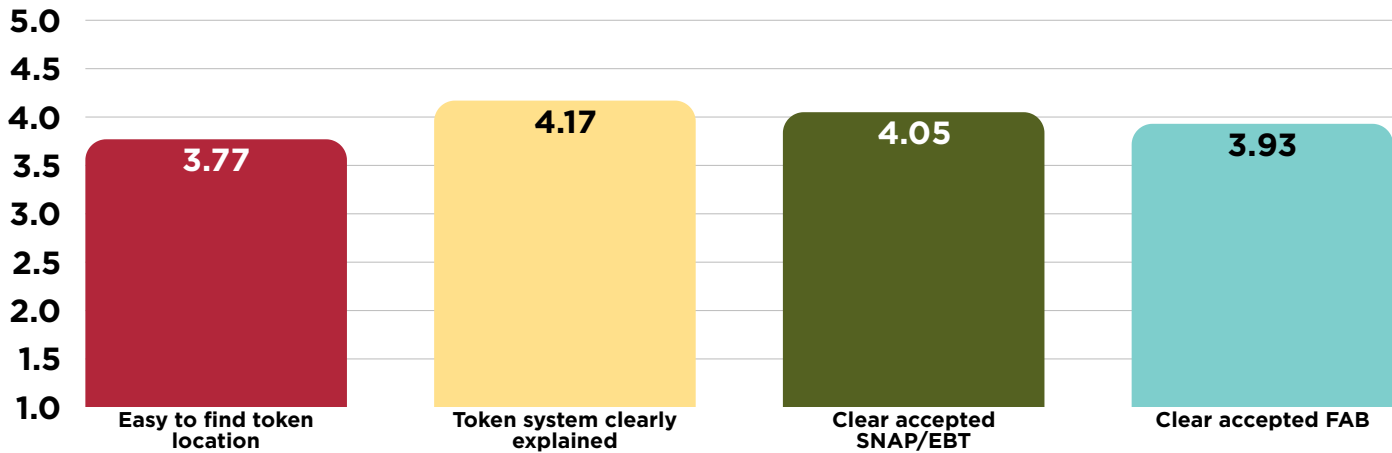
- A subset of FAB outlets were shopped by either 1 or 2 shoppers, depending on shopper interest and follow through.
- Shoppers could visit multiple outlets, but could not visit the same outlet more than once. A total of 58 shoppers completed 77 shopping experiences.
- Shoppers submitted photos and completed a survey. The survey was reviewed by national experts from GusNIP Nutrition Incentive Program Training, Technical Assistance, Evaluation, and Information Center (NTAE), Michigan Farmers Market Association (MIFMA), Farmers Market Coalition (FMC), National Grocers Association (NGA), and the Center for Nutrition and Health Impact.
- Outlet characteristics and customer experience were measured on a 5 point Likert-type scale (1 = strongly disagree - 5 = strongly agree) and outlet selection was measured on a 4 point Likert-type scale (1 = poor - 4 = excellent).
- Shoppers received a stipend for their participation and completed survey.
- Using descriptive statistics, we summarized data by calculating averages and determining how much responses varied from those averages. We used a statistical test that compares group averages to ascertain whether there were meaningful differences between groups. When differences were found, we ran an additional test to see which specific groups were different from each other. For the open-ended survey responses, several team members reviewed and grouped similar answers together to identify common themes and patterns. For more details about statistical tests and results, please email [info@freshaccessbucks.com](mailto:info@freshaccessbucks.com).
- This study was approved by the University of Florida Institutional Review Board (IRB).



# Shopper Perceptions of Outlet Characteristics

1 = strongly disagree - 5 = strongly agree

- Easy to find token location
- Token system clearly explained
- Clear accepted SNAP/EBT
- Clear accepted FAB



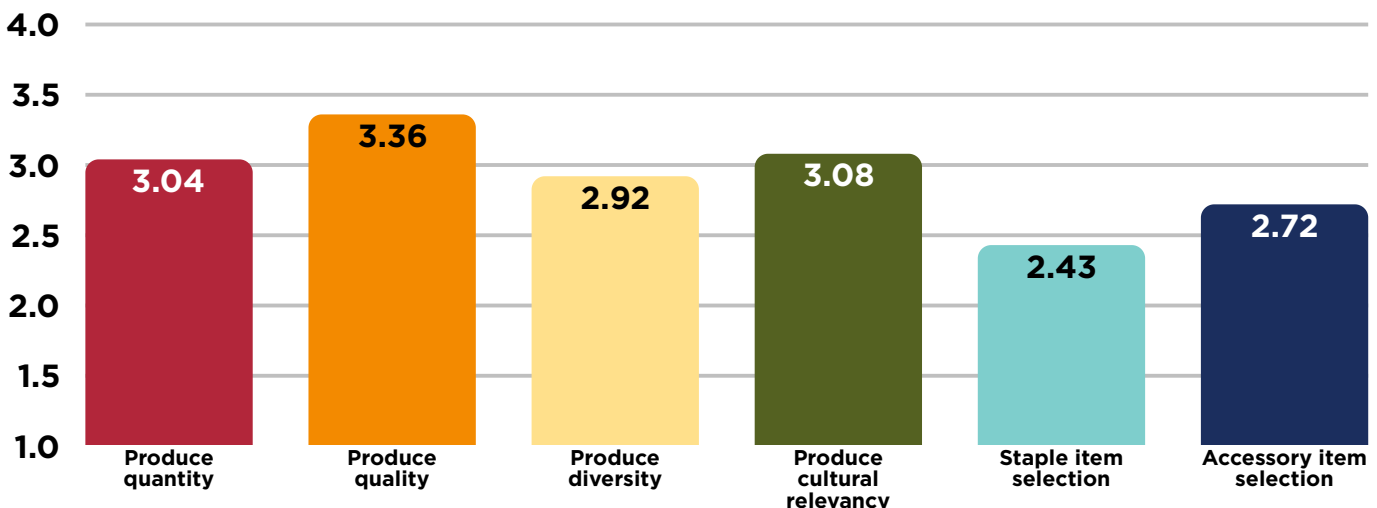
## Insights:

Many shoppers indicated that it was clear that the outlet accepted SNAP and FAB. At farmers markets, shoppers generally felt it was easy to find the location to get their tokens and that the token system was clearly explained.

# Shopper Perceptions of Outlet Selection

1 = poor - 4 = excellent

- Produce quantity
- Produce quality
- Produce diversity
- Produce cultural relevancy
- Staple item selection
- Accessory item selection



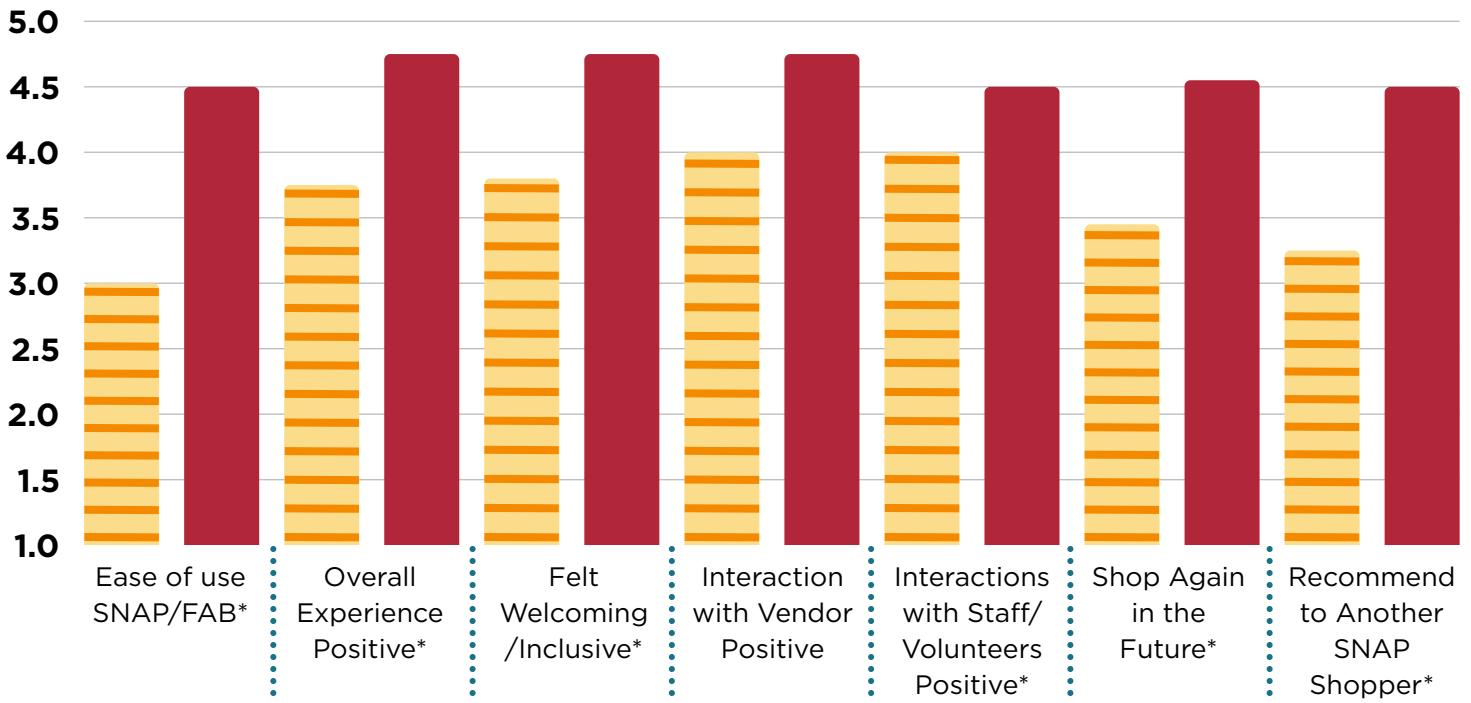
## Insights:

Shoppers felt that the produce available at the outlet was good in terms of quantity, quality, diversity, and cultural relevancy; however, staple and accessory item selection could be improved at some outlets.

# Price Labeling and Shopper Perceptions

1 = strongly disagree - 5 = strongly agree

● Prices Not Labeled ● Prices Labeled



## Insights:

When prices were clearly labeled, customers were more likely to report higher positive experiences (denoted by (\*) on the graph above). Those experiences positively connected with price labeling included ease of SNAP/FAB, overall positive experience, felt welcoming/inclusive, positive interactions with staff/volunteers, would shop again in the future, and would recommend to another SNAP shopper. Price labeling did not have a significant impact with positive interaction with vendor.



# Origin Labeling and Shopper Perceptions

1 = strongly disagree - 5 = strongly agree

● Origins Not Labeled ● Origins Labeled



## Insights:

When origins were clearly labeled (by location, denoted as "Florida-grown", or by farmer/producer name), customers were more likely to report higher positive experiences (denoted by (\*) on the graph above). Those experiences positively connected with origin labeling included ease of use, positive interactions with vendors, would shop again in the future, and would recommend to another SNAP shopper.

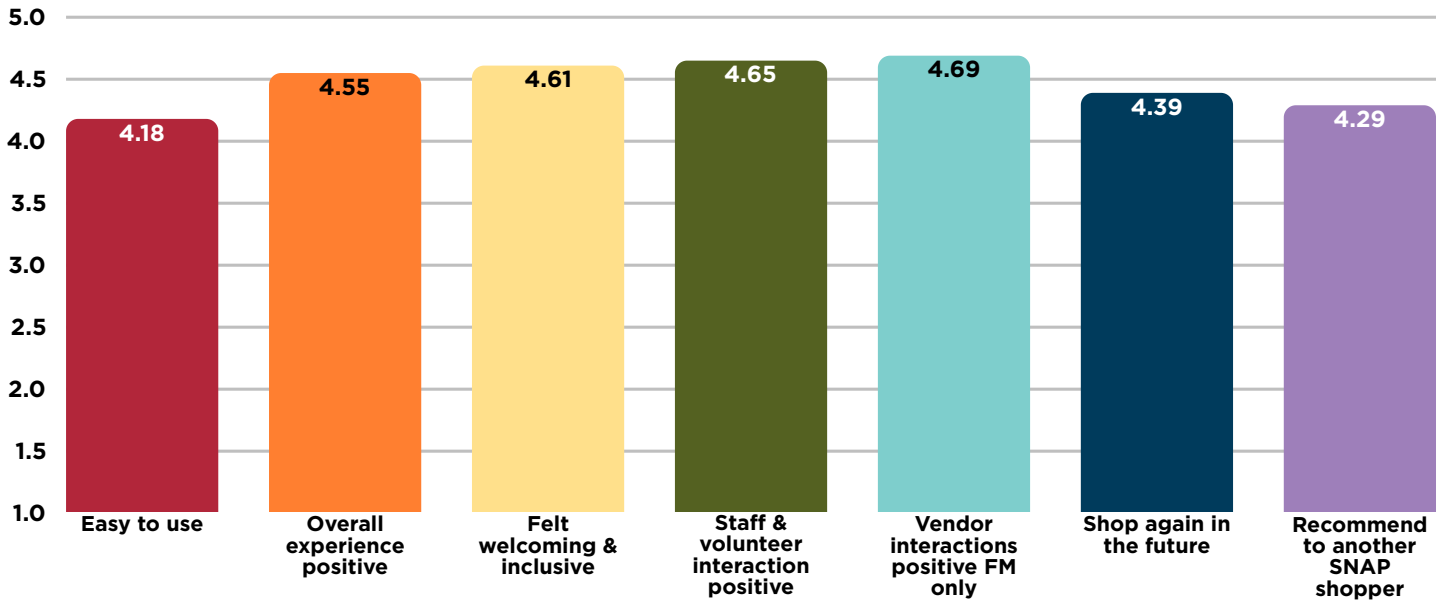
## More on products:

- Selection, pricing, availability of products to meet the needs and wants of the customer, and ample vendors available at farmers markets are important to the customer shopping experience.
- A limited selection of SNAP and Nutrition Incentive-eligible items often results in a negative customer experience.
- Many customers were disappointed by the (lack of) fruit selection.



## Shopper Perception of the Shopping Experience

1 = strongly disagree - 5 = strongly agree

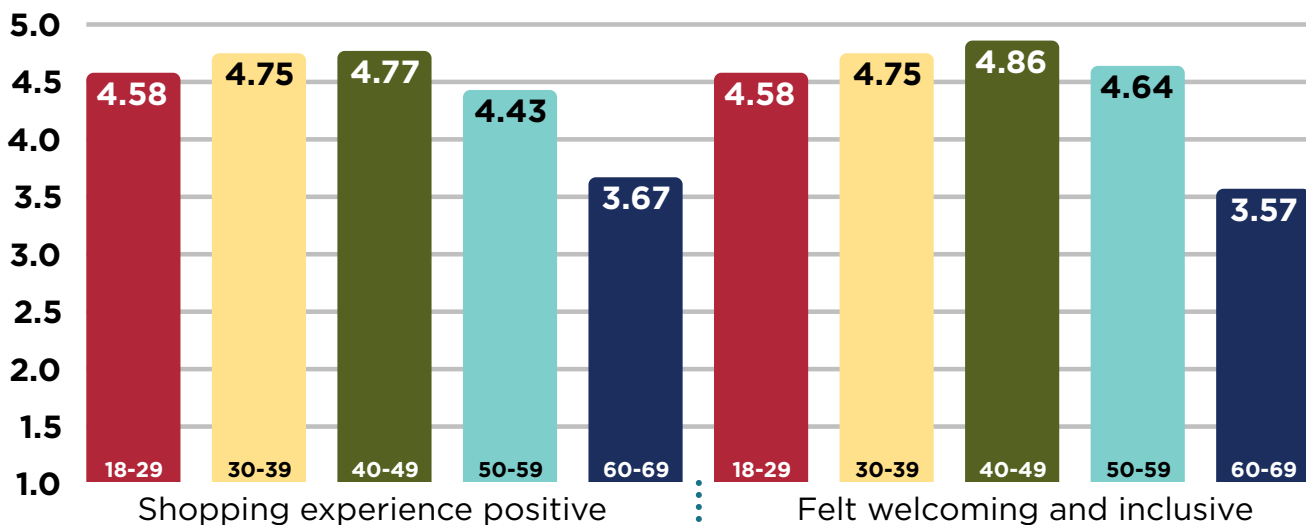


### Insights:

Our mystery shoppers reported positive experiences at FAB partner outlets, including friendly interactions with staff, volunteers, and market vendors. Most said they would shop there again and recommend the outlet to other SNAP shoppers, noting that using SNAP and FAB was simple and the atmosphere was welcoming and inclusive.

## Shopper Perception by Age

1 = strongly disagree - 5 = strongly agree



### Insights:

Older adults, aged 60-69, were less satisfied by their overall shopping experience and rated the outlets as less welcoming and inclusive than other shoppers.



## Additional Takeaways:

### Education & Engagement

- Educating SNAP customers on FAB and local produce leads to a positive shopping experience and an improved understanding of costs, limited selection, etc.
- Customers who engaged directly with farmers/producers seemed to have a positive shopping experience, even when faced with factors that might otherwise make for a negative experience (such as limited selection).

### Environment

A positive atmosphere or "vibe" of an outlet may be attributed to clustering of a diverse variety of SNAP and Nutrition Incentive-eligible vendors or products, activities or events to extend the time customers are shopping. This often contributes to repeat shopping.

### Promotional Materials

- Placement, size, and readability of promotion materials, as well as program explanation, are important to the customer experience, clarity, and understanding.
- When there is a lack of promotional materials or labeling, customers often have to ask, which may lead to mixed results.
- Most vendors at farmers markets do not display their token signage, which can be confusing for customers.

# Customer Challenges and Barriers:

**Communication:** Lacking/limited outlet-level communications, such as promotional materials, product labeling, vendor token signage (farmers markets only), and directional signage to information booth (farmers markets only)

**Training:** Limited knowledge/understanding by staff, volunteers, and/or vendors

**Inclusivity:** Lack of sensitivity/poor treatment of the customer by staff or vendors

**Selection:** Limited selection of Nutrition Incentive-eligible and SNAP-eligible products

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## What influences the customer's shopping experience:

### Positive Experience:

- Positive interactions with staff/vendors
- Clear understanding of the program and how to use it
- Ample SNAP & Nutrition Incentive-eligible product selection
- High quality produce
- Reasonable pricing
- Prices and produce origin labeled

### Negative Experience:

- Negative staff/vendor interactions
- Program explanation lacking
- Limited to no promotional materials
- Limited SNAP & Nutrition Incentive-eligible product selection
- Lack of price and/or origin labels



# Acknowledgments:

Feeding Florida and the entire Fresh Access Bucks team would like to express gratitude to those who helped inform our approach and provided valuable feedback in the development of the mystery shopper program. We'd like to thank all mystery shoppers for their participation and guidance and Fresh Access Bucks program partners throughout the state for their cooperation, outreach support, and input. Thank you to Laurel Sanville, Whitney Fung Uy, and Courtney Parks at Center for Nutrition and Health Impact, Rachael Ward at Farmers Market Coalition, Joe Lesausky at Michigan Farmers Market Association, and Ted Mason at National Grocers Association Foundation Technical Center for your encouragement, feedback, and expertise. Finally, thank you to the Fair Food Network and the GusNIP NTAE Center for seeing value in this project and for funding support.

