

# Odawa Indian Tribe Brings Healthy Foods to Rural Michigan

Cathy Edgerly

## At A Glance

As of September 2015, 713 members of the Little Traverse Bay Bands of Odawa Indians (LTBB) had access to affordable, healthy foods at a new farmers' market in Petoskey, Michigan. Some LTBB members in this area live up to 10 miles away from a grocery store. Lack of access to affordable, healthy foods may make it harder to have a diet that protects against serious chronic conditions such as type 2 diabetes, obesity, and heart disease. With support from the Inter-Tribal Council of Michigan, LTBB members can now shop for healthy produce close to home.

## Public Health Challenge

The need to increase access to healthy foods such as fruits and vegetables is particularly great in tribal communities. In Michigan, nearly 62% of American Indian/Alaska Native adults have obesity or are overweight. Obesity can increase risks for heart disease, type 2 diabetes, and some cancers (e.g., breast, colon, kidney), according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). A healthy diet, along with regular physical activity, can help lower risks for developing obesity. One study found that only 24% of men and 33% of women in the American Indian population ate five or more servings a day of fruits and vegetables. In addition, many American Indian communities are in food deserts—low-income areas with limited access to grocery stores. This lack of access to healthier foods makes it harder for tribal communities to have a healthy diet.



## Find Out More

To learn more about the LTBB farmers' market, visit

<http://www.ltbbodawa-nsn.gov/>

or LTBB's Facebook page,

<https://www.facebook.com/LTBBODAWA/>.

This project is supported by the CDC's Racial and Ethnic Approaches to Community Health cooperative agreement.

## Approach

To improve access to fresh, affordable produce, LTBB teamed up with Inter-Tribal Council of Michigan to open a farmers' market in Petoskey, Michigan. The two groups promoted the market through the tribe's monthly newsletter, website, electronic mailing list, and other social media outlets. They also handed out flyers in central community locations. The new farmers' market ran every Sunday for 16 weeks, making it easier for community members to shop and eat healthy where they live. Common items included tomatoes, squash, cucumbers, herbs, apples, cherries, potatoes, and chard.

## Results

In June 2015, the LTBB farmers' market opened its doors with three vendors. Following promotional efforts, the market continued to attract new vendors, which increased the variety of produce for sale. By September 2015, the market averaged seven vendors each week. A survey conducted at the market showed that 91% of customers thought that prices were good or excellent and about 30% of customers were repeat visitors. In addition, vendor fees and foods not sold at the market were donated to the LTBB Youth Building and Food Distribution Center, which provides food assistance to tribe members.

### Contact

**Cathy Edgerly**

Inter-Tribal Council of  
Michigan  
2956 Ashmun St

Sault Ste. Marie, CA  
49783

Phone: 906-632-6896

*I am proud to say that the success of our farmers' markets help to ensure healthy food options and the long-term health of our communities.*

- Billi Jo Head, LTBB REACH Coordinator

## What's Next

To ensure continued success, the Inter-Tribal Council of Michigan plans to help LTBB track the number of customers who visit the market, conduct a yearly customer survey, and collect information about vendor sales through a standardized reporting form. Results will be used to identify what kinds of healthy foods customers want and need. With support from the Youth Farm Stand project, a Michigan State University extension program, the market will also provide tribe members with classes on food safety and healthy meal preparation. To attract more customers and improve community engagement, promotional efforts will continue through traditional and social media outlets.