

Designing A Mystery Shopper Program for your Nutrition Incentive or Produce Prescription Program

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an initiative of Feeding Florida

The Nutrition Incentive Program Training, Technical Assistance, Evaluation, and Information Center (NTAE) is supported by Gus Schumacher Nutrition Incentive Program grant no. 2023-70414-40461/project accession no. 1031111 from the USDA National Institute of Food and Agriculture. Any opinions, findings, conclusions, or recommendations expressed in this publication are those of the author(s) and should not be construed to represent any official USDA or U.S. Government determination or policy.

DOUBLE YOUR SNAP/EBT HERE WITH FRESH ACCESS BUCKS



What is a Mystery Shopper Program?

- Mystery shopping uses specially-trained customers, or mystery shoppers, who shop in person or online and provide feedback on their experience.
- Organizations can then use feedback from mystery shoppers to implement short and long-term changes to programs and services.



HOW MYSTERY SHOPPING WORKS AT NI OUTLETS

1. Recruit, train, and assign each mystery shopper to a designated NI outlet. Note that only customers with active SNAP/EBT cards are eligible to participate.
2. Once trained, a mystery shopper visits their assigned outlet and makes a purchase using SNAP/EBT.
3. Mystery shopper submits a survey detailing their experience, including but not limited to availability and quality of produce, interactions with staff, and understanding of nutrition incentives.
4. Shopper receives a stipend for participation and completion of survey.

Why Create a Mystery Shopper Program?

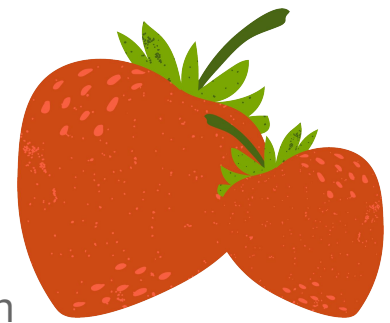
- First-hand shopper observations
- Evaluate program accessibility
- Improve shopper experience
- Ensure program compliance
- Develop resources and make changes based on shopper feedback



Methods



Methods



- Participants recruited via flyers, social media, and partner outreach
- 2 years/growing seasons
 - Jan-May 2023
 - Application → Welcome Email (assignment) → Training → Shopping at assigned outlet → Survey → \$35 stipend
 - 30 days
 - Sept 2023-Feb 2024
 - Application + training → Shopping at assigned outlet → Survey → \$45 stipend
 - 21 days
 - Lots of workflows and automations! Including waitlist
 - More streamlined
- Survey reviewed by experts from NTAE, MIFMA, FMC, NGA, the Center for Nutrition and Health Impact.

Methods

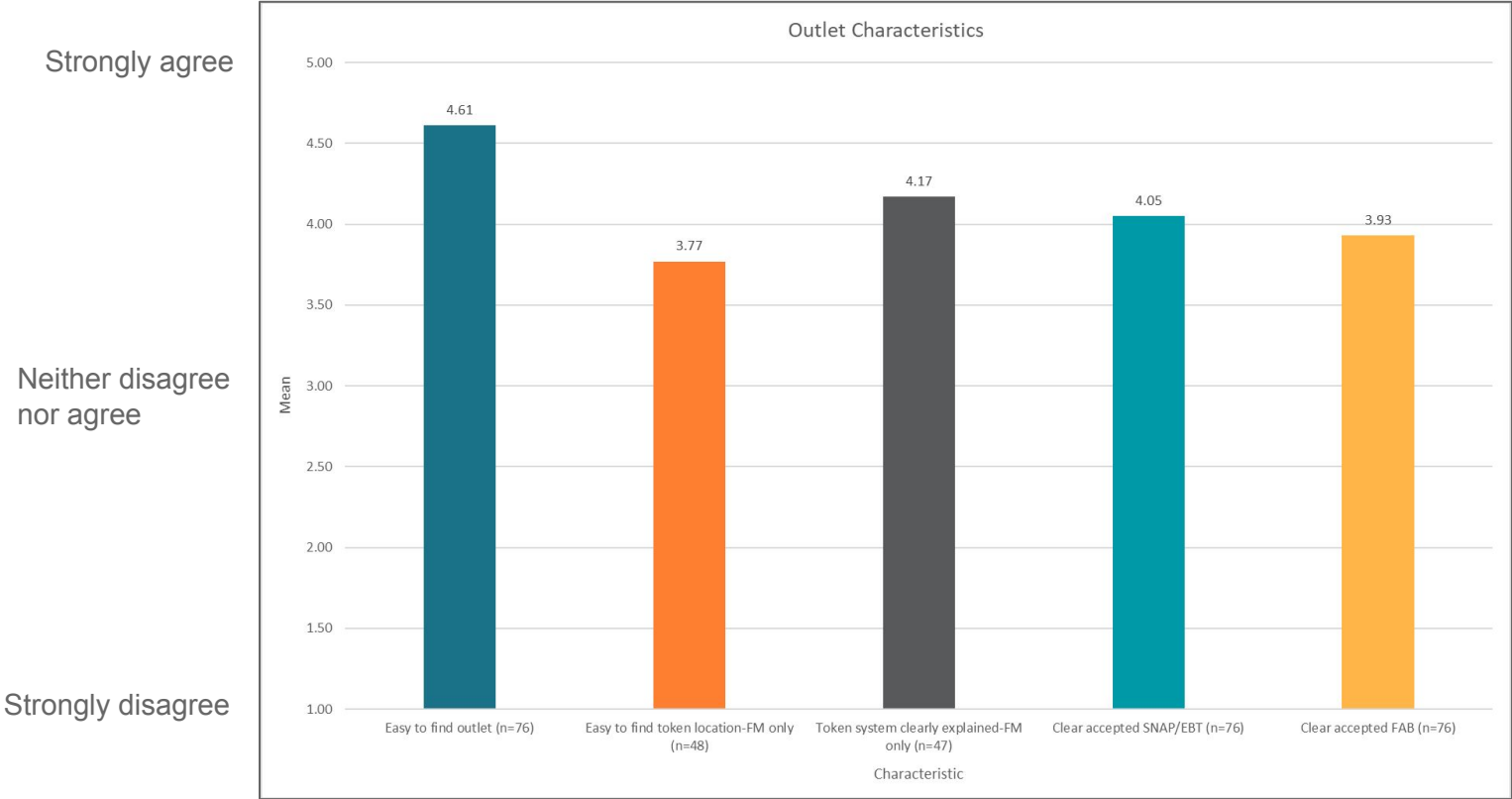
- 2 open positions per outlet
- Shoppers could shop more than one partner outlet, but could not shop the same location more than once
 - 58 shoppers
 - 77 shopping experiences
- Outlets were shopped 0, 1, or 2 times



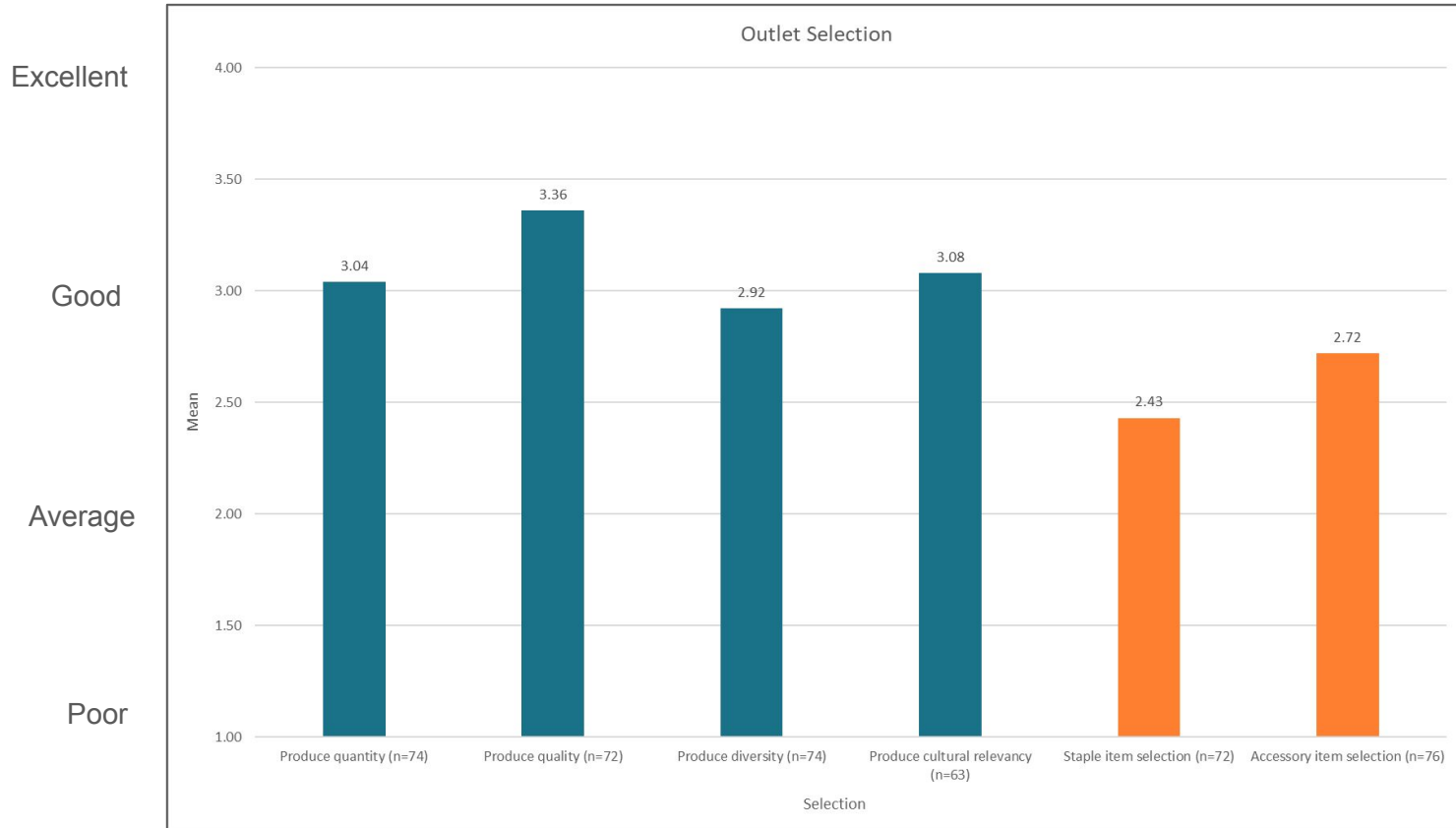
Results



Shopper Perceptions of Outlet Characteristics



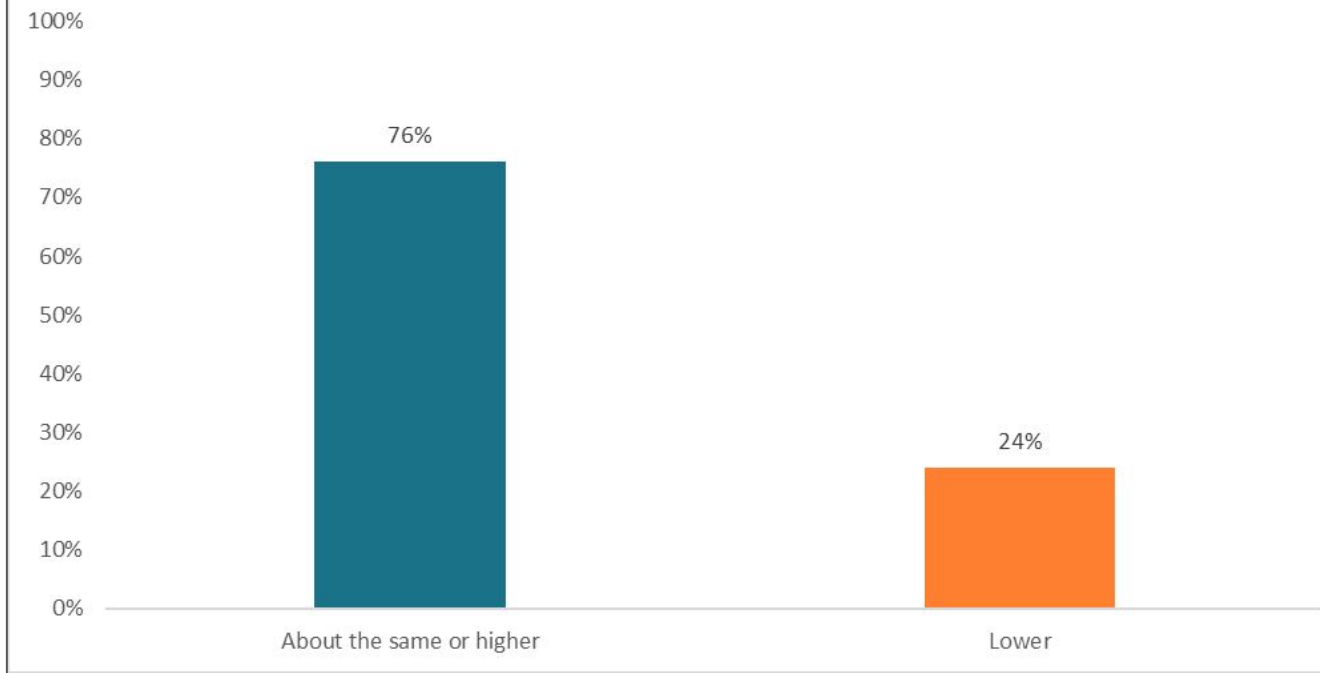
Shopper Perceptions of Outlet Selection



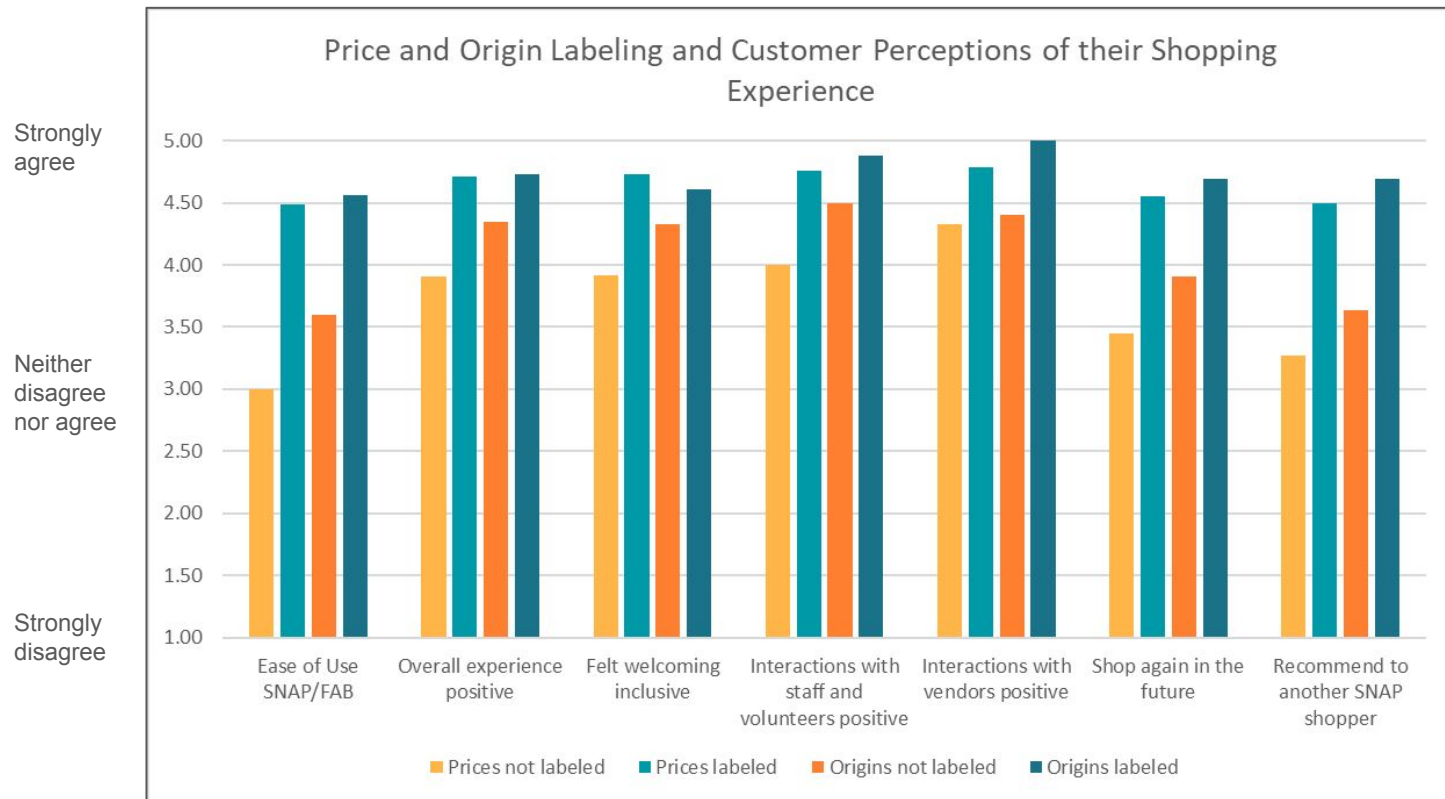
Shopper Perceptions of Pricing



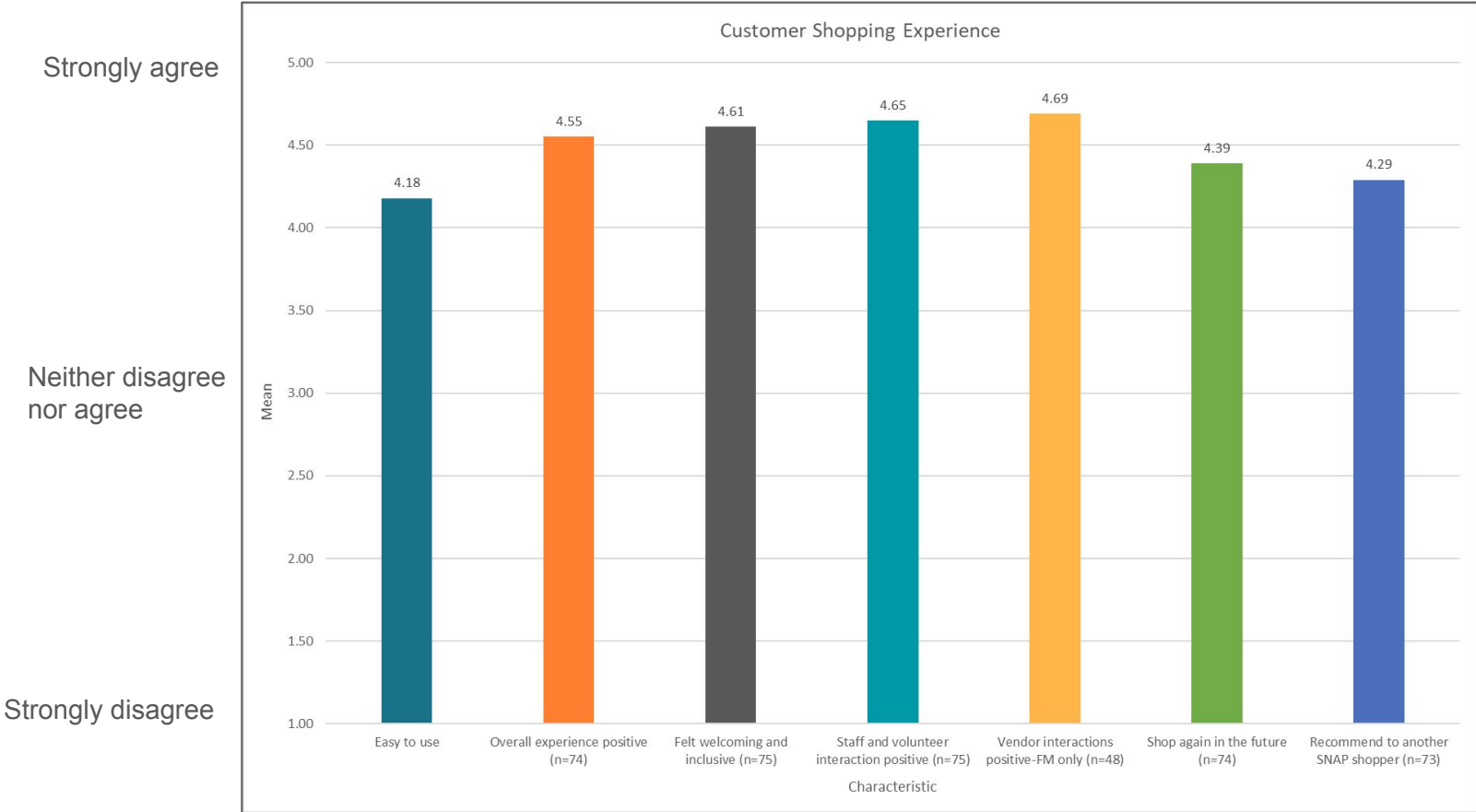
Compared to other places you shop, the prices of fruits and vegetables at this outlet are:



Price and Origin Labeling and Shopper Perceptions



Shopper Perceptions of the Shopping Experience

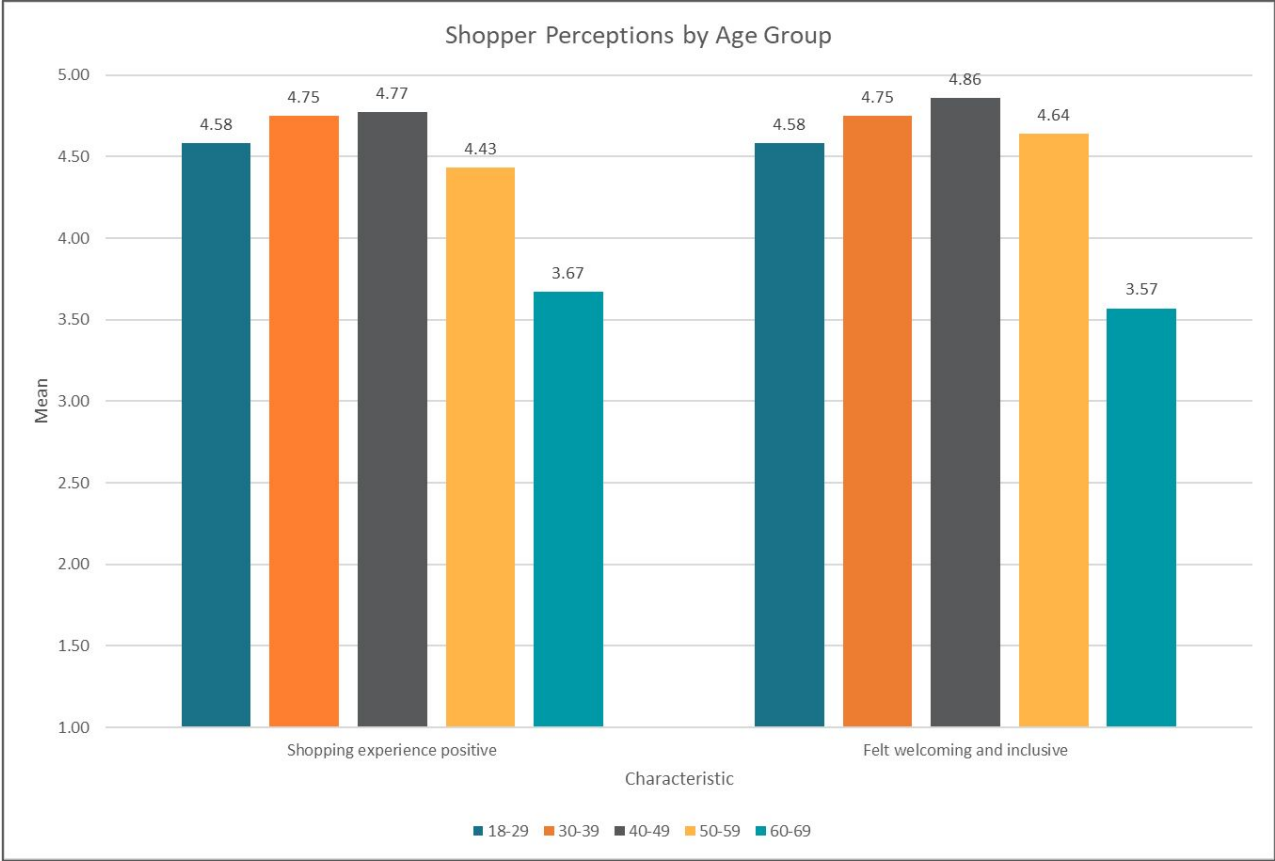


Shopper Perceptions by Age

Strongly agree

Neither disagree
nor agree

Strongly disagree



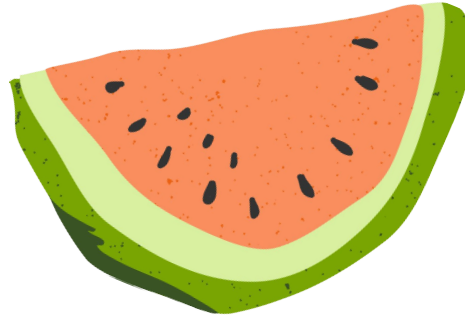
What influences the customer's shopping experience?

Positive Experience

- Positive interactions with staff/vendors
- Clear understanding of program and how to use it (promo materials, knowledgeable staff/vendors, program explanation)
- Ample SNAP and FAB selection
- High quality produce
- Reasonable pricing
- Price and origin labeling

Negative Experience

- Negative staff/vendor interactions
- Program explanation lacking
- Limited to no promotional materials
- Limited SNAP/FAB selection
- Lack of price and/or origin labels



Barriers and Customer Challenges

- Lacking/limited outlet-level communications
 - Promo materials
 - Product labeling
 - Vendor token signage (farmers markets only)
 - Directional signage to information booth (farmers markets)
- Limited knowledge/understanding by staff, volunteers, and/or vendors
- Lack of sensitivity/poor treatment of the customer by staff or vendors
- Limited selection
- Lack of clarity/understanding of the program and how to use it (including eligible items, etc.)

Other Important Takeaways



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 - may lead to mixed results.
- Most vendors at farmers markets do not display their token signage, which can be confusing for customers.

Other Important Takeaways



Education and 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).

Other Important Takeaways

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 FAB items often results in a negative customer experience.
- Many customers were disappointed by the (lack of) fruit selection.



Other Important Takeaways



Environment

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

Other Important Takeaways



Compliance

- We were unable to quantitatively measure compliance, however, in most cases where compliance was noted in the customers' feedback, SNAP and FAB rules and regulations were followed and explained to the customer.

What next?





FAB Partner Feedback

- **SNAP Customer Experience**
 - How can we make it as easy as possible for the customer to understand and use SNAP and FAB?
 - How to provide/expand/improve vendor and staff education on SNAP/EBT-friendliness and create a welcoming environment for SNAP shoppers?
 - How to provide/expand/improve customer education on what produce is FL grown and general information on what is SNAP and FAB eligible?
- **Market/Outlet Staffing and Training**
 - What are some ways to increase customer engagement without increasing staff capacity?
 - What are best practices to ensure SNAP and FAB promotion materials, price labels, and origin labels are being used by market staff and are visible, readable, clear and in good shape?
- **Vendor Communications and Training**
 - What are some ways to ensure new staff at vendor booths/new staff at single vendor outlets understand SNAP/FAB rules and regulations?
 - How to provide/expand/improve vendor education on SNAP/EBT-friendliness and creating a welcoming environment for SNAP shoppers?
 - What are best practices to ensure SNAP and FAB promotion materials, price labels, and origin labels are being used by vendors and are visible, readable, clear and in good shape?

Deliverables

- Mystery Shopper Toolkit
- Updated Vendor Contract & Guidelines
- Updated Vendor Talking Points
- Customer Video
- Mini outlet-specific reports

Coming Soon!

- Vendor Video
- Final report/white paper
- Website mystery shopper resource page



**FRESH ACCESS BUCKS
MYSTERY SHOPPER
TOOLKIT**

**Gaining SNAP Shopper Insight into
Your Nutrition Incentive Program**

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HOW DO CUSTOMERS GET SNAP AND FAB TOKENS?
Customers can visit the SNAP/EBT booth at the market to get SNAP and FAB tokens. There, customers swipe their EBT card for a one-to-one match in FAB tokens they would like to use and receive up to \$40.

WHAT IS THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN SNAP AND FAB TOKENS?
SNAP tokens (colors vary by market) can be used to purchase any SNAP-eligible item at the market and can only be used at that particular market. Customers can use FAB tokens (green tokens) to purchase fresh Florida-grown fruits and vegetables and food-producing plants and seeds. Green FAB tokens and food-producing FAB farm-direct outlet.

WHAT HAPPENS IF A CUSTOMER DOES NOT USE ALL OF THEIR TOKENS?
SNAP and FAB tokens do not expire. Customers can return to the market at any time to spend leftover tokens. To request a refund, customers can ask someone at the SNAP/EBT booth about the market's token refund policy. Tokens cannot be refunded for cash.

WHAT PRODUCTS ARE SNAP ELIGIBLE?
✓ fresh fruits and vegetables ✓ bread and baked goods ✓ meat, fish, poultry and eggs ✓ dairy products ✓ food-producing plants and seeds ✓ honey, jam, and sauces ✓ coffee beans, loose or bagged tea ✓ non-alcoholic beverages

WHAT PRODUCTS ARE NOT SNAP ELIGIBLE?
✗ hot or prepared food or drinks fit for immediate consumption
✗ food labeled for pet consumption ✗ non-food items

WHAT PRODUCTS ARE FAB ELIGIBLE?
✓ fresh or minimally processed Florida-grown fruits and vegetables ✓ food-producing plants and seeds
*for example pre-sliced FL tomatoes packaged to take home

WHAT PRODUCTS ARE NOT FAB ELIGIBLE?
✗ Any products other than fresh or minimally processed Florida-grown fruits and vegetables and food-producing plants and seeds are not eligible

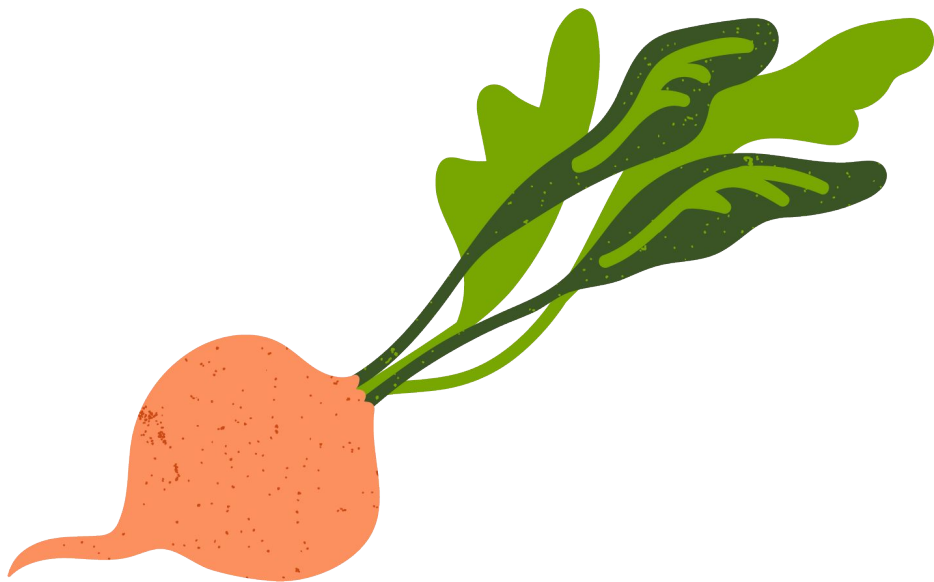
WHAT IF A CUSTOMER PAYS WITH TOKENS AND NEEDS CHANGE?
If a customer pays with tokens and needs change, vendors must provide change in either SNAP or FAB tokens, whichever the customer used to pay. Vendors cannot give customers change in cash for purchases made with tokens. As an alternative, customers can pick out additional items to the value of their change.

GIVING CHANGE EXAMPLE:
A customer purchases a bunch of radishes for \$3 and pays with a \$5 SNAP token. What should the vendor do?
✓ Give the shopper \$2 change in SNAP tokens
✓ Add more radishes to bring the total to \$5
✗ Give the customer \$2 change in cash
✗ Give the customer \$2 change in FAB tokens

Designing Your Mystery Shopper Program

We'll go through the first steps today!

1. Determine your goals
2. Decide your research protocol
3. Create your budget



Determine Your Goals

- What are you hoping to learn?
- What questions do you want shoppers to help you answer?
- What might your firms hope to learn?
- Are you focused on a certain firm or region, or are you looking for wider program improvements?



FAB MYSTERY SHOPPER PROGRAM GOALS

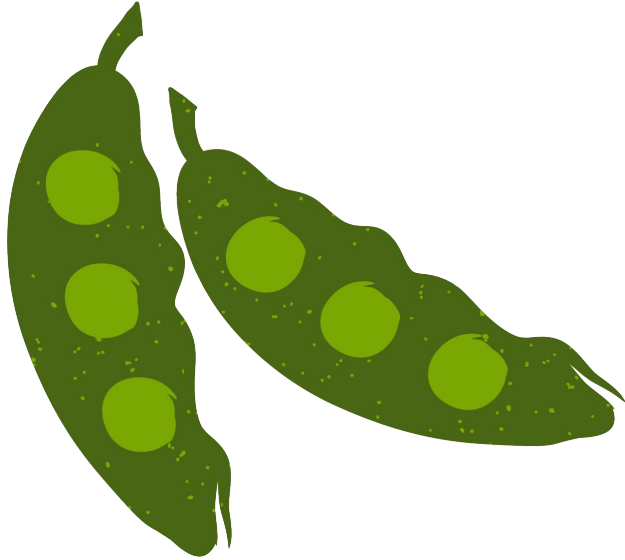
- Ensure outlets are welcoming, inclusive, and simple for SNAP shoppers to navigate
- FAB outlets clearly explain the nutrition incentive program to SNAP shoppers
- Markets display appropriate signage communicating accepted payment types, pricing, and produce origin
- Outlets correctly administer the nutrition incentive and provide the appropriate change at checkout



Research Protocol

- Scope & Selection:
 - Will you collect data from one or multiple locations?
 - If multiple, how will you select locations?
- Data Collection Methods:
 - Survey (easy, scalable)
 - Interviews (rich detail, flexible)
 - Focus Groups (group insights, deeper understanding)
- Sample Size
 - How many shoppers will you gather data from? Will you stop at a specific number or when no new information emerges?
- Feedback Needed
 - What information must shoppers provide to meet your goals?

Budget



- A mystery shopper program requires time and funding to operate.
- Pay shoppers for their time.
- Consider your needs for survey development, data analysis, reporting - do you have someone on staff that can do all of these things? Or will you need consultants?
- Ensure to set aside funding for developing materials or making changes.
- Scale your program with the funding you have available

Breakout for worksheet

Share out

Next Steps

Follow the [Mystery Shopper Toolkit](#)

- Consider workflow
- Create application (we have examples!)
- Create your survey (consider your goals)
- Recruit + Train shoppers
- Evaluate
- Make changes based on what you learned



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Acknowledgements

- Our mystery shoppers!
- FAB Partners
- NTAE Capacity Building and Innovation Fund
- Feedback, survey, and resource review:
 - Center for Nutrition and Health Impact
 - Michigan Farmers Market Association
 - Farmers Market Coalition
 - National Grocers Association Foundation
 - Fair Food Network
 - Nutrition Incentive Hub



Thank You!





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