

Areas in need get a food market on wheels

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Michigan State University public health researcher, Rick Sadler, is using his mapping expertise to help a farmers market and other local food sources go mobile in Flint, bringing healthier options closer to those most in need. Credit: Harley J. Seeley

A Michigan State University researcher is using his mapping expertise to help a farmers market and other local food sources go mobile in Flint,

bringing healthier options closer to those most in need.

Rick Sadler, who earlier this year published a study showing the positive effects of moving the Flint Farmers' Market downtown, is now helping the market, along with a mom-and-pop grocery store and other organic farms, identify the best locations to serve in order to take their fruits and veggies on the road.

"The mobile market will provide not only fruits and vegetables, but also selected meat, cheese, dairy, grains and other foods," Sadler said. "The idea is really for it to be a stand-in for a grocery store where there isn't one."

With input from additional community partners ranging from nonprofits to government and religious entities, Sadler mapped out areas in Flint that not only were most in need, but showed a desire to have this alternative market available to them.

Sadler is a public health professor in the MSU College of Human Medicine and his findings are published in the *International Journal of Health Geographics*.

"Community buy-in is essential," Sadler said. "The many groups that were engaged in this process included both residents of and advocates for the neighborhoods identified as highly suitable for a mobile market, most of which are in the northwestern part of the city."



The owners of a small, neighborhood store in Flint called The Local Grocer will run a new mobile food market that will bring healthier options to those most in need. The market is planned to launch at the end of the month. Credit: G.L. Kohuth

But beyond the buy-in from the community, certain key variables were looked at within the study that also helped organizers identify the best places to begin offering the service.

"Availability of healthy food and socioeconomic distress were two variables of immediate importance because they are primary predictors of existing disparities in diet-related behaviors and health outcomes," Sadler said.

The other variables—population density, proximity to bus stops and presence in neighborhood centers—Sadler said were also important because organizers wanted to reach as many people as possible, so the sites needed to be in a place where a lot of people could easily reach them.

The owners of a small, neighborhood store called The Local Grocer will run the [mobile market](#), which is planned to launch at the end of the month and will start by making two stops per day, three days a week, to many sites. More neighborhoods and stops may be added in the future as the mobile service gets underway.

Foods from area farms and local suppliers also will initially be used, yet the goal is to increase these sources to include area community gardens too.

"The dream would be to expand these mobile markets and other neighborhood-level, community-owned stores with healthy food options and provide increased opportunities for local farmers and growers," Sadler said. "Food is one of the most fundamental elements of the economy—everybody eats—so in a community like Flint, why shouldn't we be growing and selling our own food to one another?"

Provided by Michigan State University

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