

# jipoc

2013

Jefferson Public Citizens



UNIVERSITY of VIRGINIA

# Letter from the Editor

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Dear Reader,

I'm delighted to introduce the fourth edition of the Jefferson Public Citizens (JPC) journal. The Jefferson Public Citizens (JPC) program was launched in 2009 at the University of Virginia to combine academics with public service and offer an undergraduate student research experience. Each fall JPC solicits research proposals from any discipline across all seven schools of the university. Select teams work for two years to refine their questions and methodologies, and embark on their inquiries under the tutelage of faculty mentors and graduate students. This journal, our fourth edition, is the culmination of the original research conducted by teams selected for funding in January 2012.

This year's cohort of 59 students and 8 graduate students explored research topics including energy efficiency, affordable housing, accessibility of local produce, a schoolyard garden initiative, middle school girl aggression, an evaluation of a music-based after-school program, and intimate partner violence among UVa students – all here in Charlottesville, Virginia.

Other research was international in scope. Students travelled to the Caribbean, India, Guatemala, and South Africa, affording them the opportunity to better understand the challenges of water filtration, efficient cooking stove technologies, community healthcare centers, self-employment of women, and GIS mapping for networking, while directly experiencing the unique attributes of these environments, geographies, economies, and cultures.

Our final article in the journal is from a project completed last spring. Due to a publication error, this article did not appear in last year's journal but we are happy to be able to include it in this 2013 edition. All of these articles demonstrate the passion, effort and commitment of our JPC students, graduate mentors, faculty advisors, and community partners. I hope that you will enjoy learning about their exciting and inspiring work.

To see personal testimonials of the JPC experience, please visit our website (<http://www.virginia.edu/jpc/>) and find links to short videos of our alumnus and faculty. We, and our students, are deeply grateful to our faculty and graduate student mentors, our review committee members, and the donors who make these exceptional opportunities possible.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Brian Cullaty". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

Brian Cullaty

Director, Jefferson Public Citizens Program

# Acknowledgements

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# **Now *That's* the Power of Produce: Using Children's Programming at Farmers Markets to Increase Exposure to Healthy Foods**

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Catherine Breimann, Carla Jones, Natalie Roper, and Erica Stratton

*Through a three-year Jefferson Public Citizens project, a team of undergraduate and graduate students created a multi-phase project around the Charlottesville City Market. In 2012, the team created the Power of Produce (POP) Club based off a program in Oregon City. The project's main goals were to initiate action-oriented research, to provide better access to healthy foods, and to expose children to fruits and vegetables in a variety of ways. Based on local success, the POP Club now seeks to create a national movement dedicated to empowering children to make healthy food choices through programming at farmers markets. The POP Club provides farmers and markets with the opportunity to build a lasting and unique relationship with future generations of local food supporters.*

## **Background**

In 2011, a Jefferson Public Citizens team conducted a survey at the Charlottesville City Market to determine the demographics of current market customers and their preferences. Through this work, the team discovered that some populations were not represented at the market because of economic, physical, and cultural barriers. For the 2012 phase of the project, the team focused its efforts on decreasing economic barriers through children's programming at the Charlottesville City Market.

Community-driven recommendations and trusted research led the team to focus their efforts on children. Researchers found that low-income focus group participants were heavily influenced by their children's food preferences because "it does not make sense to purchase food that children will not eat" (Bradbard et al, 1997). Children must be exposed at least 15 times to a new food before they learn to like it; a luxury that families with limited food budgets cannot afford (Satter 2012). These findings were confirmed by comments made by community members during the planning phase of this project.

To address this web of complex issues, the team explored ways that the Charlottesville City Market could be an outlet of healthy food choices and expose children to new fruits and vegetables. Through modeling children's programming adapted from the Oregon City Farmers market, the team strived to address all of these goals while decreasing economic barriers to the Charlottesville City Market.

## Approach

Over the last three years the team has relied on collaborative problem solving. Through their partnership with the Charlottesville City Market and its surrounding community, the team conducted community meetings, engaged in conversations with stakeholders, and led listening sessions. These techniques helped pinpoint barriers to access and identify best next steps.

### *Determining Guiding Principles*

The team organized a brainstorming session with community members dedicated to serving the low-income communities of Charlottesville. Several groups were represented including the Jefferson Area Board of Aging (JABA), Monticello Area Community Action Agency (MACAA), Vinegar Hill Canning Cooperative, Farmers Market Coalition (FMC), Market Central, and the Healthy Food Coalition. The dialogue among these diverse stakeholders helped determine the project's three main goals: to initiate action-oriented research, to provide better access to healthy foods, and to expose children to fruits and vegetables in a variety of ways.

### *Discovering POP*

Once the team determined a focus, it began researching what successful programs were already being implemented at other farmers markets. One of the most thriving programs was the Power of Produce (POP) Club in Oregon City, Oregon. Market manager, Jackie Hammond, created the POP Club to provide participating children with \$2 in market currency<sup>1</sup> to spend on fresh produce each time they come to the farmers market. The program also offers activities and food sampling to encourage children to try new foods. The team contacted Hammond and began developing the idea of creating a POP Club in Charlottesville, Virginia. Hammond encouraged the team to evaluate the POP Club in Oregon City and quantify its success for future funders. The team piloted an evaluation tool and observed the POP Club in Oregon City. This evaluation confirmed how successful the program was for kids, parents, and farmers in Oregon.

Through surveying and interviewing, the team found that 72% of POP Club participants have tried a new fruit or vegetable through the POP Club program. These newfound favorite foods ranged from currants to gazpacho. Of participant parents, 70% reported that their child requests produce that he or she tried through the POP Club, confirming the influence of children on their parents' purchasing choices. All of the vendors interviewed said that they had seen sales increase 35% due to the POP

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1. Market currency refers to money that can only be used at a designated farmers market. The most common forms are paper coupons and wooden tokens.



Club. These results confirmed the role that the POP Club plays in connecting families, farmers, and markets. The team left Oregon City ready to initiate a POP Club pilot in Charlottesville.

### *Implementing POP Club Charlottesville*

When envisioning POP Club Charlottesville, the team was passionate about including nutrition activities in addition to providing participating children with market currency to spend on fresh produce. After meeting with dietitians, the team developed the Two-Bite Club to be a part of weekly POP Club activities. This program highlighted a fruit or vegetable each week and encouraged children to take two bites in order to receive a badge to show their membership in the Two-Bite Club. Each market day kids had the opportunity to add an additional ribbon to this badge for every new fruit or vegetable they tried. In addition to Two-Bite, each week offered an educational activity, such as gardening demonstrations, a bike powered smoothie blender, cooking demonstrations, and scavenger hunts. The children's participation in these activities was documented in a POP Passport developed by the team. The POP Passport included a pre- and post- survey, activities for the children, and charts to record their participation. The team partnered with different organizations to run these activities and was dedicated to making the POP Club a community event.



The team advertised the POP Club Kick Off event to organizations that they felt served the underrepresented populations at the market. The team worked to develop connections with the Boys and Girls Club, the Madison House Big Sibs program, Head Start Charlottesville, and City of Promise. Flyers distributed through these partner organizations encouraged children to come join the fun.

The POP Club Kick Off took place on September 15, 2012 and the pilot program ran for the four weeks following.

## **Outcomes**

As a pilot, the program showed great potential for an ongoing effort in the Charlottesville community, but due to its short duration, its immediate numerical impacts were limited.

### *Supporting the market and vendors*

POP Club programming brought attention to the Charlottesville City Market. The program was featured in newspaper articles and television interviews. The media campaign that the team launched to advertise the program reached wide-ranging market supporters through Facebook, email newsletters, flyers, and online event postings. Further, the marketing for the program also increased awareness in the community that the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) dollars are accepted at the market.<sup>2</sup>

The program brought 93 children and their accompanying friends and families to the market over the four-week pilot period. The team saw a 30% return rate over the duration of the pilot and a 7% increase in participation on average each week. As the excitement about the POP Club grew in the community, the program expanded each week with a 42% increase in attendance from the third to the fourth week of the pilot.

By issuing children \$2 in market currency, the POP Club provided vendors with increased business and new young customers. Similar to what the Oregon City evaluation showed, vendors were eager to support the program, offered children discount deals, and were proud to be a participating POP vendor. Based on these findings, the team is confident that if the program were to continue sales for farmers would increase.

### *Children's Nutrition Education and Making Healthy Food Choices*

One of the overarching goals of the project was to increase children's exposure to healthy foods. Through experiencing healthy foods in different ways, such as touching foods, observing their peers eating, and preparing the food themselves, 88% of the children that responded to the survey reported that they tried a new food and liked it. There was a 65% participation rate in the Two-Bite Club. Participants

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2. The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program was known as food stamps in previous years.



recorded in their passports purchasing foods featured in the Two-Bite Club, such as peppers, butternut squash, and kale.

#### *Increasing Access With Limited Success*

Despite the team's efforts to attract low-income populations, only a few participants came from the organizations that the team approached. The team found it difficult to establish legitimacy of the POP Club and its organizers in such a short period of time. In addition, the organizations were already overbooked and understaffed and the market's schedule was not aligned with their hours of operation.

However, the team found success bringing the POP Club to these organizations through a different approach. They piloted this idea at a public housing after-school program. The POP Club organized a lesson plan focused on root vegetables that included a Two-Bite Club and vegetable art. The participants in the after-school program were receptive to the activities and asked that the team return.

### **Discussion**

The POP Club and its evaluation in Charlottesville was a pilot to determine if the program could expand to locations other than Oregon City. Through the Charlottesville team member's experiences, limitations, and lessons learned, they better understand how this program could spark a national movement.



### *Limitations of Project*

There were a variety of factors that hindered the extent of the project's success. One of the largest limitations was that farmers markets are difficult places to collect data because of their unpredictable nature. Additionally, the market season ends in December and the team's project was not started until September. This limited the number of POP Club days and the amount of time the team had to develop and adequately market the program. All of these limitations combined resulted in a four week POP Club, which was too short to instill and evaluate behavioral change. Based on the Oregon City POP Club's longstanding success, the POP Club can result in positive behavioral change.

### *Definition of Success*

While the team's goal of increasing access to the market was minimally successful, there were participants from low-income populations and the team considers its efforts effective. This is one of the first efforts to increase economic access to the market and it is expected to be a long and ongoing process.

Many of the team's successes came from relationship building. Low-income populations that participated described they found out about the POP Club from direct communication rather than from a flyer. The most effective "marketing" technique was going to an after-school program and interacting with low-income children. This technique requires a significant commitment and given the limitations mentioned above, the team did not have the time to do this with all organizations.

### *Building a National POP Movement*

After honest conversations with the team's community partner, it became clear that the Charlottesville City Market lacked the capacity to continue such a resource-intensive program without outside support. While the POP Club did not continue in Charlottesville, Hammond receives many requests from markets across the country looking to create their own POP Clubs. These inquiries are demanding of her limited time. Hammond and the team concluded that the team's value was in creating a free, online resource hub for markets across the country. Currently, the team is developing this online resource hub and it should be available by Summer 2013. It will include templates for budgets, POP curriculum and materials, and evaluation tools. These tools will make it easier for other markets to start POP Clubs of their own. The website will allow the team to track the number of POP Clubs created and collect data on the movement's success and innovations. Imagine the impact that would result if there was a POP Club in every market across the country! Now, *that's* the Power of Produce.



## References

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## Biographies

**Catherine Breimann** is a Third Year student at the University of Virginia pursuing an interdisciplinary degree in political philosophy, policy, and law.

**Carla Jones** is a graduate of the Urban and Environmental Planning Masters Program. She is currently pursuing her Master of Public Health.

**Natalie Roper** is a fourth year American Politics major at the University of Virginia and is currently pursuing her Masters in Public Policy through the accelerated program at the Frank Batten School.

**Erica Stratton** is a Third Year student at the University of Virginia studying Urban and Environmental Planning and Environmental Science.

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