

CCE FMNP Educator Spotlight: Mo Tidball



The CCE **Farmers Market Nutrition Program (FMNP)** Outreach team has begun an ongoing series of educator spotlights aimed at recognizing educators and the amazing work they do, and sharing some of their practical advice to other educators. We are continuing the series with **Mo Tidball**.

Mo is an FMNP educator working with Cornell Cooperative Extension in Seneca County. See Mo's recommendations for creating a more welcoming table and how she is able to get her nutritional messages across to more consumers at markets.

Read the full interview with Mo below.

Can you tell me about your roles and positions within Cornell Cooperative Extension?

I'm the Nutrition Issue Leader at Seneca County Cornell Cooperative Extension (CCE). Also, I've been doing Farm-to-School programming (<https://agriculture.ny.gov/farming/farm-school>) for a good eight years, and that takes up a good amount of time, but it still is in the same vein of supporting local foods and eating locally for better health and health of the economy, which is very similar to the Farmers' Market Nutrition Program. I also work on the Wild Harvest Table program (<https://www.wildharvesttable.com/>), which is something that I started back when I first came to Seneca County CCE.

What is one of the more engaging topics or lessons among consumers, and why do you think that is?

One that is interesting is the Rethink Your Drink lesson with soda. When you have adults and children actually measure out the amount of teaspoons of sugar in their favorite soda and they're like, "Wow, I had no idea." Then you can give them a sample of some seltzer water with fresh watermelon and mint that is refreshing and lovely, and there's not that sugar in it. It works because it's concrete. You know, if you just say to people, "You have to eat less and exercise more," it's overwhelming, but if you say, "Hey, when you drink sugary beverages here's what's in them and this is why you should cut them out," it's more powerful.

Do you like to personally add anything to lessons or learning materials that may not already be included?

I would have to say that I don't necessarily use the Farmers Market Nutrition Program lessons verbatim. It's more about having some of the handouts, chatting with people, seeing where they're at and what materials and resources they need. So usually, I like to have a food sample of something that's in season at the moment, and then I talk about adding more fruits and vegetables to their meals. Also, chatting with people and

seeing where they're at and what information would be useful to them I think is more important personally than always sticking straight to a lesson plan that might not fit their immediate needs.

I'm curious, how do you attract more people to your table and how do you keep them engaged?

We try to have a nice display with our red tablecloth and lots of different recipes. I think at the farmers market, it's important to get out front a little bit and just start talking to people. Just to let them know we have lots of simple recipes, great information from Cornell Cooperative Extension, and free samples, and then their guard goes down because they know we're not trying to sell them something. They don't want to walk up there and feel awkward like they have to buy something. I think that's crucial because if you don't engage people and just let them walk by, they're just going to walk by you. You really do have to sort of call out to people.

Also, a lot of times we'll set up our table right next to the market manager, where the SNAP Ed tokens are handed out and the FMNP coupons are handed out, and we engage people that are using those, give them some recipes and say, "Hey, you can go get strawberries from that vendor over there, and there's lettuce at that vendor over there." That way we're helping those people stretch their food dollars in healthy ways, and can give them some samples and recipes that they can use.

What would you say is important for other educators to know about FMNP education, and what's some advice you might give to another educator or someone just starting out?

Definitely to create a welcoming table that people want to walk up to and chat with, and have some different recipes. Also to engage people. If you just sit in a chair behind your table while drinking your water, you might not talk to a soul all day. But if you're standing up and you are calling people

over, at that very same market, you might talk to 50 people. They're not going to come to you, you've got to kind of bring them to you.

What have you found to be the most challenging part about FMNP education and how do you work to address that?

You don't necessarily have a lot of time with people. So you want to kind of pick one or two strong messages that you want to make sure you're getting across that day. If it's adding more fruits and veggies to your meals, have a hand-out ready, maybe with the tip sheets for getting more fruits and veggies and maybe the other side will have a couple of recipes. Also, finding ways to gracefully cut off conversation is another important skill. So you've got to be able to bring them in and also be able to nicely nudge them out, if you need to.

A big thank you to Moira Tidball for her time and insights, and Cole Hempel for conducting the interview. Please note that the perspectives presented in these interviews do not necessarily reflect the positions of FMNP, Cornell University, and/or Cornell Cooperative Extension. To find more information about the Farmers' Market Nutrition Program and Cornell Cooperative Extension FMNP Outreach visit <https://www.human.cornell.edu/dns/fmnp>.