



**FVRx TC:
A Produce Prescription Program from Healthy Food For All
Cornell Cooperative Extension - Tompkins County**

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Summary

FVRx TC is an innovative disease prevention and management strategy that will change the landscape of nutrition and wellness in Tompkins County. By empowering healthcare practitioners to prescribe fresh fruits and vegetables as a form of prevention-oriented medicine, FVRx TC represents the beginning of a significant transformation. This strategy will change the culture of the health care system by creating a model for the intersection of local agriculture, nutrition, and healthcare, and by bringing nutrition incentives into the healthcare space and food to the center of promoting health.

FVRx TC will result in immediate and long-lasting positive impacts on the health and quality of life of participants in 2019, while providing an expandable model to improve the health of thousands of low-income community members.

A Collaborative Pilot Project

FVRx TC combines the medical advice of health care providers (Dr Donna Sandidge at Cayuga Center for Healthy Living and Dr Reilly Coch at Cayuga Medical Associates), hands-on nutrition education from CCE Tompkins staff, access to fresh fruits and vegetables from the local farms working with Healthy Food For All, and project evaluation support from Cornell's Master of Public Health Program.

In 2018, HFFA, CCHL and the MPH Program at Cornell University started a pilot with a cohort of eight low-income community members diagnosed with diabetes. From June 2018 through the beginning of March 2019, participants received weekly CSA shares of

fresh produce, and had frequent appointments with practitioners at CCHL to monitor health outcomes.

In 2019, healthcare providers at CCHL and Dr Coch's office at Cayuga Medical Associates will prescribe CSA shares of fresh produce to 50 low-income (Medicaid eligible) patients with diabetes or medical obesity. These health care providers will provide integrated medical services and counseling, set goals and monitor health outcomes before and after the project.

Healthy Food For All staff at CCE Tompkins will enroll patients in FVRx and arrange for participants to receive produce on a weekly basis from a local farm from June through November. Participants will have the option to choose either a pre-packed box of produce, or to go to the farm or a convenient farm-stand location to fill their own bag with enough produce for all household members. Nutrition education and culinary resources will be provided to support participants and their families in learning how to prepare healthy meals.

Cornell's Master of Public Health Program will provide research and evaluation support to quantify the impact of FVRx TC on health and demonstrate the value of this nutrition-based preventative medicine with the goal of presenting a persuasive cost-benefit analysis that will motivate insurance companies and employers to offer FVRx as a benefit.

Patient Outcomes

Based on results from our pilot in 2018, we anticipate positive change in perceived health (measured with validated tools), as well as change in BMI, fruit and vegetable consumption and household food security at a rate equal to or higher than national reports from similar programs.

Nationally in 2018¹:

- 69% increased their fruit & vegetable consumption
- 55% decreased their BMI
- 45% of patient households reported an increase in food security

¹ National statistics provided by Wholesome Wave

People receiving a CSA share through Healthy Food For All in 2018:

- 92% reported a significant improvement in household food security
- 73% increased their consumption of produce

FVRx TC patients in 2018:

- 87% decreased their BMI
- 100% lowered their blood pressure

"FVRx TC is breaking ground as an innovative disease prevention and management strategy. In less than six months, participants have lost weight, lowered their blood pressure, and started feeling healthier by adding more fruits and vegetables in their diet." – Donna Sandidge, MD Medical Director of Cayuga Center for Healthy Living.

In 2019, we will collect the following data:

Routinely collected health metrics	Supplemental metrics for the FVRx Pilot Program
Weight	Change in perceived health, measured by Patient Health Questionnaire-9 (PHQ-9)
Body Mass Index (BMI)	Participation in education sessions, through attendance records provided by Healthy Food For All
Blood pressure	Change in consumption of fruits and vegetables, measured in the intake and feedback forms (Appendix 2, Appendix 3)
A1C*	Change in household food security, measured in the intake and feedback forms (Appendix 2, Appendix 3)
	Weekly produce estimates from participating farms

*from established patients type 2 diabetes, as already collected at a health care provider

Our Innovative Technology Driven Solution Sets Us Apart

While FVRx TC looked to other pilot programs for its initial structure and metrics, our team's approach has expanded in significant ways. We continue to improve our technology driven model to provide the means to administer a growing program.

Our systems:

- Allow invoicing for specific patient prescriptions by medical payees, rather than relying permanently on a general program funding model
- Allow electronic refills of patient accounts upon completion with or without co-pays

- Ensure patient dignity and ease by using anonymous accounts, matching them with a specific farmer, and allowing them to pick up produce without the stigma associated with coupons or other identifiers
- Track produce consumption by providing produce order dates and selections associated with each patient at each particular farm
- Incentivize participation of local farmers by providing payment up front and reallocating unused funds, rather than requiring farmers to seek reimbursement using a low-participation coupon plan

These capabilities and the flexibility to expand further into applications for medical practitioners, farmers, and patients, provide a growth model for effective and efficient administration.

National Momentum

Successful examples of similar prescription produce programs are currently operating in 10 states throughout the United States (including one operating nearby in Broome County, NY by FaHN).

Wholesome Wave is a national organization promoting local and regional nutrition incentive programs through networking, resources, and consulting support. FVRx TC is a member of its National Nutrition Incentive Network (NNIN) and will benefit from this association and contribute towards national expansion through knowledge sharing.

The 2018 Farm Bill established a national Produce Prescription Program (PPP) under the Gus Schumacher Nutrition Incentive Program, which replaces the Food Insecurity Nutrition Incentive Program (FINI). Up to \$4.5 million will be appropriated in 2019, with increasing amounts each year thereafter, to fund pilot projects for nonprofit organizations or State/local agencies to partner with healthcare providers to (i) provide fresh fruits and vegetables to low-income individuals suffering from or at risk of developing diet-related health conditions, and (ii) evaluate the impact of these types of projects on dietary health, food security, and health care use and costs. Our FVRx project is designed to meet these criteria.

Future Expansion

We are currently seeking the following community partnerships:

- Medical providers that want the option to serve their patients prescription produce and will participate in data collection protocols
- Farmers that want to adapt their CSA model to accommodate patient tracking and prescription payment systems and that provide organically grown, diverse produce of high quality and convenience
- Social service professionals and community leaders that can act as advisors and promoters of our efforts here in Tompkins County

We will continue to seek monetary support for our program through:

- Community foundations
- Individual donors
- Healthcare focused charitable foundations
- The USDA Gus Schumacher Nutrition Incentive Program

Requests for additional information should be directed to Baz Perry, FVRx Program Director and Operations Manager, Healthy Food For All, at ebs20@cornell.edu or 607-272-2292 ext 242.

