

2019 Produce Plus Report



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2019 Produce Plus Overview



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What is the Produce Plus Program?

The Produce Plus Program aims to:

- Increase access to fruits and vegetables for low-resource DC residents
- Increase community participation and investment in neighborhood markets
- Improve the viability of farmers' markets selling in communities with challenges such as limited access to healthy affordable food or a lack of secure employment opportunities with living wages



\$10 worth of produce at the Ledroit Park Farmers' Market

2019 Summary Overview

Produce Plus Distributed: \$886,970

Produce Plus Redeemed: \$841,310 (94.9%)

8,586 unique participants*

18,252 additional people served**

*The total number of unique participants above only includes individuals who picked up checks, not the total number who registered.

**Customers were asked "How many people do you share food with?"



\$10 of Produce at Arcadia's Mobile Market at Oxon Run Park

How does Produce Plus work?



The Produce Plus Tent at the LeDroit Park Farmers' Market

With Produce Plus, DC residents participating in qualifying programs can go to farmers' markets twice per week to get \$10 to spend on fresh fruits and vegetables.

The program is administered by DC Greens through a grant from DC Health.

Produce Plus is built upon strong partnerships and in 2019 collaborated with thirteen community organizations across the District to distribute Produce Plus, manage volunteers, and collect data for the program. In 2019, Produce Plus partnered with the following organizations:

- Arcadia Center for Sustainable Food & Agriculture
- Building Bridges Across the River
- Community Foodworks
- DC Urban Greens
- DC Open Air Farmers' Market at RFK
- Diverse Markets Management
- Eastern Market (DGS)
- FRESHFARM
- Markets & More
- Mount Pleasant Farmers' Market
- Petworth Community Market
- Rich Capital Concepts
- Ward 8 Farmers' Market, Inc.

Partnerships



Volunteers at the FRESHFARM H Street NE Farmers' Market



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Market Champions

Produce Plus creates employment opportunities for District residents in communities reached by the program. As paid staff of the Produce Plus team, Market Champions conduct community engagement and cultivate welcoming, inclusive spaces at distributing markets. In 2019 Produce Plus had 15 Market Champions assigned to markets across the city.

Market Champions are assigned to one or more farmers' market. Their roles include:

- Helping new customers navigate the market
- Answering questions to support utilization of Produce Plus and other benefits such as WIC, WIC and Senior Farmers' Market Nutrition Programs, SNAP, and matching programs available at participating markets
- Developing and maintaining relationships with market managers
- Distributing program outreach materials in their neighborhoods



Market Champion Kim with a volunteer Lutricia Murphy at Arcadia's Mobile Market in Downtown Anacostia.

Refining the Role of Market Champions

Market Champions serve additional key roles including:

- Collecting customer feedback,
- Providing language interpretation services
- Encourage customers to try new fruits and vegetables.

Despite holding this important role at markets, 2019 customer feedback indicated customers were unable to identify Market Champions at their market. An opportunity exists to more clearly define their position at markets.



Market Champion Brenda with volunteers Pam and Jasmine at the Monroe Street Market

Farmers' Market Brigade

Farmers' Market Brigade volunteers support the Produce Plus Program by **distributing checks** at farmers' markets and by **supporting customers to shop at markets**. As a result of program expansion and improved volunteer management operations, the total number of volunteer hours donated by Farmers' Market Brigade volunteers has more than doubled since 2016.

“There have been some really nice bright spots in volunteering... the appreciation for this program is really great and hearing that from the customers is always nice, as we are there to support them!”



Volunteer Leader Juanita and volunteers at FRESHFARM's H Street NE Farmers' Market.

Year Over Year Volunteer Data

	2016	2017	2018	2019	% change 2018 to 2019
Unique Volunteers	265	284	285	257	-10%
Unique Customer-Volunteers*	52 (20%)	75 (26%)	83 (29%)	82 (32%)	-1.2%
Volunteer Hours	2,378	4,230**	6,267***	5,693	-9%
Customer-Volunteer Hours	1,044 (44%)	1,651 (39%)	2,917 (47%)	2,910.5 (51%)	-0.2%

*Customer-volunteers are volunteers who also receive Produce Plus benefits.

**The growth in volunteer hours was likely a result of launching the Volunteer Leaders program in 2017.

***The growth in volunteer hours between 2017 to 2018 likely reflects more accurate reporting by volunteers on a new, user-friendly volunteer website platform. This platform was also used in 2019.

Volunteer Trends in 2019

The Farmers' Market Brigade also aims to foster **ownership** of the program amongst recipients of Produce Plus. Volunteering serves as an important gateway for customers to become leaders, decision-makers, and stewards of the Produce Plus program. DC Greens conducts targeted outreach and relationship building to support program recipients to also be program volunteers.

Volunteers who are also Produce Plus customers contribute significant effort each year, donating 2,910.5 (51%) of 5,693 total volunteer hours at markets in 2019. Nine out of ten top performing volunteers and half of the Volunteer Leaders were also customers.

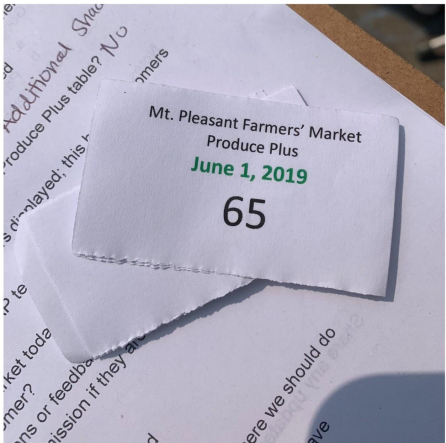


Volunteers and Market Champions serve customers at the Ward 8 Farmers' Market in the Congress Heights neighborhood.

Volunteer Feedback

Despite dedicated service from volunteers across the city, many markets struggled with managing long customer lines due to high demand and limited funding for the program. Customers and volunteers were dismayed by wait times and the lack of resources to serve residents, which often resulted in negative program experiences.

“Thinking about how much time we are requiring to have people wait in lines or make visits to the markets each time for \$10 seems very inconvenient.... I hope that there's some consideration going on to lessen the burden for the customers.”



Clockwise from the left: Line at Columbia Heights Farmers' Market; Line management tickets from Mount Pleasant Farmers' Market; Line at at Arcadia's Mobile Market in Parkside; Tickets from FRESHFARM's Mount Vernon Farmers' Market.



Who Uses Produce Plus?



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Produce Plus Customers At A Glance

Produce Plus has high participation from seniors and customers over the age of 50. The average age of participants in 2019 (57 years) increased compared to 2018 (50 years). The median age stayed constant at 59 years further indicating that there was an increase in customers at the higher end of the age ranges.

Female-identified customers continued to make up the majority of Produce Plus participants.

Gender			
Male	2,342	27.3%	
Female	6,231	72.6%	
Other	13	0.2%	
Age		2018	2019
Average		50	57
Median		59	59

How Do Participants Qualify?

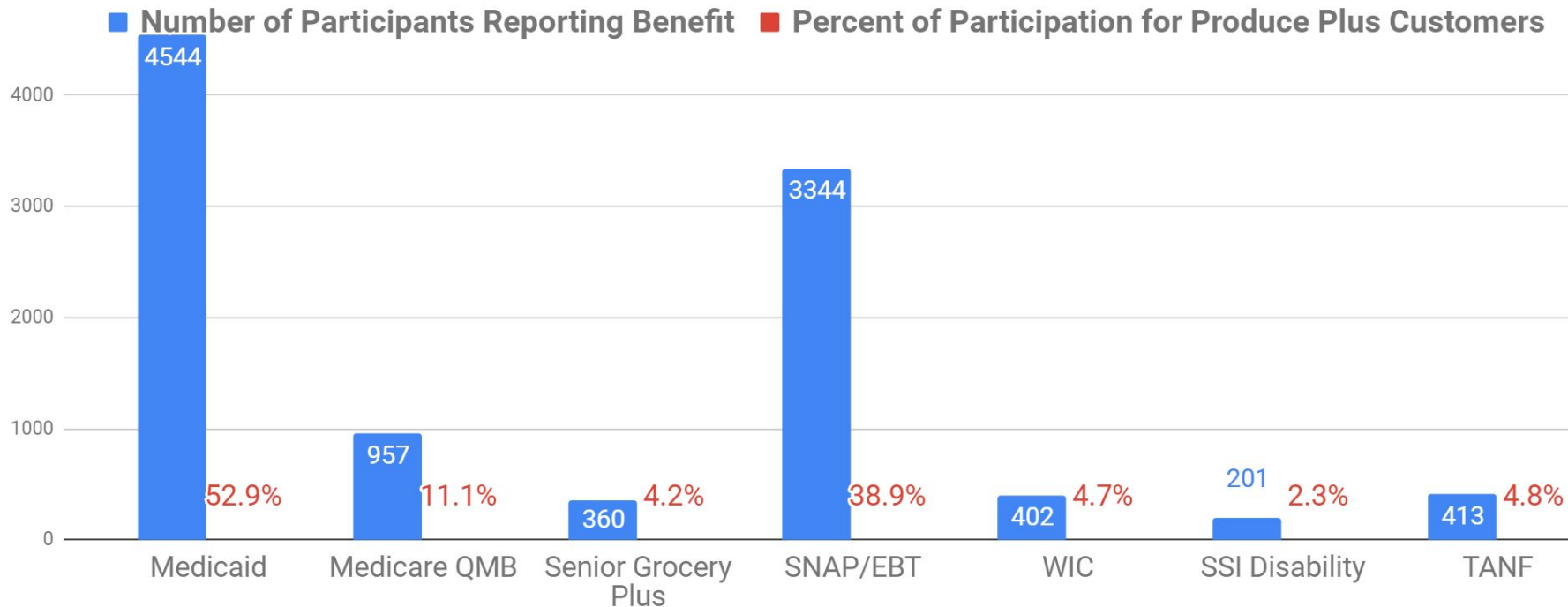


\$20 of Produce at the Capitol Riverfront Farmers' Market

Customers must present documentation that they are DC residents and participate in one of the following programs:

- Medicaid,
- Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP),
- Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC),
- Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF),
- Senior Grocery Plus,
- SSI Disability
- Qualified Medicare Beneficiaries (Medicare QMB).

Qualifying Programs Reported by Produce Plus Customers



Percent of participants reporting each benefit during Produce Plus registration remained constant from 2018 to 2019. Only TANF customers showed a slight increase of about 1% .

Note: Individuals who register for Produce Plus may participate in several qualifying programs. Totals may be more than 100%.



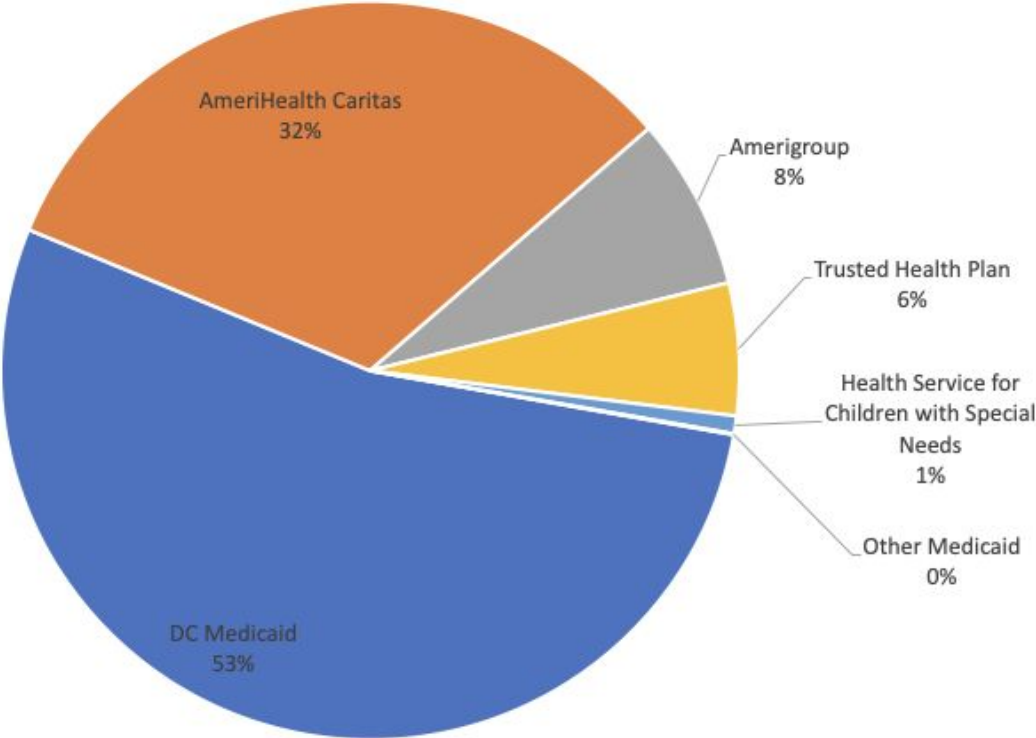
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Providing Food Resources for Medicaid Recipients

Types of Medicaid Reported by Produce Plus Participants



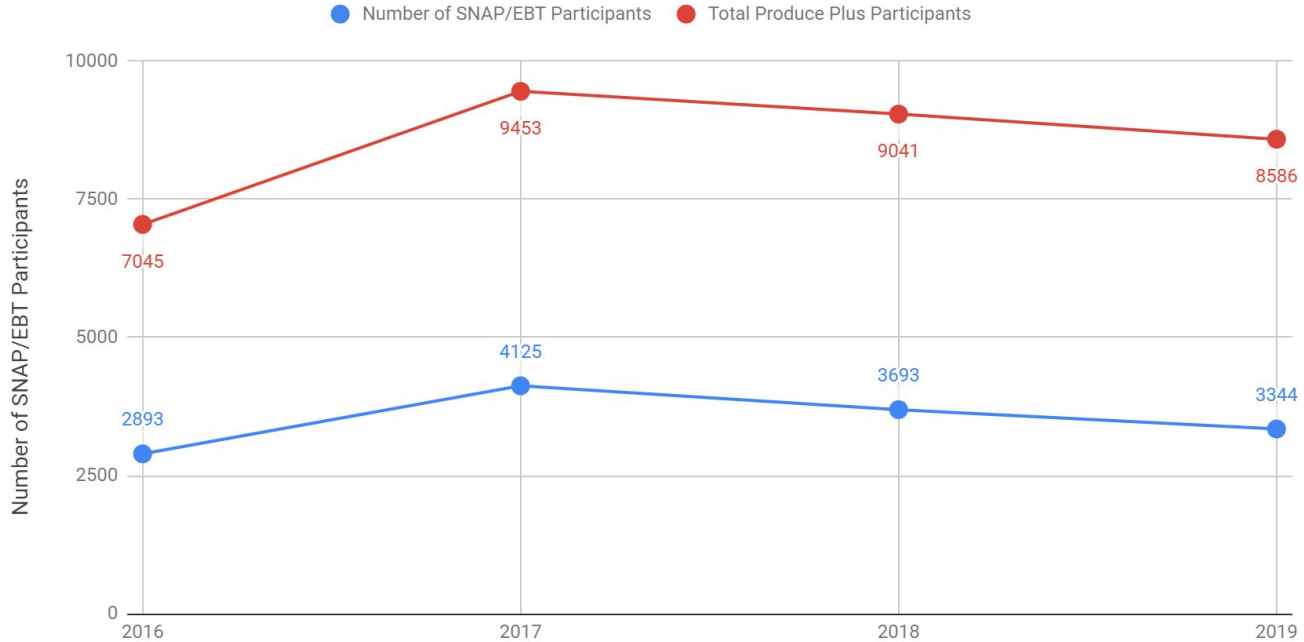
Medicaid continues to be the most commonly reported program that participants use to register for Produce Plus with 52.9% of overall customers using it to register.

Additionally 77.4% of customers who reported that they are Medicaid recipients used it as their only qualifying program, indicating that it is an important food resource for those customers.

Food Access for SNAP Users

In 2019, the number of Produce Plus members reporting SNAP participation decreased slightly. However the decrease aligned with the overall decrease in program participation over the past two seasons of the program.

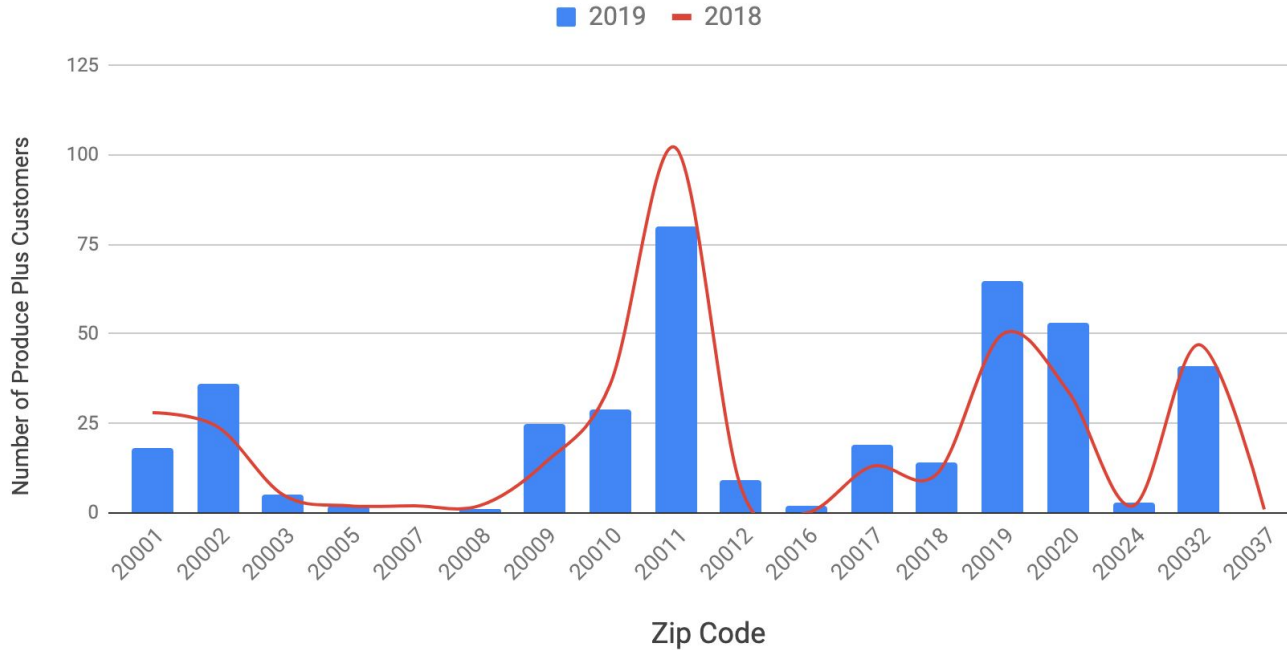
Number of Produce Plus Participants Reporting SNAP Enrollment



Note: Produce Plus participants may participate in SNAP but not report their enrollment if they present a different benefit card during Produce Plus registration.

Reaching WIC Participants

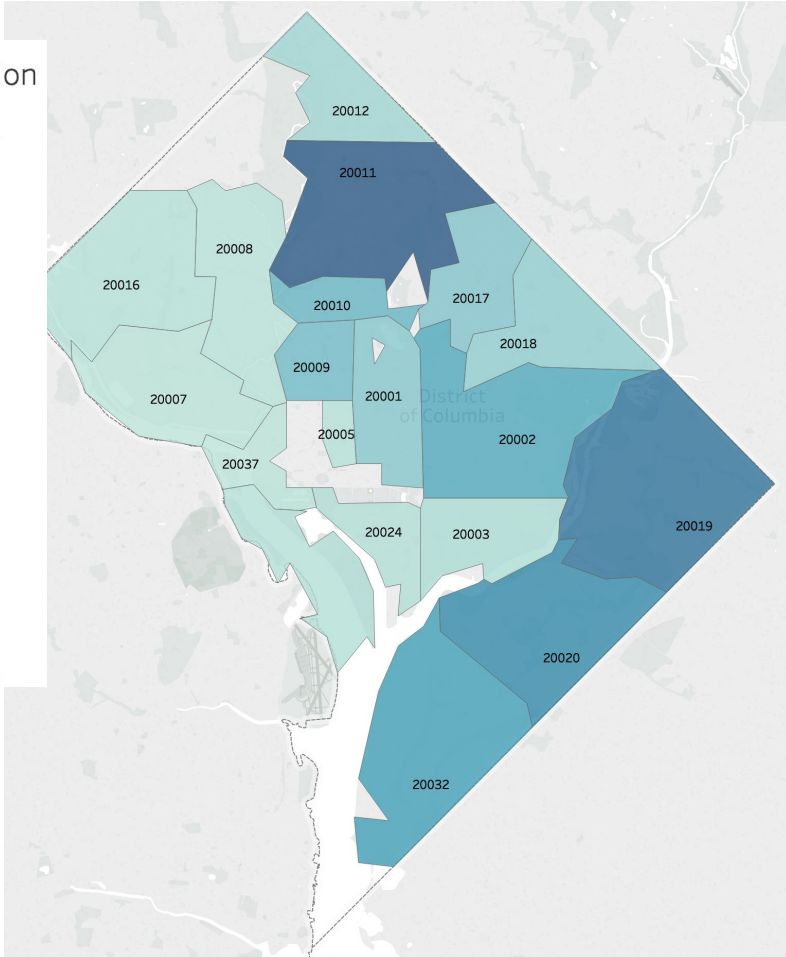
Changes in WIC Recipient Participation in Produce Plus by Zip Code



Participation for WIC recipients increased in zip codes 20019 and 20020; the areas of Ward 7 and 8 which were targeted by Market Champions for specific outreach to young mothers.

WIC Participation

Zip Code	
20001	18
20002	36
20003	5
20005	2
20007	0
20008	1
20009	25
20010	29
20011	80
20012	9
20016	2
20017	19
20018	14
20019	65
20020	53
20024	3
20032	41
20037	0



Reaching WIC Participants

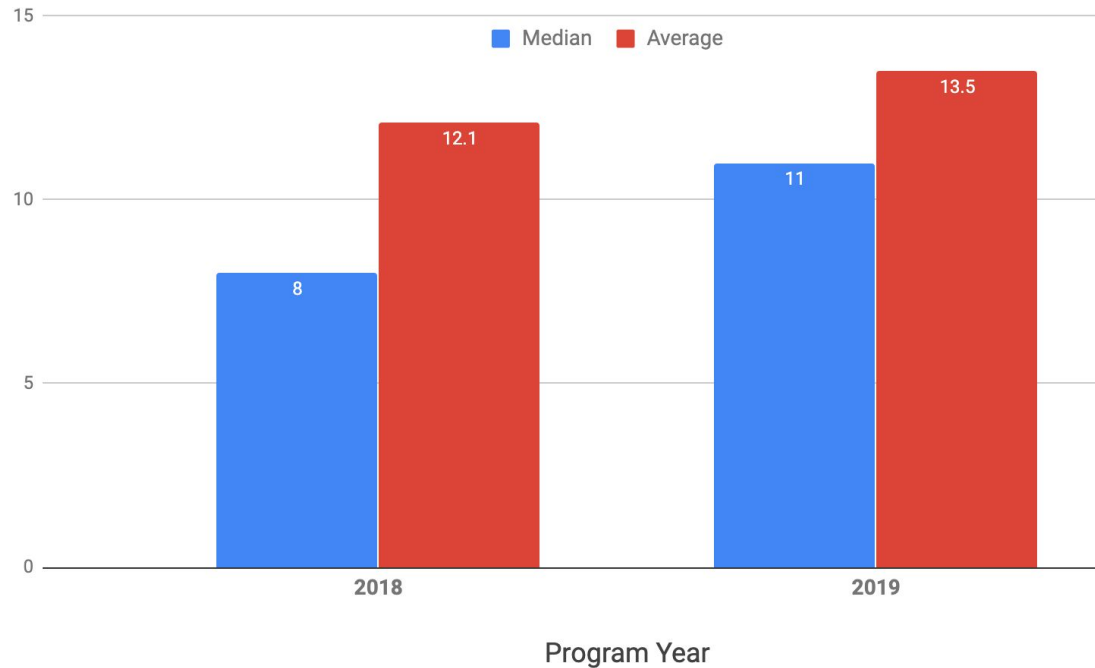
Participation for WIC recipients overlaid with a map shows highest participation in zip codes located in Wards 4, 7 and 8.

78.7% of Medicare QMB recipients who participated in Produce Plus during the 2019 season had participated in a previous year making them the most consistent group of participants. Both their average and median number of visits increased from 2018.

Additionally, 76.1% of Produce Plus customers who enrolled using QMB did not report another qualifying program.

Medicare QMB

Median and Average Market Visits



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Providing Access for Food Insecure Residents

In 2019 the Produce Plus program used the Hunger Vital Sign™, a 2-question screening tool, to identify participants who are at risk for food insecurity*.

Using this measure, 72.9% of Produce Plus customers identified as being at risk for food insecurity. This is an increase of 4.4% from 2018 (68.5%).

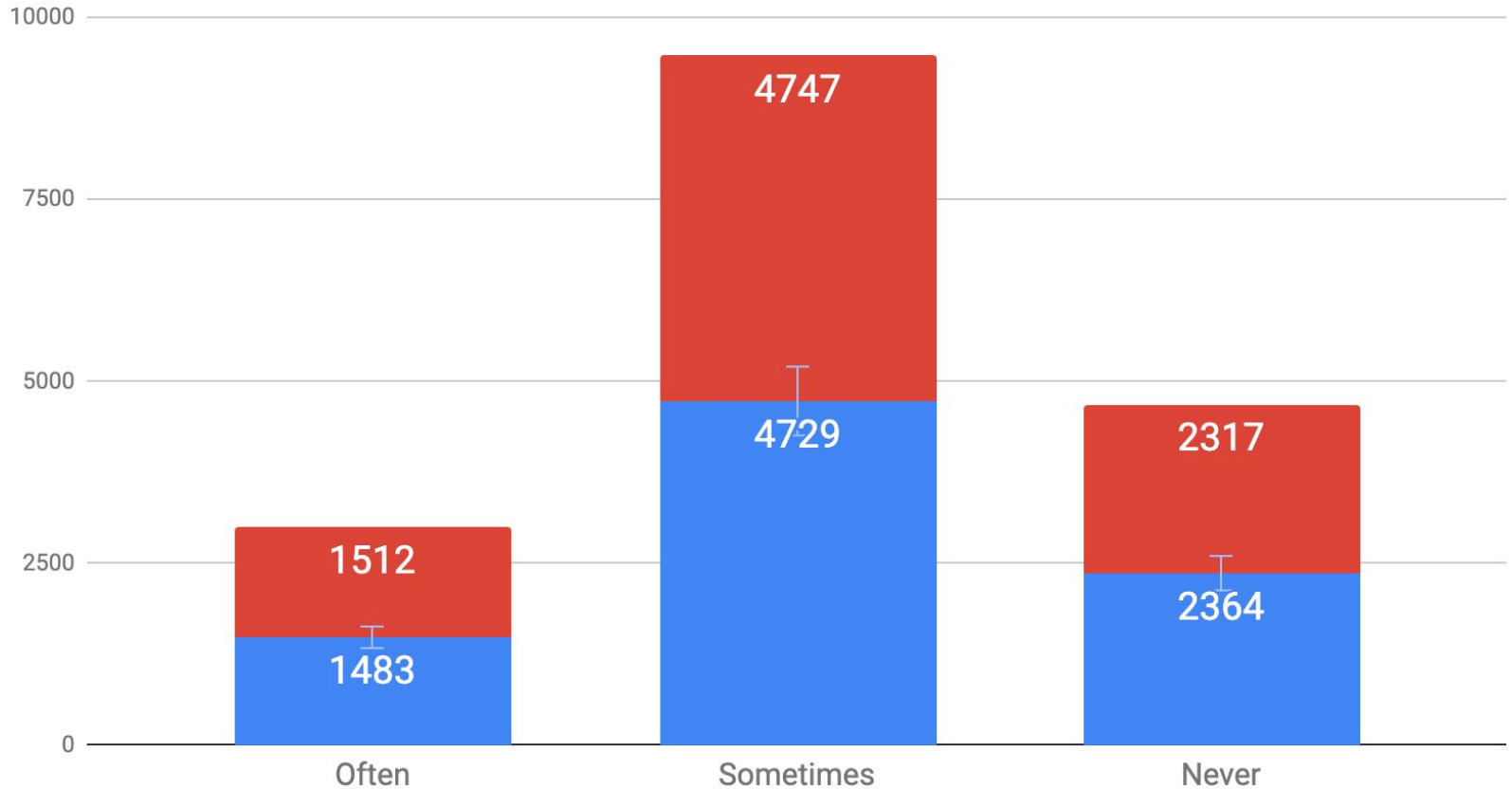
*Answering that either or both of the two statements is 'often' or 'sometimes' true would identify someone as being at risk for food insecurity. Note also that 10 customers did not answer the questions, and have not been included in the total percentage.



Volunteer Jennie Mak assists a customer at FRESHFARM's Capitol Riverfront Farmers' Market.

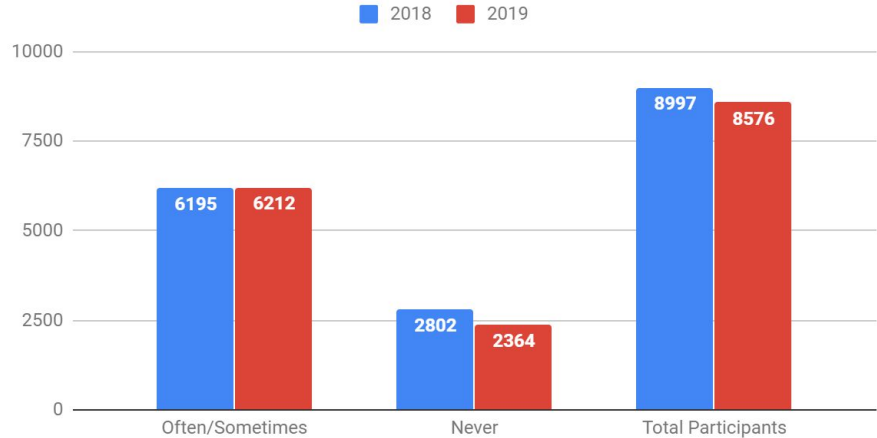
Hunger Vital Sign

- Within the past 12 months the food we bought just didn't last and we didn't have money to get more
- Within the past 12 months we worried whether our food would run out before we got money to buy more.

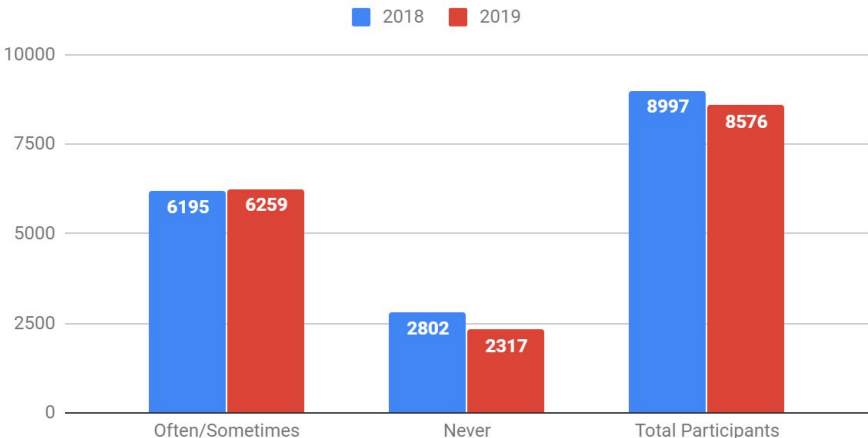


Although there were fewer participants in the 2019 Produce Plus season compared to 2018, both statements had a higher total number of responses in the “often” and “sometimes” categories in 2019 compared to 2018. This may indicate that outreach and enrollment is capturing those with the highest need for food assistance.

Within the past 12 months we worried whether our food would run out before we got money to buy more



Within the past 12 months the food we bought just didn't last and we didn't have money to get more



Note: Not all participants answer these questions during enrollment, consequently the total participants for both years is lower than total participants in the program. 44 participants are missing from 2018 and 10 from 2019.



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2019 Produce Plus Program Trends



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Zip Code	2019 Customers	2018 Customers	Change
20001	821	935	-114
20002	686	763	-77
20003	186	218	-32
20004	3	2	1
20005	69	81	-12
20006	1	0	1
20007	12	11	1
20008	24	26	-2
20009	484	507	-23
20010	514	626	-112
20011	809	829	-20
20012	94	78	16
20015	11	12	-1
20016	26	12	14
20017	324	304	20
20018	249	244	5
20019	1816	1973	-157
20020	883	884	-1
20024	282	256	26
20032	1228	1196	32
20036	4	3	1
20037	60	81	-21

Produce Plus Participants by Zip Code

Produce Plus participation was lower overall in 2019 compared to 2018. This is reflected by a decrease or levelling off in enrollment in most zip codes across the city.

Opportunities exist to further understand this decline and improve customer participation.

New Markets Bring New Customers



Volunteer Jenny helps a customer at the Fort Totten Farmers' Market

Despite the overall decrease in participation, there were three zip codes that saw slight increases in enrollment during 2019 compared to 2018: 20017, 20024, and 20032.

Each of these areas of the city were either nearby to new markets and/or new areas supported by Market Champions in 2020. Typically new markets have a larger reach than markets that are continuing in the program. They are able to enroll customers who are new to Produce Plus and more likely to serve one-time customers.

- 20017:
 - Fort Totten Farmers' Market opened a couple of blocks from the zip code in Ward 5
 - A Market Champion focused on outreach to Ward 5 and was assigned to the new Market to support customer enrollment
- 20032:
 - Two new C.R.I.S.P Markets opened
- 20024:
 - A Market Champion was assigned to the Southwest area for the first time to support outreach and enrollment

A map of the zip codes included in Ward 5 (per [statisticatlas.com](https://www.statisticatlas.com)) and the location of the Fort Totten Farmers' Market near zip code 20017.



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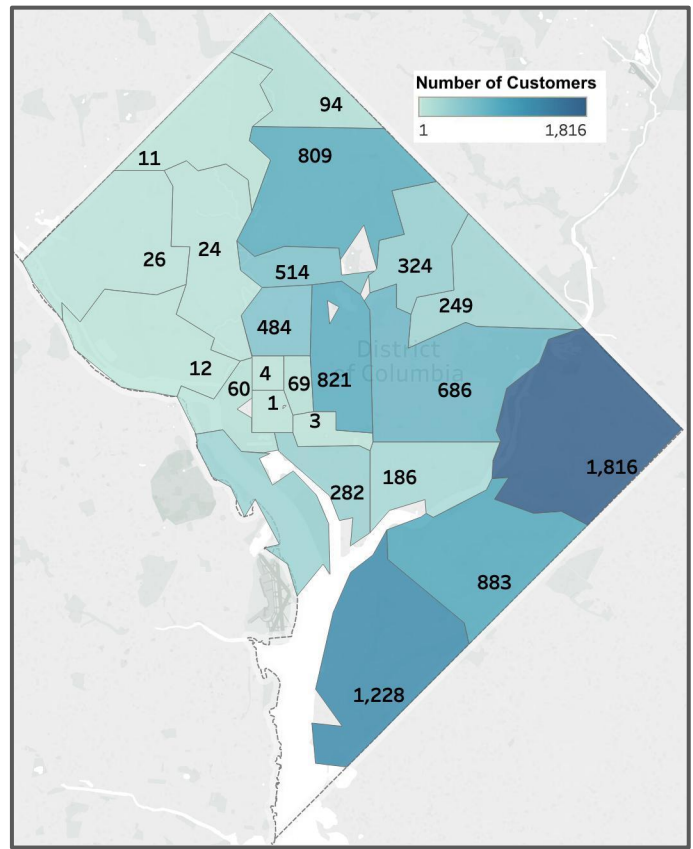
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Overcrowding at Markets

The largest decreases in registration for Produce Plus are correlated with areas of the city home to markets with generally high participation (Zip Codes 20001, 20002, 20010, and 20019) These markets consistently serve more customers than those in other areas*.

Although the average change in enrollment per zip code was -20, the average for these areas was -115. This seems to point to a limit to the number of customers that markets can serve before crowding and lines will dissuade them from enrolling in the program. Opportunities exist to make the program more accessible by mitigating overcrowding and lines.



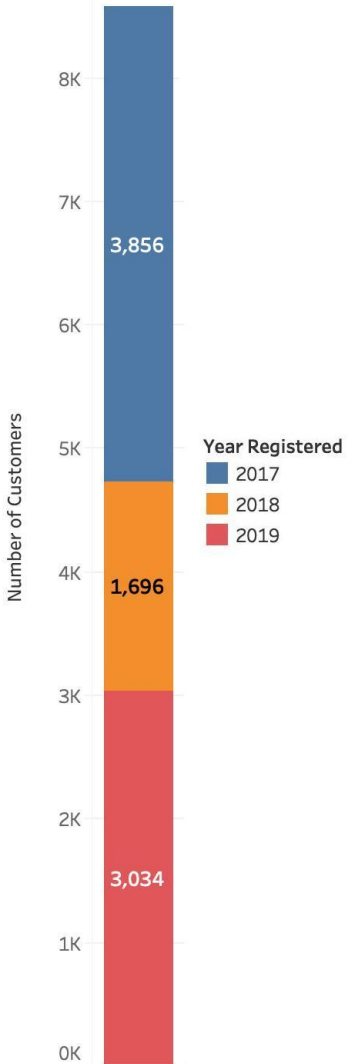
*There are 13 participating markets in Zip Codes 20001, 20002, 20010, and 20019 (two which operate on two separate days) out of 36 total participating markets. Despite being only 36.1% of participating locations, they distributed 49.4% of Produce Plus funds in 2019.



Participation of New vs Returning Customers

In 2019, 64.7% (5,552) of Produce Plus customers were returning after participating in a previous season (a 12.1% increase in returning customers compared to the 2018 season). Customers new to the program in 2019 (3,034) made an average of 5.7 (median of 2) visits to the market to get checks, while the average for returning customers was 12.9 visits (with a median of 9).

This data seems to suggest customers require a level of familiarity with the program to use it more regularly. Current program design may favor customers who have participated in the past versus new enrollees, and present an opportunity to increase usership among new participants



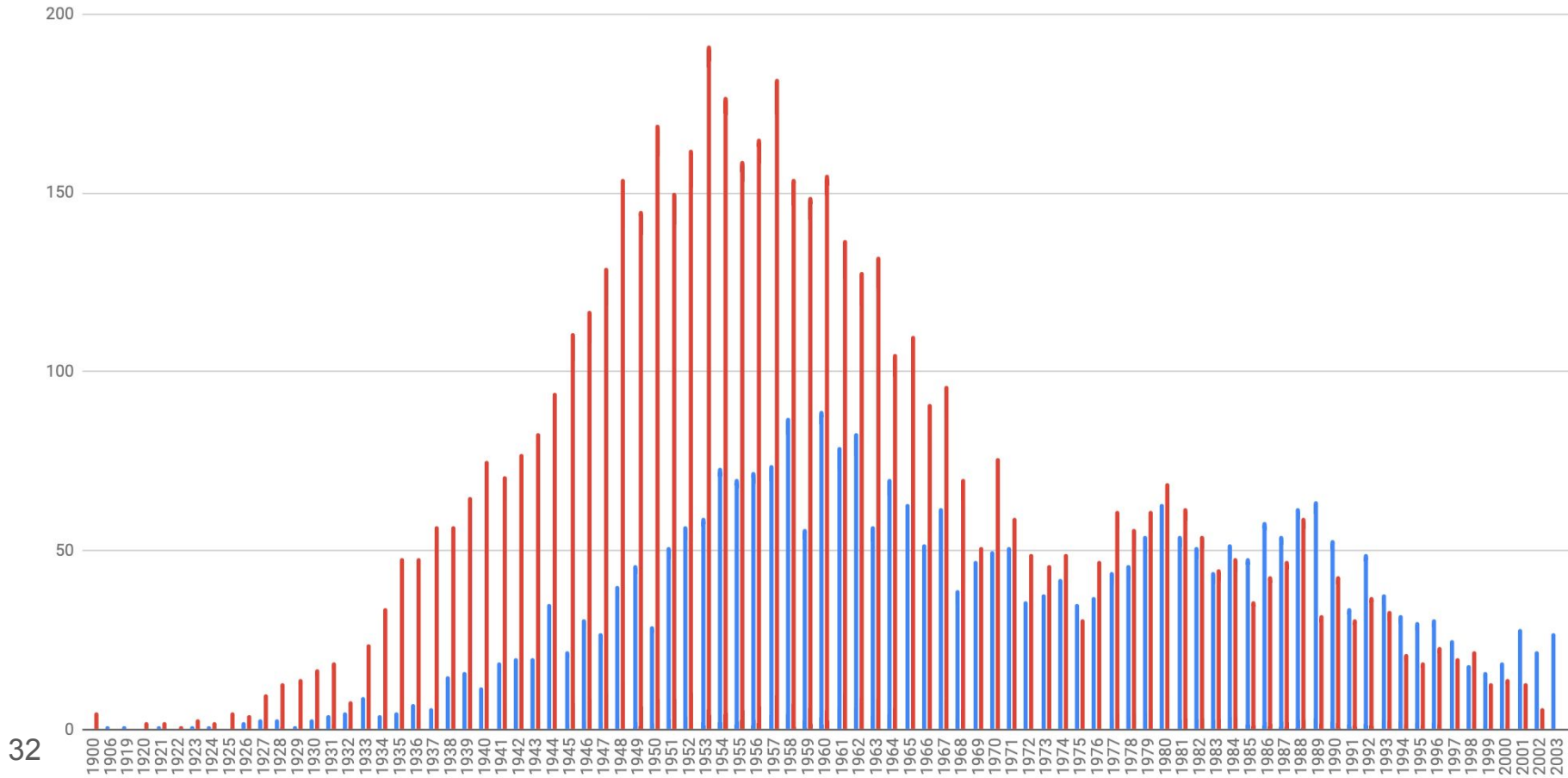
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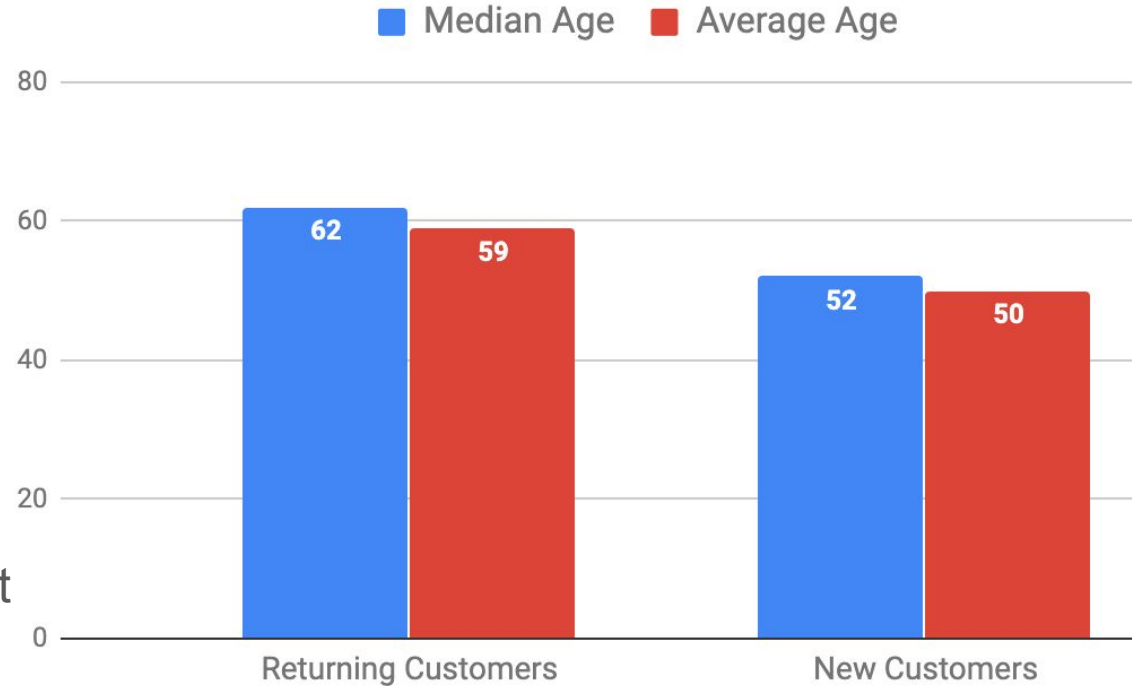
Year of Birth for New and Returning Produce Plus Customers

■ New Customers ■ Returning Customers

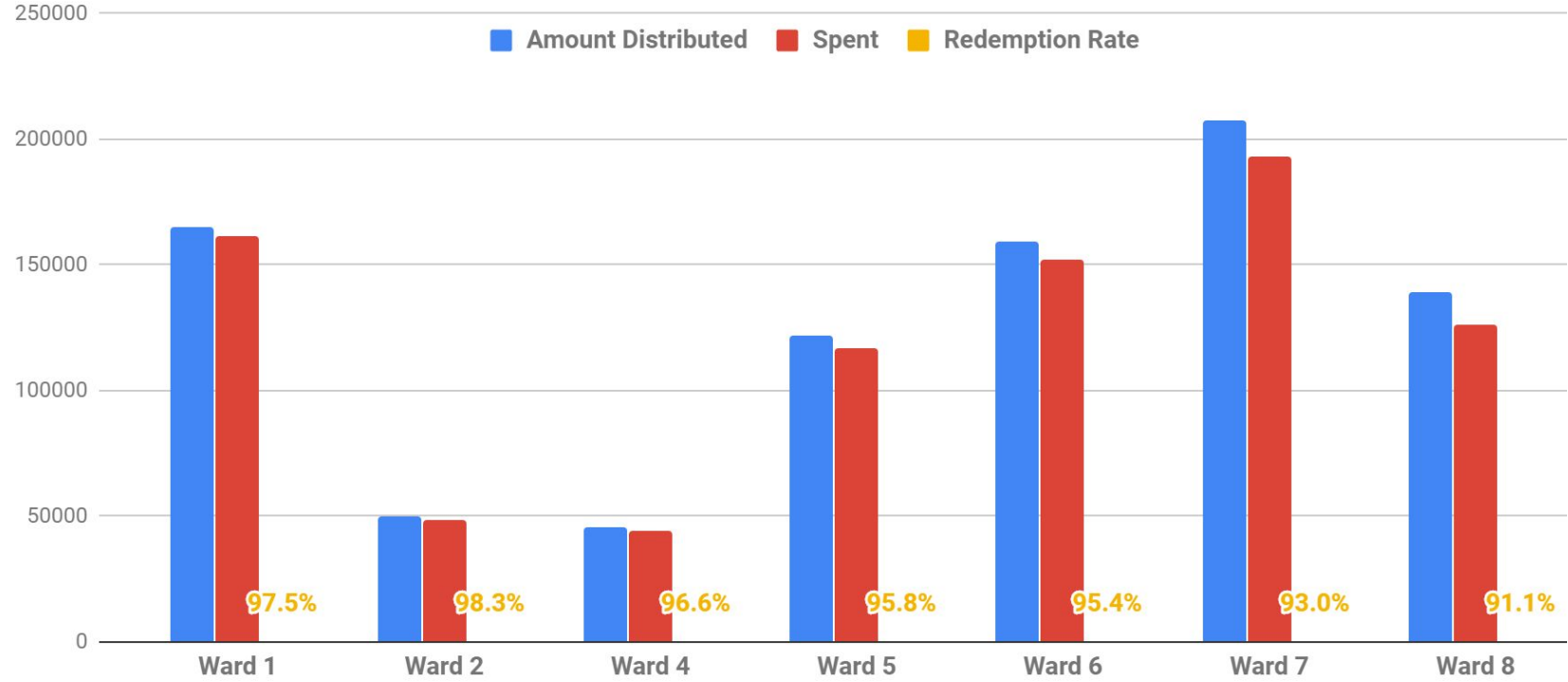


Outreach and Customer Retention

Although the program continues to attract senior community members, both the average and median ages of new customers were approximately 10 years younger than returning customers. Outreach and enrollment seem to be reaching the target demographics to diversify the Produce Plus customer base and it may be that the focus should shift to improving retention instead of strengthening outreach.



2019 Redemption Rates by Ward



Redemption rates for Produce Plus have remained consistent from 2018 to 2019. Only Ward 8 had a slight decrease in redemption which can be attributed to the high number of new market distribution sites in that Ward during 2019*.

**On average new markets in 2019 had a redemption rate of 89.91% while established markets had 94.6% redemption. In 2019 new markets tend to have a higher number of first time customers and first time customers have a 3% lower redemption rate during the season than customers who have previously participated in Produce Plus.*



Conclusions and Recommendations



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1. Produce Plus reaches customers with high rates of food insecurity (with 72.9% being food insecure per the Hunger Vital Sign in 2019) and increasingly becomes a regular resource for them year after year (demonstrated by the continuing increase in both average visits per customer from 4 visits in 2017 to 6 visits in 2019).
2. Additional support is needed in order to retain new customers and get them to use the program at the same rate as more long-term participants, including planning retention strategies in addition to outreach and making the program more accessible for diverse demographics.
3. The current program structure relies significantly on volunteer labor and has seen long wait times for participants. Future program planning should focus on leveraging technology to implement the program and strategies to utilize volunteers efficiently while mitigating long wait times for customers



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