

# Bay Mills Indian Community Establishes Farmer's Market to Improve Community Health

## Summary

The Bay Mills Indian Community, located in a rural area on the northern tip of the Upper Peninsula of Michigan, has limited access to full grocery stores and other outlets that provide healthy food options. In 2010, Bay Mills was one of three tribal communities in Michigan that participated in the Inter-Tribal Council of Michigan's (ITC) Tribal REACH US Risk Factor Survey (RRFS), which found that 68% of adults were overweight or obese and 67% did not eat enough servings of fruits or vegetables per day. Through the ITC's REACH- *Journey to Wellness* grant program, funded by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the Bay Mills Indian Community formed a coalition of local leaders to establish a local farmer's market to address this pressing health issue in their community. The first farmer's market opened on July 30, 2015, and ran weekly through October 8, 2015. By the end of the season, the new market had quintupled in size.

## Challenge

For the approximately 2,057 members of the Bay Mills Indian Community, a lack of access to healthy food is one factor contributing to the high rates of adult obesity and increased risk of death from diabetes, stroke and coronary artery disease. The majority of the reservation is also located in Chippewa County, where only 1% of residents live within half a mile of a park, limiting the community's access to physical activity resources [1]. These environmental factors are compounded by a history of systematic oppression, racism and historical trauma resulting in food insecurity, health and economic disparities that persist today, leaving the Bay Mills Indian Community especially vulnerable to a variety of poor health outcomes [2].

## Solution

Introducing farmer's markets in Indian Country is a critical step toward improving food systems and restoring the deep social, political, spiritual and cultural connections with the land—building resilient and diversified local economies, while simultaneously improving the health of local communities [3].

The Bay Mills Indian Community took a proactive approach in establishing their local farmer's market. They formed a coalition of 28 community members, including directors of local entities on the Reservation, staff from the Bay Mills Indian Community Health Center, the Bay Mills Farm Director and the "Youth Growing Medicine Program" Director. The coalition's main goal for the market is to provide the community with healthy, locally produced food, including fruits, vegetables and honey, along with Native American art from Tribal members. The market serves and benefits all members of the Bay Mills community by accepting a variety of payments, including Senior Project Fresh and WIC coupons.

1) <http://wwwn.cdc.gov/CommunityHealth/profile/currentprofile/MI/Chippewa/310049>

2) Echo Hawk Consulting. (2015). "Feeding Ourselves: Food access, health disparities, and the pathways to healthy Native American communities." Longmont, CO: Echo Hawk Consulting.

3) Ibid.

## Your Involvement is Key

Excitement around the market has grown considerably, as local community members have already shown interest in starting their own gardens, to share and sell vegetables next market season. One patron even said, "I love this place!" Positive reinforcement and continued support will help the farmer's market continue to thrive and succeed long-term.

### Results

The farmer's market began running on July 30, 2015, and ran every Thursday through October 8, 2015, between 4 and 7pm. It was conveniently located in the Bay Mills Resort & Casino's parking lot on the Reservation. The market was promoted through various media sources, such as local newspapers in Chippewa County, the Bay Mills Indian Community Health Facebook page, and flyers in local stores, banks, the senior building and a variety of other locations that community members frequent.

The first market started with two vendors: a local "Youth Growing Medicine" group that sold starter plants and a produce vendor who sold lettuce and cabbage. Both vendors sold out of all of their products on that first day. Every week since the market's inception, new vendors were added, offering an increasing variety of produce, like zucchini, cucumbers, squash, tomatoes and maple syrup. By the end of market season, the number of vendors had quintupled in size, with an average of 10 vendors per week helping to make nutritious food more available to the community. At a late August market, 80 people had visited within the first two hours of opening, and within the first two months, approximately 900 people had visited the farmer's market in total. These numbers show that the farmer's market continued to grow throughout the season, and the community welcomed it with open arms.

## Sustainable Success

Several factors contributed to the success of the first Bay Mills Indian Community farmer's market. The coalition demonstrated an understanding of the "consumer" by choosing to hold the market on Thursdays, which is payday for several local businesses. By running the market from 4 to 7pm, the market was more accessible to people who work from 9 to 5, including the nearby enterprise and resort employees. The market was centrally located on Lakeshore Drive, a main roadway in Bay Mills that is used by all community members. There are also plans to expand forms of payment to include debit and bridge cards, to help minimize payment barriers. The careful planning and implementation of the farmer's market bodes well for its continuation, sustainability, long-term access to healthy food and, ultimately, better health outcomes for the Bay Mills Indian Community as well as other residents of Chippewa County.

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