

# Berrien County's mobile market expands its offerings and reach

By DEBRA HAIGHT - HP Correspondent | Posted: Thursday, May 21, 2015 6:00 am

BERRIEN SPRINGS - There shouldn't be any "food deserts" in Berrien County this year thanks to Be Healthy Berrien's Mobile Farmers Market program, supporters say.

The mobile market van will soon be on the road, delivering fresh produce to sites in five area communities.

The organization's representatives met Tuesday at the Neighbor to Neighbor building in Berrien Springs to examine the delivery van, which has been christened "Michelle" by organizers.

They further toured the Andrews University gardens, which will provide the produce through summer and fall.

This is the second year for the mobile farmers market.

Mobile Market coordinator Ryan Wallace said the van this year will stop at three locations in Benton Harbor and locations in Berrien Springs, Buchanan, Eau Claire and Niles, starting the week of June 8.

A full schedule of where and when the van will be at the different locations will soon be posted on the [www.behealthyberrien.org](http://www.behealthyberrien.org) website. He said he added the Eau Claire location just recently.

"The community wanted it. They lost their only grocery store last year," he said.

He showed off Michelle, which is a converted FedEx van with a refrigeration unit. It has a sink for food preparation at each site. The sink unit has compartments for washing, rinsing and sanitizing food and then a fourth compartment for hand washing.

"We will pack up here (at Neighbor to Neighbor) or out at the gardens and warehouse on Shawnee and have a refrigeration unit to keep everything fresh," he said. "Then at the sites, we will plug into a generator when we can. People will also see a couple of pop-up tents at each location."

Wallace said the mobile farmers market will offer more than produce this year because the university's food service program will provide healthy baked goods for sale. Lakeland Health dietitian



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Baked goods that will be offered at the market.

Heather Rudnik will provide nutritional and healthy eating information every other week.

There's also an opportunity to get free-range eggs raised by an Andrews professor.

Bon Appetit food service manager Mark Daniels said he sees this new venture as an opportunity to get out in the community.

"We felt that this complements the produce that will be for sale, and we'll have baked goods that have a good shelf life and also breads that are sweet or savory and also healthy," he said.

People can expect the mobile market to be at each site for three to four hours each week. Rudnik said she will be on hand to provide both general nutritional information and quick demonstrations of recipes that use fresh produce every other week.

She will also be doing longer, hands-on demonstrations at one of the Benton Harbor market locations.

Nicki Britten of Be Healthy Berrien said she's excited to see the mobile food pantry expand this year after a good first season in 2014.

"This was an idea concocted in my brain four or five years ago," she said. "It took on a life of its own. It's always exciting when an idea comes to fruition. We're providing food to people who need it and helping them get high-quality food. We want to change people's eating and shopping habits."

In addition to providing the food for the mobile farmers market, the Andrews Student Gardens is starting its fifth year offering the Community-Supported Agriculture Program to the community. People can buy a season subscription and get produce, baked goods and eggs delivered on a weekly basis.

People can connect with the student gardens website at [www.augardens.com/csa-registration](http://www.augardens.com/csa-registration).

The student gardens program is teaming up with the Berrien County Health Department for another endeavor: Pioneering a produce-delivery service for Bridge Card holders in the Benton Harbor area.

That program is the result of a \$100,000 grant awarded by the Michigan Department of Community Health.

Bridge Card holders will be able to use their Double Up food bucks to pay for produce and receive twice the value they're charged for fresh fruit and vegetables.