Started in 2015, the Georgia Food for Health program promotes affordable access to local fruits and vegetables and healthy eating in under-served communities through partnerships with healthcare providers, community organizations and fresh produce retailers. Through the program, healthcare providers give families innovative prescriptions that can be spent on fruits and vegetables at participating farmers markets. Current program sites include Good Samaritan Health Center in Atlanta, the Athens Farmers Market, and Augusta Locally Grown.

Wholesome Wave Georgia Executive Director Will Sellers kicked off the Data Party with a warm welcome and inspiring words.

- This event has been over 12 months in the making.
- Next year we hope to be in person!
- We hope today’s party will be “lit”! (shout out to Will’s teenage daughter who coached him on his opening remarks 😂)
- “Big does not equal great. And great does not equal big.” Jim Collins, author
- We could not do this on our own. Thank you to our neighbors for joining us in this collective effort!

Next, GF4H Program Manager Sarah Moore shared key program highlights.

- 7 years running—the program continued and was even strengthened through the pandemic
- 1,176 participants
- 2,537 people reached (participants and their families)
- $298,605 redeemed in produce prescriptions.
  Yes, that’s close to three hundred thousand dollars!

To learn more about the GF4H program, please visit our website here.
Reports from Site Leaders

Site leaders Monica Bledsoe (Athens), Loren Ferguson (Atlanta), and Sunny Hudkins (Augusta) gave updates from each program.

**ATHENS FARMERS MARKET**

- **Participants**
  - Total Household Members: 320*
  - 116 Participants
  - Completion rate: 78%

- **Participants Over Time**
  - September 2017 - August 2021

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Participants Over Time</th>
<th>Members</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2017</td>
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<td>2021</td>
<td>53</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

*Missing data from 2017; this is likely around 365.

- **Total Prescription Redemptions**: $60,502
- **Average amount per completed participant**: $672
- **Average amount per participant**: $522

- Renewed Spanish speaking cohort in 2021
- Adaptations for COVID-19 led to high participation rate throughout the pandemic
- Close relationships with program staff and participants translates to high satisfaction and graduation rates

“It taught me so much about picking healthier options. Local vegetables are better than Kroger! Great recipes! I am in love with this program. Very kind people.” *Program Participant*

**Good Samaritan Health Center**

- **Participants**
  - Total Household Members: 486*
  - 266 Participants
  - Completion rate: 49%

- **Participants Over Time**
  - September 2016 - August 2021

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Participants Over Time</th>
<th>Members</th>
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<tbody>
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<td>2021</td>
<td>37</td>
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</table>

*Missing data from 2017; this is likely around 610.

- **Total Prescription Redemptions**: $15,273
- **Average amount per completed participant**: $117
- **Average amount per participant**: $57

- Participants get increased access to healthcare via monthly clinician visits
- A dedicated full-time staff member is needed to manage the program
- This program is serving highest needs participants, and participants are highly engaged

“I enjoyed watching the cook prepare food and the camaraderie among other people. I enjoyed the teacher (awesome). It gave me a new outlook on my health and food prep. I’m off my blood pressure med!!!” *Program Participant*

**Augusta Locally Grown**

- **Participants**
  - Total Household Members: 686*
  - 235 Participants
  - Completion rate: 62%

- **Participants Over Time**
  - September 2015 - August 2021

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Participants Over Time</th>
<th>Members</th>
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<tbody>
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<td>2021</td>
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*Missing data from 2015 and 2017; this is likely around 900.

- **Total Prescription Redemptions**: $111,124
- **Average amount per completed participant**: $761
- **Average amount per participant**: $473

- Committed, dedicated leadership has ensured program sustainability since 2015
- Program has had a mental health and wellness focus since 2020
- Tight knit community supports close relationships between participants, farmers and health clinic staff

“I never expected the farmers market or the (GF4H) program to expand to what it is now. I love this program. We now need more chairs at the market for vendors, participants, and people in general. The participants like to hang out at the market. It has become a social experience.” *Vegetable Park Farmers Market Staff*
Participant Panel

Our participant panel, moderated by program graduate Johnnie Thomas, provided attendees with an in-depth look into what six participants experienced during and after the program. Here's what we heard:

“This program is about much more than just food.”

"Whatever I would get, I would prepare and share not only with my grandkids but with my mom. And she would remind me, “Are you going to the market today?” She would remind me just in case I might forget."

"That sense of community was pivotally important to my success, to know that I didn’t have to fall back on comfort food to relieve the stress. I had some other strategies, I had other tools in my toolkit, I had a community I could talk to when I wanted to grab whatever treat I wanted and make a healthier choice instead. Having that community of people with some of the same struggles reminded me of all the better choices I can make, encouraged me to get back on the path. It's what kept me connected."

Program Evaluation

Program evaluators then shared program outcome numbers.

GF4H Reach 2015-2021

TOTAL ENROLLED
1,176 people

HOUSEHOLD MEMBERS
2,537

TOTAL COMPLETED
819 people

Total $ of Produce
Prescriptions Redeemed
Per Year (2015-2021)

TOTAL = $298,605
Healthy Gains Beyond Food: Georgia Food for Health goes beyond just eating healthy—stigma around mental health is being addressed through this program. Peer support is built in.

Reaching Goals: Georgia Food for Health program goals are being achieved!

Positive Escape: The program provided, and is still providing, a much-needed distraction/escape/positive place for participants to show up to during the stressful time of the pandemic, and the difficult things they are facing in their lives.

Connecting Participants: The social connections participants gain through the program provided accountability, increased likelihood of individual success, and reduced isolation.

Engaging With Growers: Participants are eager to spend more time on the farms and get to know the farmers.

Some Barriers Persist: There are a few big barriers to maintaining changes after the program ends: affordability of fresh fruits and vegetables, access to the farm/farmers/fresh food, and the need for year-round programming.

Ongoing Successes: Some of these changes can be maintained after the program ends.

Lifestyle Changes: This program creates lifestyle changes that have an impact on many areas of participants’ lives, including increased health knowledge, behavior changes, confidence to maintain changes, and improved physical & mental health.

Themes from 2021 Focus Groups

In the fall of 2021, we held three focus groups with program participants for the first time. Here are the themes that emerged from those conversations:

Healthy Gains Beyond Food: Georgia Food for Health goes beyond just eating healthy—stigma around mental health is being addressed through this program. Peer support is built in.
Ideas and Takeaways From Mini Parties!

Our Mini Parties were small group discussions held in breakout rooms on varying topics. Each group discussed their topic, brainstormed ideas, and shared “party gossip” (key points) back with the full group.

“Front Porch” Group  
**Topic: Participant Engagement and Leadership**
- Have an alumni group come that could serve as mentors for new participants
- Develop written collateral and include pictures to help address language barriers
- Great facilitation by Ms. Johnnie, who demonstrated participant engagement at its finest

“In The Garden” Group  
**Topic: Growing the Georgia Food for Health Program**
- Develop flyers for the program to build connection to schools, churches, and other organizations
- Discussed how to remove barriers to growth
- Looked at growth from different angles like expansion through recruitment, offering year-round programing to increase the time participants are involved in the program, and look at different ways to get the community involved

“Kitchen” Group  
**Topic: Policy, Advocacy and Evaluation**
- Discussed the need for raising awareness at a state level
- Appreciated the different ways we are sharing findings, not just quantitative
- Suggested sending politicians gift baskets as a small sampling of what Georgia Food for Less does
- Important to leverage the mental health benefits for support
- Find ways to work towards billing Medicaid for produce prescriptions

“Back Patio” Group  
**Topic: Year-Round Programming**
- Benefits of year-round programing
- Consistent food access allows for folks to implement long-term change
- Community and mental health are important and having this program in the winter months would be helpful
- It would provide long-term benefits for farmers
- Introducing people to fruits when they’re in season

“Balcony” Group  
**Topic: Total Wellness / Mental Health**
- Some participants shared that they experience anxiety, depression, or other mental health needs
- Participating in the program gave participants something to look forward to, contributing to their improved mental health
- The farmer’s market environment was warm and inviting and the people were friendly. Many felt a sense of peace going there, which improved their mental health
- Having a destination to go to gave them something to look forward to
- Discussed the importance of more awareness and education around mental health in the program
- Noted that there are not a lot of men in the program and men also struggle with mental health
- The program should also reach out to seniors, especially during the pandemic
Our Plan Going Forward

As a result of the Data Party, Wholesome Wave Georgia and our GF4H partners are taking the following actions:

• The Data Party Planning Committee has been meeting biweekly since January in preparation for the 2022 Data Party. The committee includes a graduate of the program, staff from each GF4H site partners, WWG staff, and the evaluation team.
• During our debrief, the committee reflected on their strengthened relationships as a result of the planning meetings, and decided to morph the group into a standing GF4H Advisory Committee (GAC).
• One of the first jobs of the GAC will be to review community input and suggestions from the Data Party. Stay tuned!

Find the full recording of the Data Party here (Passcode: xfe2AKq#).

The Georgia Food for Health Data Party Planning Committee

Will Sellers, WWG Executive Director
Elizabeth Jump, WWG Board Member
Sarah Moore, WWG Georgia Food for Health Program Manager
Mekenzie Gear, Program Coordinator
Johnnie Thomas, CHOA & Georgia Food for Health Program Graduate
Loren Ferguson, Good Samaritan Health Center
Monica Bledsoe, Athens Farmers Market
Sunny Hudkins, Augusta Locally Grown
Ama Atiedu, Georgia Food for Health evaluator
Maddy Frey, Georgia Food for Health evaluator