

Collecting SNAP customer testimonials



Customer testimonials are important to our FINI grant, but they also help you to tell the story of your market and how it benefits your community. Talking with SNAP customers about how they use the program and how it benefits their families can give you something data collection can't. You have the opportunity to put a face on the statistics of hunger in your community through personal stories and quotes. We can also learn more about what outreach to SNAP shoppers is most meaningful.

GOAL:

Show impact of VFM on Virginia's SNAP clients and meet FINI requirements for SNAP customer testimonials and photos.

PROCESS:

Getting to know customers before asking for their stories is key. While you don't need to be on a first-name basis, it's important that you have spent some time getting to know customers over the duration of the season and can recognize people who return to the market on a regular basis. Chatting while running their SNAP transaction is one way to get to know them. You might say:

- *It's nice to see you again! We're so glad you're back!*
- *What do you all plan to buy this week? We've got some great new (seasonal produce item) you should try!*
- *What was your favorite thing you bought last week? Was that something new you hadn't tried before?*
- *I see you all come regularly. I would love to ask you some questions about using SNAP at the market one (market day) when you have time. Is that something you'd be willing to do?*



Becoming a friendly ally will help to warm customers to the prospect of answering questions. You may also have a volunteer or intern who would be a good fit for this job. Someone who is friendly without being overwhelming and is sensitive to the challenges sometimes faced by those receiving federal benefits like SNAP would be a good fit.

Once you've selected a few customers you think might be amenable to answering the questions, pick a few market days where you or the story collector will have time to talk without being rushed or interrupted and locate a place in the market where you can have a private conversation. The best time to do this is when the market is still full of the season's best fruits and veggies.

You can prime your participants the week prior by asking if they would mind spending a few minutes taking a survey when they come to the market next week. You may also offer some kind of incentive like market swag, a reusable VA Grown bag, or extra tokens to help encourage their participation.

Do not expect to ask every question in any given interview and feel free to add questions that address your unique context, populations, and program design. Practice interviewing a friend, spouse, or coworker, highlight your top priorities, and get familiar with them so you don't have to rely on your question sheet during your interview.

STORY DAY:

On the day you have selected to interview your customers make sure you have all the necessary supplies.



- Copies of the story questions
- Clipboard and pen for taking notes and signing photo releases
- Photo releases (English and Spanish are available)
- An envelope or folder to store completed surveys
- A camera or phone to take photos
- A phone or other recording device if you want to record the conversation (ask first!)
- A friendly smile and great attitude, be willing to accept that a customer may not want to participate even if they indicated they would do so previously

Make sure to introduce yourself and treat your interviewee as a peer. Ask if they have permission to use their story and a photo. Set their expectations for the interview by helping them understand why you need to gather this information. You could say:

-Thank you so much for agreeing to help us with this project! As you may know, we receive government funding for our Virginia Fresh Match program. We want to make sure that we show how the program helps families like yours to purchase healthy food. Hearing about your experience would really help us to keep our program going. Do you mind answering a few questions?

- Check for acceptance from the interviewee.
- If they agree to continue, forge ahead!
- Ask questions and probe for more information when needed. For instance, instead of asking “Do you like our SNAP program?” which would result in a yes or no answer, ask “How do you feel about being able to use your SNAP EBT at the market?”.

**See sample questions at the end of this handout.*

Be respectful of your interviewee’s time and the sensitive nature of the subject matter. The interview should last no longer than 5-10 minutes. If your subject seems uncomfortable, feel free to skip or rephrase questions.

Ask if they would mind you snapping a quick photo or two, either posed, or preferably of them buying tokens or shopping the market. You could say that you would love a photo of them with their shopping bags full of fresh produce or with their family or friends!

Have them sign necessary releases for photos and quotes. Ask for contact information so you can follow up on your notes if needed. Texting is a non-threatening way to contact people. You might ask:

-Do you mind if I get your number so I can text you if I have any questions about our conversation today? I want to make sure I get everything you said right!

Wrap up by thanking your interviewee and providing the incentive, if you offered one. Let them know that their participation makes a difference to lots of families your community and across the nation.

SUBMITTING YOUR INFORMATION:

There are several ways you can submit your information. You might choose to write up your interview in a story with a few paragraphs about each of your subjects. You’ll find sample write-ups at the end of this handout. However, you may decide to simply send copies of the interview sheets (make sure they’re readable!) and the photos in an email.

VFM FINI interviews, releases, and photos should be emailed to Gayle at pgayleprice@gmail.com.

TIP: No need for fancy market jargon

Use SNAP EBT or food stamps, not “federal nutrition benefits”

Call the incentive program by its local name

Use words like heart disease and obesity, not clinical terms like cardiovascular disease or diet-related illness.

SAMPLE SNAP CUSTOMER QUESTIONNAIRES:

Name _____
Phone/Email _____
Market _____
Date _____

1. How long have you been coming to the market?
2. How long have you been using the SNAP & VFM Program at the market?
3. How did you hear about the program?
4. What do you buy at the market?
 - a. What % of your weekly groceries do you purchase?
 - b. What % of your weekly produce do you purchase?
 - c. Do you buy
 - i. Meat
 - ii. Eggs
 - iii. Baked goods
 - iv. Produce: Fruits (y/n) Veg (y/n)
 - v. Jams, jellies, honey, salsas etc
 - vi. Snacks i.e. beverages, popcorn, candy, donuts
5. How many people live in your home?
6. Who does the cooking?
7. What types of foods do you cook at home?
8. Has using SNAP changed how your family eats/cooks? Y/N. How?
9. Is your F/V consumption less, same, more since you started using the program?
10. Has household tried any new fruits and/or veg since you started using SNAP at market? Y/N?
What? Did you/they like them/not like them? Do you use these regularly now?
11. Have there been any changes in your health since you started shopping at market/using SNAP and VFM program? (provide a scale)
1 2 3 4 5
No change Huge improvement
12. What works/does not work about the SNAP and VFM Program at the market – what could we do more, better, different?
 - a. Booth – customer service, efficiency
 - b. In market?
13. Barriers to using benefits at the market?
14. Anything else?

Question Packet Guide for Interviewing Consumers (Federal Nutrition Benefit Customers)

These questions are intended to guide your interview with market consumers. While the questions were designed to be appropriate for consumers to answer, be mindful that each person is unique; be present, flexible, and respectful during the interview, adjusting phrasing and questions to suit the tenor of each individual conversation. You do not need to ask every question, however keep in mind the goals of your project and the importance of asking questions that uncover the impact of the nutrition incentive program on the subject.

Part I: Background

- What's your name?
- Can you tell me a little bit about where you come from?
- Can you tell me a little bit about your family or community?
- What federal benefits are you using at the market today? [Prompts: food stamps, WIC, FMNP?]
- Before I continue with more questions, do you have any story that you would like to share with me?

Part II: Purchasing Experience & Habits

- Why do you shop at the farmers market?
- What are you planning to buy at the market today?
- Why do you buy fruits and vegetables?
- What would make it easier to buy the kind of food you like to eat?
- How have your shopping habits changed (if at all) since you started using [insert name of local nutrition incentive program]?
- What's most important to you when you are food shopping?
[Prompts: freshness and quality of produce, price, convenience]
- What differences do you find (if any) between shopping at the farmers market and shopping at the grocery store?
- How do you feel about your interactions with the farmers at the market?
- If you had 'all the money in the world,' what kinds of things would you cook and feed your family?
- Where do you shop when the market is not running? What kinds of food do you buy?
- Do you continue shopping at the market when your [insert name of federal benefits using, if known] run out?

Part III: Program Impact

- How has the [insert name of local nutrition incentive program] affected you?
- How does the [insert name of local nutrition incentive program] affect your day-to-day life and overall quality of life?

Question Packet Guide for Interviewing Consumers (cont.)

- Could you tell me about friends or relatives who would like to participate in this program, but can't for some reason?

Part IV: Personal

- How would you describe the health of you and your family?
- How would you describe your family's ability to buy fresh food?
- Have you, a family member, or friend had health challenges related to food? How has that affected you?
- Can you tell me a story about someone in your community who you admire, who is doing something to improve the community's food? This can be a story about yourself.
- Can you tell me about a positive memory you have had with food?
- How does food connect to other parts of your life?
- Why is food important?
- What was your experience with food and cooking as a child?

Part V: Big Picture

- Can you talk about the price of food in your town/city/region?
- What other factors could help improve access to food in your town/city/region?
- What changes would you like to see in our food system?
- If you sat down with the president/mayor what would you tell them about food in your community?
- Can you share a hope you have, either for yourself, your family, your friends, or your community?

Final Questions

- Would it be OK if we use your name, your words, and your photograph – to tell your story? That means, we may use your story on our website or in our organization's brochures about our program. [If yes] Would you please sign this permission form?
- Would it be OK if I or someone from my organization called or emailed you about your story if we have any other questions? [If yes] What is your email address or telephone number?

Photo/Story/Video Release

You must obtain permission from your interview subject to use their photograph, words, or video in any of your organization's materials. Make sure you explain what it means for them if they sign the form—that is, that you may use their image and words on your website, in your promotional materials, in a story in a local publication, etc. Translate the form into other languages, as necessary.

PHOTO/STORY/VIDEO RELEASE FORM

Thank you for allowing us to capture your photograph/story/video. This form will serve as a statement of your willingness to participate and a release of information.

I consent to the photographing of my person and property and the use of my photograph, name, likeness, voice, and words ("Photographs") and grant to [Wholesome Wave] and anyone authorized by them (collectively, ["Wholesome Wave] and its agents") permission to use, reproduce, display, broadcast, alter, modify, and/or copyright and renew all Photographs or likeness, taken by [Wholesome Wave] or provided to [Wholesome Wave], for any purpose, including, but not limited to, use in advertising, promotional, public relations, educational and fundraising materials, all media, including, without limitation, in broadcast, cable, electronic and print media ("[Wholesome Wave] Materials"), without limitations or compensation (such use being defined herein as the "Use").

I agree that the Photographs, images, and likeness become the property of [Wholesome Wave], and may not be returned. I understand that [Wholesome Wave] shall own all rights and I waive any right to inspect or approve of my images use in [Wholesome Wave] materials. I understand that I will not have any rights of ownership. I understand that my Photograph and likeness will not necessarily be used by virtue of this agreement.

I declare that: (1) I am of legal age and I have every right to contract in my own name, or my parent or legal guardian has signed below; (2) I have every right to grant [Wholesome Wave] the use of my Photograph or likeness without violating other commitments.

I hereby agree to hold [Wholesome Wave] and its agents harmless from any past, present and future claims, actions, demands, liability, rights, damages or losses ("Claims"), that I, my beneficiaries, administrators, executors or assigns had, have now or may have in the future in connection with the Photographs or likeness and/or the Use, including without limitation, any actions for trademark or copyright infringement, violations of rights of publicity or privacy, or for blurring, distortion, alteration, optical illusion, or any use of the Photographs. I agree to hold [Wholesome Wave] and its agents harmless from any Claim by any third party arising out of any inaccuracy or breach of any representations and warranties herein.

Photo/Story/Video Release (cont.)

I understand and agree: (1) that this Release is binding and (2) this Release constitutes an agreement between myself and [Wholesome Wave] and no waiver, modification or addition to this Release shall be valid unless in writing and signed by the parties.

I have read this release before signing below and I fully understand the contents, meaning, and impact of this release.

Traducción al español: Gracias por su generosidad en ofrecernos su historia, video, o foto. Esta hoja servirá como un promiso de su intento a participar. Servirá también como un comunicado de información.

Doy a [Wholesome Wave], sus representantes, sus empleados, y negocios afiliados permiso a usar mi imagen y historia en una fotografía o otro tipo de reproducción digital, en cualquier y todo de sus publicaciones, para propósitos comerciales, medios de comunicación social, y en su sitio web, sin pago o más consideración. Tengo dieciocho años o más y puedo contratar con mi propio nombre. Antes de firmar aquí, he leído esta hoja y comprendo la información presentada y el significado de la hoja.

Make sure to include all contact information for your participant.

Date: _____

Printed Name: _____

Signature: _____

Phone Number: _____

Email Address: _____

SAMPLE CUSTOMER STORY WRITE-UPS:

Sasha Stoddard

Sasha is shopping with her son, age 13, and daughter, age 10. Sasha was a regular shopper at DCFM until seven years ago. She's recently returned to the market and has been using SNAP/EBT there this year. Eating healthy, stretching her budget and living sustainably are important to her. She and her children grow vegetable plants, and they preserve additional fruits and vegetables by canning and dehydrating.

Sasha purchases some items at the grocery store and supplements with produce from the market. She likes to provide fresh fruits and vegetables to her family, and the match makes it affordable.

Her children particularly love cherries and strawberries, but like most fruits and vegetables. One of Sasha's favorite things to cook is the meatloaf that her son loves. She makes it with market ingredients – lots of grated zucchini and carrots, and grassfed beef mixed in with the meat she gets from the store to make it healthier. She prepares it in bulk and freezes it for use throughout the year.

"There is a preconception that food stamp people are not working, but its just not true. Seven years ago, I became a single mom. I've worked hard. I got my bachelors, then my masters, and I am living and raising my children on graduate student loans while I get my final degree. It's challenging! This program helps people with specific needs get on their feet."

Sasha also likes that she is able to support the farmers and shop locally – "I feel that when I shop at the market, I am supporting my community, and the SNAP and match program supports us back".

Andrew Pittman

Andrew is a big man, in his late 50's. He and his wife recently moved into the area from Richmond. Andrew first noticed the farmers market the prior week when he was waiting for his wife to get out of a doctor's appointment. Curious, he came to visit. He'd never been to a farmers market before and it was love at first sight.

Andrew does all the cooking for himself and his wife. They don't eat a lot of meat - he cooks mostly vegetables. He's had a kidney transplant so he watches what he eats. Lately he's been making a lot of smoothies as a quick way to get a lot of nutrients, especially now that he is able to afford a greater variety of fruits and vegetables and is not limited to what he can find in the grocery store. When he first started receiving SNAP, he was only getting about \$16/month and it wasn't much help for his budget. This has gradually increased, and the SNAP match helps a lot.

Andrew's wife does the driving because he is legally blind. This week, he begged her to stop by the market so he could get some more fresh vegetables. She waited in the car while he shopped. He shops with gusto and delight – stopping at every booth, greeting vendors like family, taking his time over his choices, discussing each purchase with other shoppers around him.

"Shopping at the farmers market is a new experience for me, but everyone has been very pleasant and I like it that I can support local farmers. It's great I can use my EBT card at the market – I didn't know you could do that. I'm getting the hang of the tokens and using the red ones first for my fruits and vegetables. Keep up the good work! I'll be back every week."

Elise

Elise has been coming to Dale City Farmers Market for years, and now shops there with her 12-year-old daughter, April. Elise does all of the cooking for the family and incorporates fruits and vegetables into every meal.

Elise started using SNAP after her partner got into an accident and was unable to work. After their other expenses, "there was never enough left over to pay for groceries. Doubling my money here has helped a lot. "She and her daughter shop as partners, checking out quality, quantity and price at their favorite farmer's booth. "This program is the only reason we have been able to stretch our food budget. Without it, we would be living on ramen. And even ramen with a cucumber on the side is still ramen," she laughs. "It's made a big difference."