

## Community health center to include a farmers' market

According to the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), in the past decade, the number of farmers' markets has sharply increased from 2,863 in 2000 to 6,132 in 2010. However, a recent study found that wealthier residents that live in urban areas are likely to have access to farmers' markets where produce can be sold at higher prices compared to smaller and more rural areas. As a result, individuals that have a low income, particularly in rural areas, have lower access to fresh fruits and vegetables.

In effort to improve access to healthy foods for underserved populations, a group of USC researchers are conducting a community based participatory research project (CBPR) to create a farmers' market on the campus of a federally qualified health center (FQHC) in Orangeburg, SC.

Dr. James Hebert, principal investigator and researcher from the Arnold School of Public Health, received a grant from the Cancer Prevention and Control Research Network (CPCRN), which is affiliated with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and National Cancer Institutes (NCI), committed to developing new interventions that reduce cancer burden and disparities, especially among minority and medically underserved populations.

Project director and faculty member from the College of Social Work, Dr. Darcy Freedman and colleagues have designed the project to include various strategies aimed to improve community access.

"We are putting the farmers market in the very place that people are most likely to think about health. In addition to increasing physical access, we will also address economic access. To reduce the financial burden of buying fresh produce, we will have a voucher program that doubles the value of food stamps," said Freedman.

Health care providers at the FQHC will also encourage their patients to utilize the market. Providers will write "prescriptions" to be filled at the market for patients that are not eating enough fruits and vegetables.

"We are looking at the farmers' market as a pseudo-pharmacy to encourage the users of this program to think about fruits and vegetables as the first line of medication people should be taking in terms of improving their health. It's very much about primary prevention."

Freedman and colleagues are committed to working with community members to create a farmers' market to be opened May 2011, with a goal that the market will operate long after the conclusion of the current project. Freedman's previous work serves as a model for the current project, which included starting several farmers markets in low income neighborhoods in Nashville, TN that are still operating today.

"The community is involved in every step of the process, so when the researchers go away the market is sustained by the community," said Freedman.

### Key Points

- A group of USC researchers are working with community members to create a sustainable farmers' market to improve access to healthy foods for underserved populations.
- The farmers' market will be on the campus of a federally qualified health center (FQHCs) in Orangeburg, SC.
- One of the goals of the project is to develop a model for starting farmers' markets at FQHCs that can be expanded across the country.

One of the main goals of the current project is to develop a model for starting farmers' markets at FQHCs that can be expanded across the country.

Currently, Freedman and Dr. Ronald Pitner from the USC College of Social Work have a project featured at the USC McKissick Museum in a photovoice exhibit entitled, *From Snapshot to Civic Action: Creating Healthy Environments through Community Engagement*. Photographs and related stories are displayed that capture residents' perspectives of strengths and concerns of life in a public housing community. The exhibit can be previewed from January 8- March 26, 2011.