



CENTER FOR FOOD SYSTEMS  
AND COMMUNITY TRANSFORMATION

## Bringing Fresh Food into Petersburg

*Making fresh, local foods more accessible in Petersburg is being achieved through a POP! Market; this vignette is part of our “Virginia Food Systems and COVID-19 Story Collection Project” that aims to highlight, collect, and share stories of hope and resilience in our food system amidst the pandemic. Find out more about this project and view our entire series on [our website](#).*

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Improving the food system in Petersburg, Virginia has become even more important in light of the COVID-19 pandemic. According to 2020 County Health Rankings data from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, Petersburg City faces tremendous socioeconomic challenges that are associated with increased prevalence of adult obesity (42%). In fact, the County Health Rankings rank Petersburg City 133<sup>rd</sup> of 133 counties and independent cities in Virginia.

Prior to the pandemic, Petersburg’s food system was already impeded by limited food access and transportation options that compromised engagement in healthy behaviors. Since the emergence of COVID-19 and subsequent school closures, the demand for healthy food options in Petersburg has become more acute. For example, because more than 90% of students in the city are eligible for free or reduced breakfast and lunch, Petersburg families need to be connected to food resources that are not only healthy, but available and accessible during these challenging times. Creating additional opportunities to utilize SNAP/EBT (Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program/Electronic Benefit Transfer) benefits and take advantage of the Virginia Fresh Match program, which matches SNAP dollars spent with the equivalent amount in fresh fruits and vegetables, is critical within the community. In response to these communal needs, a group of Petersburg stakeholders have launched a novel initiative to strengthen the local food system.

*The POP! Market (Petersburg Offers Produce)* is a mobile market offering fresh, local food that presents Petersburg residents in low healthy food access areas with the opportunity to purchase healthy produce and maximize their SNAP benefits through the Virginia Fresh Match program. The mobile market is an extension of River Street Market (local farmers’ market) and

is supported by Petersburg Healthy Options Partnerships (PHOPs)— a group funded by a CDC (Centers for Disease Control) grant that aims to increase healthy food and active transportation options in Petersburg through 2023. Additional partners include the Harding Street Urban AG Center, the Petersburg Healthy Community Action Team (HCAT), Kingdom Covenant Empowerment Center, and Petersburg City Cooperative Extension. By offering a mobile market with fresh, local produce, PHOPs and River Street Market strive to increase and diversify healthy food options available to the community; thereby, increasing consumption of healthy foods by Petersburg residents. Specifically, two refrigerated vehicles, rented with PHOPs grant funds, extend the reach of quality produce to community members in Petersburg neighborhoods with limited food access.

The idea for the *POP! Market* originated from the community’s need for more options in healthy food priority areas outside of River Street’s central downtown location. Although Petersburg is surrounded by cities with diverse food options, Walmart and Food Lion are the only major chain grocery stores available to residents. However, both are situated on the same street and are not easily accessible to downtown neighborhoods. Moreover, despite the presence of River Street Market, few residents are aware of this opportunity to access local food and produce. Even if community members are aware of River Street Market as an opportunity to access fresh, local food, some may not have access to the transportation needed to get there, or they may feel more comfortable going to their local corner store, which may not provide the same healthy foods as found at the market. As a grass roots community initiative, the concept for the *POP! Market* also stems from recommendations of community focus group data collected at Pleasants Lane Elementary School by the Petersburg HCAT. These



The POP! Market in Petersburg. Photo courtesy of VT Center for Public Health Practice & Research

recommendations revealed support for a mobile market with access points at schools and frequently visited public locations. Surveys later administered by PHOPs affirmed the community's desire for more fresh food options—with the majority of respondents (74%) reporting they would visit a mobile market if it were available.

As a result, every first and third Friday of the month, the *POP! Market* offers anyone in the Petersburg community the opportunity to purchase produce from local farmers with either debit, credit, cash, or SNAP funds/EBT cards. Some of the farms\* providing the produce include Browntown Farms of Brunswick County; Carry Me Back Farms of Prince George County; Two Veterans Farms of Petersburg; and Wells Produce of Prince George County. From these farms, River Street Market compiles beautiful boxes of fresh produce full of items such as sweet white corn, summer squash, red potatoes, mixed onions, curly kale, mixed berries, fresh bread, and pasture-raised eggs. Valued and sold to anyone for \$20, these boxes are available to SNAP recipients with an EBT card (or P-EBT card) for \$10. Thanks to the Virginia Fresh Match program, *the POP! Market* matches every SNAP dollar spent with the same amount in fresh fruits and vegetables. Because the *POP! Market* boxes include mostly fresh produce, they are automatically half off for SNAP recipients.

Currently, the *POP! Market* is offered from 11:00 am to 1:00 pm at Kingdom Covenant Empowerment Center. However, there are plans to expand the market to other locations and times once a customer base and greater support are established. This novel addition to Petersburg's local food system has already been well received. According to exit surveys, 100% of patrons

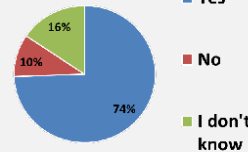
# PETERSBURG HOPs

HEALTHY OPTIONS PARTNERSHIP



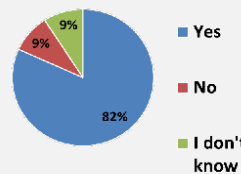
Results are based on 195 Petersburg residents' responses to two community surveys.

Would You Visit a Mobile Market?



pHOPs will offer mobile produce markets in areas that need and want more access to fruits and vegetables.

Would You Buy Fresh Produce at the Library?



pHOPs will work with local farmers to offer a produce market at the Public Library.

6 out of every 10 people DID NOT KNOW about the Virginia Fresh Match Program at River Street Market.



pHOPs is promoting the SNAP and Virginia Fresh Match programs.

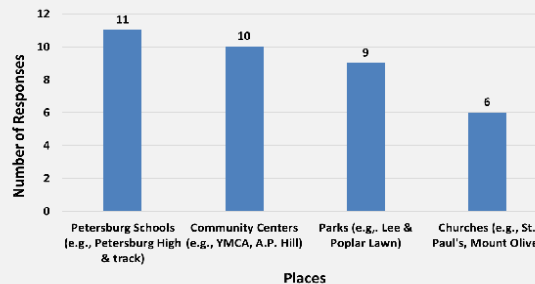
1 out of every 2 Petersburg residents surveyed does not feel safe walking in the City.



Reasons for feeling unsafe were not surveyed, but could include traffic, crime, lack of sidewalks, among other issues.

pHOPs supports efforts to expand and connect safe walking and biking trails in Petersburg.

Places Where People Would Like to Exercise



pHOPs will work with partners to create opportunities for community members to use these types of places to exercise.

Infographic Courtesy of VT Center for Public Health Practice & Research

would visit another POP! Market. The majority of *POP! Market* visitors said they liked either the types of foods provided or the accessibility and location of the market best. Two-thirds of survey respondents were unaware that the Virginia Fresh Match program can provide free fruits and vegetables to people using SNAP benefits/EBT cards (or P-EBT cards) at the market. Thus, the *POP! Market* has already served to increase awareness of this valuable program (Virginia Fresh Match). As the River Street Market Manager and *POP! Market* Coordinator Cheryl Bursch noted, “Some people that came here today realize[d] that they can double their SNAP dollars and have a bigger selection at the farmers’ market. I can kind of see the wheels turning like, ‘OK, maybe it’s worthwhile for me to go down there’” (Progress-Index, 2020). This synergistic benefit to the food landscape in the community is exactly what the mobile market was intended to do.



Infographic Courtesy of VT Center for Public Health Practice & Research

The PHOPs team and River Street Market are excited about the potential for the *POP! Market* to positively impact the food system in Petersburg, especially in light of the COVID-19 pandemic. With each box moving directly from the farm to the customer, and with most of the produce picked or harvested the day before pickup, *the POP! Market* serves as a vital resource for fresh, quality food during a time when staying healthy is of utmost importance.

This vignette was adapted from an original Progress-Index article from July 6, 2020. You can learn more about the partners working to bring *POP! Market* to the Petersburg Community by clicking the following links:

- POP! Market Facebook [page](#)
- [PHOPs and their CDC grant](#) and Facebook [page](#)

[Harding Street Urban Agriculture Center](#) and their Facebook [page](#)  
[Petersburg Healthy Community Action Team](#) and their Facebook [page](#)  
[River Street Market](#) at their online ordering process and Facebook [page](#)  
[Virginia State University's Randolph Farms](#) site

\*Farms/producers that have contributed to the produce boxes thus far: AgriBerry of Hanover County; All Good Things Farm Market of Dinwiddie County; Browntown Farms of Brunswick County; Lingerfelt Farms of Dinwiddie County; Otis Acres Micro-Farm of Brunswick County; Peterson Family Farm of Prince George County; Schofield Farm of Dinwiddie County; Turkey Creek Bakery of Powhatan County; Two Veterans Farm of Colonial Heights; Virginia State University's Randolph Farms of Petersburg; and Wells Produce of Prince George County.

### **References**

Progress-Index. (2020, July 06). *New POP! Market brings fresh fruit and veggies to Petersburg neighborhoods*. Retrieved from: <https://www.progress-index.com/news/20200706/new-pop-market-brings-fresh-fruit-and-veggies-to-petersburg-neighborhoods>