The Green Market

It’s the best kept secret hiding in plain sight.

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Summary

With public health becoming one of our country’s biggest concerns, even the smallest change can make a huge difference. By creating a documentary that depicts the importance of local farmers markets, we open the door to numerous possibilities. We hope to encourage Rutgers students to make healthier choices about what they eat and help them see that they have options. Ultimately, by bringing attention to the Rutgers Gardens Farmers Market, we can convince the university to establish a transportation system to make it more accessible to the student body.

Video Link

Green Markets: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XFdWwLuokHs
The Issue: Flocal Farmers Markets

What Needs Changing:
It is far from a secret that the obesity epidemic in the United States is one that has been debated upon for some time now, but has been left with no resolution and plenty of unanswered questions. “Millions of people in the United States are considered obese. As waistlines continue to increase, people are asking the question: Who is to blame?” (Stanish, R. "The Obesity Epidemic in America and the Responsibility of Big Food Manufacturers." Student Pulse. 10 Nov. 2010. Web. 18 Nov. 2010.). There are simply too many aspects of this issue that haven’t even been addressed, but desperately need to be considered. Ideas such as food availability, or the conditions and processes of farming and producing certain goods, outside influences from commercial industries, and especially whether or not the information needed to make educated and informed decisions about our food is credible or even reaching our communities. Pointing the finger won’t solve anything, that is, unless one is pointing towards a solution and how we can get to it.

The problem is how we eat. The food that is available is just that, it’s too available. Sitting atop the shelves lining the local supermarkets are an abundance of processed foods. These products, for the most part, are inexpensive, calorie dense, and appealing to the taste, but that certainly doesn’t suggest a healthy food source. Especially considering a majority contain endless amounts of problematic ingredients, such as high-fructose corn syrup, salt, dextrin, fat and cholesterol, only to name a few. All of these additives are to maintain the availability of the food to us, the consumer. But do we really know what we are actually consuming?

Perhaps the biggest argument emphasizing obesity and underlining our overwhelming need to have all of this food readily available to us, is the influence of fast-food establishments. We want what we want, when we want it. “Two new studies conclude that the food industry is following the tobacco industry’s play book to ensure that we keep loading up on calories, and as a result virtually all of the weight gain in the U.S. over the last 30 years can be attributed to eating more…” (Arnst, C. “Blaming the Food Industry for Obesity.” Bloomberg Businessweek. Web. 16 May 2010.) To achieve this goal, these food chains compete with our conscience and shape our choice of quick, easy and inexpensive meals over balanced and nutritious ones. Whether it has become a matter of lack of time or pure laziness, society has made it clear: we want our food, fast.

Even still, this is not enough. There was a time when we were only capable of attaining the produce that was grown in that season. As a result of our yearning to have everything we want, advances in technology, government influences, bioengineering and the like, we have given ourselves the ability to purchase foods of virtually any kind all year round. This means that we are going against the natural process of how these products are grown, merely because we choose to do so. Not only are we creating business around hasty food delivery, but we’re attempting to beat out Mother Nature’s “cooking” time.

Fast-food restaurants are not the only ones focusing on the speed and cost of producing goods, and of course, in return, increasing revenue. Big corporations that have control over a mass of our country’s food supply provide an immense amount of pressure on executing a heedless
production of goods, while only benefiting the lining of their own pockets. “Mega packaged food companies and investor groups buy successful organic brands that were started by visionaries who began the companies with a commitment to the organic ideal of family farms, a clean environment, and simple food without additives. But often, when the big companies buy in, this ideal flies out the window.” (Barrington, V. “Who’s Really Behind Organic Food Brands Like Amy’s and Odwall?” AlterNet. Web. 9 Nov. 2009.) Their main focus is not on the quality of the produce for the consumer, but rather considering how to speed up the farming process. In doing so, they take it upon themselves to include the administering of specific chemicals, hormones and additives to what they are producing. This is true for farming that ranges anywhere between implanting pesticides into tomatoes to prevent infestation of insects, and injecting growth hormones into beef cattle to provide a larger cut of sirloin steak.

Another downfall within our society that affects us on more than one level is how these unhealthy, inorganic, processed foods reach the consumer. We try to create everything we need, and obviously by any means necessary, but we do not have it all at our doorstep. The supermarkets do not have their own personal farmland with baggage boys and cashiers tilling and weeding the crops. It takes transportation and in most cases, a lot of it. Some produce travel so far and so often that they have left a permanent carbon footprint.

It’s in Our Hands:

All of these issues seem impossible to settle, but there is one simple solution that has the potential to alleviate these problems and help stop the epidemic from escalating any further. The answer seems to be the best kept secret, although hiding in plain sight; farmer’s markets.

For decades past, farmers markets have been rooted into the traditions of many cultures around the world and are still seen as part of everyday life. They originated as a way of bartering home manufactured goods or agriculture. Today, these same ideals are being practiced in countries such as China, Greece and Turkey. Mostly centered on celebrations, the markets are not only a means of providing goods directly to the people, but also of bringing the community together.

Farmers markets are everywhere, but it seems as though they are the most difficult places to get to. Despite the signs on the sides or the roads, or announcements posted in the corners of our newspapers, the public eye seems blind to what an amazing hub of resources a farmers market holds. There is a combination of reasons as to why this is. Arguments arise when it comes to pricing of the goods resulting in hesitation and refusal to attend the markets. It is a common misconception that people will pay a higher cost for their produce and they don’t understand why. But if educated about farmers markets and informed of its benefits, they will realize that “the farmers market was slightly less expensive pound for pound…Such perceptions make it tough to attract customers whose chief concern is value.” (Guadette, K. “Farmers-market Food Costs Less, Class Finds.” The Seattle Times. Web. 4 June 2007.)

Value is what the people will receive, but not merely because of the difference in pricing. While talking to the farmers, who are more than eager to share their lives with you, it will become so apparent that what they provide our communities with is something that corporate America will never be able to do. What farmers markets truly have is the hope for a healthier way of the life. The food that arrives for sale at the markets comes from their own farmland, grown and tended
to by themselves. They have the answers to all the questions concerning the conditions in which foods are farmed under, why only certain foods are and should only be available during their growing season, and what makes purchasing their products a better decision for people as a whole. Farmers markets are the solution.

Rutgers University established the Rutgers Gardens Farmers Market. Farmers and various other vendors bring their freshly produced goods to this market to sell for fair prices and to interact with the patrons. But the majority of students are still unaware of the market and its resources. Unhealthy eating is not necessarily a result of bad judgment or lack of will power, but instead is the inability to access healthy food. We push so hard to keep our food at our disposal, but in doing so, severely diminish the quality of our food. Therefore, the food we should not be consuming is at our fingertips and makes healthy eating habits seem much more difficult to achieve.

This concept is modeled by our research at the Rutgers Gardens’ farmers market. Upon arriving at the Gardens, it was odd not to see many students browsing the array of locally grown produce. Upon approaching a few and asking for their opinion, we came upon the same conclusion: Rutgers students’ biggest obstacle was actually getting to the market. Specifically, Rutgers Gardens is located alongside a very busy main road that intersects an even busier main highway. Students with access to cars aren’t faced with the same problem as the majority of students who aren’t allowed vehicles on campus. Crossing those roads on foot could quite possibly result in serious injury. Consequently, attempting to visit the farmers market doesn’t seem worth the risk to students and is dismissed as a viable food choice. This needs to change and Rutgers has the ability to change it.
References


Appendices

Farmers Market Fact Sheet

What is a farmers market?
Farmers markets come in many shapes and sizes, in different cultures, traditions and countries. A typical farmers market is a market usually held outdoors where farmers from within the area meet to sell their produce. In some places, they are called market days and are centered on celebrations or fiestas. Others, it is simply a way to keep a connection with the people. Overall, farmers markets provide fresh, organic, and healthy foods to the community.

What do they sell?
These markets are commonly viewed as places where only fruits and vegetables from local farms are bought and sold. However, farmers markets are versatile and not limited to these produce. Many markets also have a lot of plant-life, (i.e., flowers, trees, potted plants…etc.) as well as hand-made fabrics and even some meat products. These aren’t corporate companies trying to create as much revenue as possible, but rather a neighbor, attempting to bring some quality onto your plate and into your life.

But what’s so great about them?
Talking to the farmers that sell at these markets, the passion they have for what they do is tangible. They will gladly talk about how there are, and only should be, certain foods available for consumption in season. They can easily describe to you how they tend and farm everything they bring to their table. There is no middle man, there are no hormones are additives. Everything is grown naturally and picked at the peak of its season. The common misconception is that these goods come at a much higher price than goods found in the local supermarkets. However, more recently, this isn’t true with most products. The prices tend to be fair and sometimes less than that of most commercial goods. The main idea is that these products are priced at their worth.

Where can we find them?
Farmers markets seem to be the best kept secret hidden in plain sight. These markets are held everywhere in New Jersey. From a high school parking lot in the very tip of north jersey, to right next door at Rutgers Gardens; these farmers are from New Jersey and travel throughout the garden state to provide their produce to everyone. Rutgers University hosts its own to show its support to local farmers and to give the student, as well as the people in the surrounding community, the opportunity to purchase quality goods.

For More Information about Rutgers Gardens
Follow the link and click on Events, or you can send a question to the contact information given.
http://rutgersgardens.rutgers.edu/
Reaching the Rutgers Community:

Since the issue at hand is getting students to the farmers market, we’ve created a documentary that will help bring the farmers market to the students. Not only will it show what types of products are sold, but it will also provide a visual experience of how a farmers market operates. And sequentially provide the much needed stimulation to bring together Rutgers students to fight for this cause.

But we’re not stopping there.

The ultimate goal of this film is to bring attention to the importance of getting to these markets. We hope to raise awareness and reach out to the Rutgers community. Showing this documentary to the right people in the right places, we can ask them to help make a difference. Rutgers students are more than willing to speak up about the issue of transportation to the farmers markets. Not only have we discussed ideas with faculty members in the different science departments, but together we have begun to take action. By contacting transportation services, we hope to use this film to expose the importance of local farmers markets to the community.

In the end, what we have concluded is that Rutgers University needs to accommodate its students and furnish a means of transportation to and from the Rutgers Gardens Farmers Market. Not only will it benefit the farmers of New Jersey, but it will certainly affect the well-being of Rutgers University students.
Editorials

There is an Answer
By Arianna Pomo
Sent to the Bergen Record

Society today has been transformed into what can only be described as one with a huge weight on its shoulders…around its stomach and down its legs. Obesity; it has become an epidemic in every home, every community, and every person who chooses a McDonalds hamburger over a home-cooked meal. The issue is brought up in practically every public debate, as they claim to find a resolution for this national problem. The reality of the situation is that the answer is simply down the street at your local farmer’s market.

People are under the misconception that farmer’s markets are too expensive or too much of a hassle to locate. Or people are merely unaware and uneducated about what farmer’s markets actually are and what they provide for the population. In comparison to the goods distributed at popular supermarkets, the produce that farmer’s grow are priced almost evenly. Just as most supermarkets are found close to home, farmer’s markets are just the same. The location and time frame in which the markets will be are advertised in most community newsletters, but still it seems people choose not to visit. Why is that?

They are unaware of the facts; the products that are sold at farmer’s markets are healthier, plain and simple. There is no question that cannot be answered by the farmer who is handing out their food. Whereas, people are potentially clueless about where and how the food on the shelves came to be there. Doesn’t that seem a little unsafe?

Yes, the economy is trying to recover from a recession and pockets are still pretty low. But should that be taken out on your children? Yes, fast food chains are everywhere and provide quick and easy meals. But are you even aware of what could be lurking in your son’s Happy Meal? Society is fueling the fire by enabling our own epidemic. Ask questions about your food, because if you don’t, you’ll never really know anything.

Transportation Dilemma
By Chris Gunning
Sent to the Daily Targum

According to the American Dietetic Association, there are roughly 4,000 Farmers Markets across the United States. They offer a variety of fresh and local products such as fruits and vegetables, cheeses, baked goods, and meats. Farmers markets also offer a unique cultural experience that you cannot get from walking down the aisles of a supermarket.

Going to and purchasing goods from a farmers market allows you the opportunity to have a more intimate experience with purchasing your food items and a chance to meet the individuals producing those food items. You are able to develop a relationship with the farmers and bakers and vendors that you would never have the opportunity to establish if you simply just grabbed all of your food off of the shelves of your local supermarket.

Here at Rutgers University, we have our very own Farmers Market every Friday beginning April 1st and running until October 31st (and sometimes even longer). The Rutgers
Gardens Farmers Market is a wonderful place that allows members of the Rutgers community and local residents to purchase fresh, delicious food items from local New Jersey farmers. All of the items are reasonably priced and many times, cheaper than what you would pay in a supermarket. As a benefit, each purchase helps to support a local New Jersey farmer who is just like you or your neighbor. With the state the economy has been in over the past few years, everyone could use a little support from one another.

The market does not come without its own dilemma, however. The location of the market is on the front lawn of the entrance to the Rutgers Gardens on Ryders Lane. This is not the safest location to walk to from the Cook/Douglass Campus. Unfortunately, students who lack a form of transportation need to walk down about a quarter-mile on the highly trafficked Ryders Lane, without any sidewalks and then cross to the other side of the road to reach the market. Because of this, many students are deterred from going to and experiencing the Rutgers Garden Farmers Market.

Currently, there is no form of transportation, such as a shuttle bus, to and from the market. If there was some form of transportation implemented that transported students from the Cook/Douglass Campus to the market, I think many students would utilize the market and buy more of their groceries from this location. It would be a benefit not only to the students but also to the farmers selling their products at the market since it would increase the volume of people coming to the markets.

After having the opportunity to interview students about the Rutgers Garden Farmers Market, I have found that many students would love the opportunity to go there but do not want to risk walking there on a busy main road and then worry about walking back with bags of groceries on that same road. If the University could provide a shuttle bus that went to and from the market every half hour, on the hour, then this would greatly improve the Rutgers Garden Farmers Market.