

# EXTENSION SNAPSHOT

Fulton-Mason-Peoria-Tazewell Unit

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## Mobile market data shows growing impact for local families in Peoria and Tazewell counties

Earlier this year, the HEAL-Food System Partner's Central Illinois Children's Health Initiative (CICHI) introduced CJ's Harvest On-the-Go, a mobile market funded by OSF and University of Illinois College of Medicine Peoria that is designed to make healthy foods more accessible for families at select Head Start and after-school program sites across Peoria and East Peoria. Early program data is now beginning to show the impact of pairing food access with nutrition education.

Since launching the mobile market, 610 households have participated, with 43% returning for multiple visits. Participation includes 372 households from four Head Start programs and 238 households from two after-school sites. Participation at several locations was especially strong. Some sites reached 70–90% of enrolled families, highlighting the value of offering markets during school and childcare pickup times when families are already gathered.

"Families want to eat well, but cost, time, and access often make healthy choices feel out of reach," said Illinois Extension Educator Rebecca Crumrine. "By meeting families where they naturally gather, we're seeing those barriers begin to shift."

Survey results suggest the markets are improving household well-being. Among respondents:

- Food security improved for 45–80% of shoppers
- Nutrition security improved for more than 85%
- About 70% of families reported eating more fruits and vegetables

At several Head Start sites, fruit and vegetable intake increased even further, with over 75% of families reporting higher consumption. Families consistently praised the markets, describing them as "perfect prices," "a blessing to our community," and "an opportunity to introduce new foods at home."

The program's combination of affordable food access and hands-on nutrition education appears to be key. Families can shop for fresh produce, dairy, and grains while youth participate in recipe sampling and nutrition activities led by Illinois Extension staff. The markets are supported by strong community partnerships, including local growers, healthcare, grocers, health departments, food banks, and volunteers who have contributed more than 300 hours of service helping operate markets and distribute food.

"Our goal is lasting impact," said Crumrine. "When families feel supported and confident, healthy habits become sustainable."



Photo by Anita Wilkinson | Illinois Extension

CJ's Harvest On-the-Go is a mobile market that sets up at select Head Start and after-school program sites across Peoria and East Peoria. This unique shopping experience provides healthy, fresh foods, at affordable prices.

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