

Farmers Market WIC and Food Stamp Incentive Programs for Southeastern Connecticut Vulnerable Families

Wholesome Wave Foundation Charitable Ventures of Westport, CT received \$63,444 to promote and implement EBT systems at three farmers markets and three farm stands in Connecticut. Funds were used to encourage the redemption of WIC and Senior benefit recipient coupons by purchasing six EBT terminals and developing EBT promotional materials.

Final Report

A. PROJECT SUMMARY

Although the Farmers Market Nutrition Program (FMNP), Senior Farmers Market Nutrition Program and Electronic Benefit Transfer (EBT) for the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) have paved the way for economically disadvantaged communities to access healthful food, many program participants still struggle with affording and locating fresh, locally grown produce. Wholesome Wave launched both the Double Value Coupon Program and the Bridgeport Farm Stand Project (which was named Park City Harvest) seeking to overcome the challenges farmers and consumers face in bringing local food to the underserved communities where it is most needed.

In order to ensure their economic viability, small-scale Connecticut farmers must expand beyond serving middle class and affluent communities and begin to market untapped and densely populated urban markets. However, in conversations with vendors participating in Wholesome Wave's Westport and Fairfield Farmers Markets in 2008, the farmers expressed an inability to commit to new markets, particularly in underserved communities where sales are modest and cannot offset the cost of farmers' exhausted resources of labor and transportation. Likewise, conversations with mid-size farmers revealed that they would also benefit from increased sales if additional outlets were established.

Wholesome Wave developed our Farmers Market Promotion Program project to promote our in-kind distribution of \$20,000.00 in incentive coupons. We directly applied these coupons to doubling the value of Food Stamp EBT, WIC and Senior Farmers Market Fruit and Vegetable benefits at farmers markets and farm stands in historically excluded communities in Southeastern Fairfield County, Connecticut.

B. PROJECT APPROACH

Linking farmers with community members is the first step in overcoming the challenges farmers, retail outlets and consumers face in making fresh, local food available to underserved communities where it is most needed. Wholesome Wave worked with farmers markets in Southeastern Fairfield County to enable them to accept SNAP through Electronic Benefit Transfer and Senior and WIC Farmers Market Nutrition Program checks at their markets.

In addition, we piloted a farm stand in three Bridgeport neighborhoods through a generous grant from the Connecticut Department of Agriculture's Viability Program, which provided staff time, materials and farm stand equipment. This program brought local farm-fresh food into areas with high SNAP usage and very limited access to fresh produce. Through working with the Bridgeport community in program planning, we identified a local vendor, who was contracted as the vendor to manage the Stratford Avenue Farm Stand in Bridgeport. Wholesome Wave purchased produce directly from 3 midsize farmers in Connecticut, and

worked with the vendor to sell the produce at the 3 farm stand locations. Surplus from sales was divided: half went back into programming to cover costs, and half was given directly to the vendor, who also received a weekly stipend.

The pilot Farm Stand program was also supported by a donor-advised fund at the Fairfield County Community Foundation through a grant that enabled our purchase of a refrigerated truck for the transport and delivery of farm fresh produce. The truck was used to gather the produce from the farms, transport it back to our farm stands and store the produce between farm stand days. In addition, this truck was used in our Norwalk Market Box program in 2009 to provide access to affordable fresh food to residents without transportation to our markets, while further increasing and diversifying our farmers' buying markets.

To further support farmers' markets and our farm stands, we launched the Double Value Coupon Program to increase the value of FMNP checks and SNAP at the participating locations. Customers shopping with WIC/Senior FMNP and SNAP redeemed their FMNP or SNAP for double their value in tokens. Tokens were then used towards the purchase of fruits and vegetables at the same location. Our Double Value Coupon Program, coupled with the U.S. Department of Agriculture's FMNP and SNAP, provided food assistance recipients with increased access and resources for farm-fresh produce in areas that previously lacked affordable access to such products.

Outreach and program promotion to the underserved populations was a critical piece to the success of the Double Value Coupon Programs. A graphic designer was contracted to develop logos, posters and fliers for distribution on site and through outreach sites such as: WIC offices, senior and low-income housing, soup kitchens, food pantries, local stores and bodegas, health centers, houses of worship, the YMCA, and community centers. Spanish and English posters and fliers were distributed, and Portuguese versions of the flyers were developed and used in support of the Danbury Farmers Market.

In support of our Park City Harvest farm stand, the Connecticut Council of Churches of Greater Bridgeport's Hunger Outreach Committee (comprised of recipients of Federal Emergency Management Agency funds, including soup kitchens, food pantries, and senior food programs) assisted in distributing program information, and provided feedback and suggestions regarding reaching target populations. Fliers, both in Spanish and in English, were included in Bridgeport Housing Authority invoices and a bilingual announcement of the program appeared on the School Food service menus for May and June. A grand opening event for the farm stand at the Bridgeport Department of Health and Social Services was a very successful outreach tool. Activities included speeches from prominent Bridgeport supporters including Mayor Bill Finch, the director of Health and Human Services, city council members and state legislators; a professional chef providing a cooking demonstration and tastings; a nutritionist from University of Connecticut providing SNAP education; and a visit by the Housatonic Community College. Media coverage included Channel 12 Connecticut News.

C. GOALS AND OUTCOMES ACHIEVED

Wholesome Wave achieved great progress in accomplishing the goals set out in the project proposal. Through working with community groups, city and state agencies, farmers, farmers markets and farm stands in Connecticut, we have been able to expand and increase affordable access to fresh food throughout diverse communities in Fairfield County.

Through this project, the following farmers markets and farm stands were enabled with EBT wireless terminals in the 2009 season (addresses are provided for those managed by Wholesome Wave):

- Westport Farmers Market, an independent market managed through support from the Westport Farmers Market vendors in 2010. (The town of Westport will support management of the market in 2011.)
- Danbury Farmers Market, managed by Danbury CityCenter
- Downtown Bridgeport Farmers Market at Baldwin Plaza, managed by the Bridgeport Office of Planning and Economic Development
- Stratford Avenue Farm Stand, Bridgeport, managed privately
- Park City Harvest Farm Stand, managed by Wholesome Wave, at 3 locations in Bridgeport: the South End at 134 Columbia Street, Saint Vincent’s Hospital (2800 Main Street), and the Bridgeport Department of Health and Social Services (752 East Main Street)
- Norwalk Market Box Program, managed by Wholesome Wave at the Norwalk Community Health Center (121 Water Street, Norwalk)

Wholesome Wave’s Double Value Coupon Program (DVCP) was implemented at all of the above farmers markets and farm stands, except for the Stratford Avenue Farm Stand.

We developed benefit redemption accounting and Double Value Coupon Program redemption accounting, which we utilized throughout the 2008 and 2009 seasons. In order to implement this accounting, we developed site-specific log sheets, through which the distribution of the DVCP and the redemption of SNAP, WIC FMNP, Senior FMNP, and DVCP was tracked each market or farm stand day.

We developed and implemented data collection procedures throughout the 2008 and 2009 seasons at each participating location, determining the amount of benefits redeemed at the market or farm stand and the amount of incentive funds distributed and redeemed at each location. The Double Value Coupon Program leveraged the following Federal benefits in 2008 and 2009 at the participating farmers markets and farm stands:

2008 Results:

	SNAP REDEEMED (\$)	WIC FMNP REDEEMED (\$)	SENIOR FMNP REDEEMED (\$)	Incentive (DVCP) Distributed
WESTPORT AND FAIRFIELD FARMERS MARKET	95.00	846.00	255.00	1,196.00
NORWALK MARKET BOX PROGRAM	154.00	864.00	0.00	3,317.00*
TOTAL:	249.00	1,710.00	255.00	4,513.00

*DVCP funds were also used to match cash purchases made by low-income customers that had been pre-screened by Norwalk Community Health Center.

Total Federal Benefits spent in 2008: \$4,513.

Total Double Value Coupon Funds distributed in 2008: \$4,513.

2009 Results:

	SNAP REDEEMED (\$)	WIC FMNP REDEEMED (\$)	SENIOR FMNP REDEEMED (\$)	Incentive (DVCP) Distributed
DOWNTOWN BRIDGEPORT FARMERS MARKET	316.00	1,767.00	1,236.00	3,319.00
DANBURY FARMERS MARKET	739.00	6,561.00	2,919.00	6,907.00
WESTPORT FARMERS MARKET	188.00	375.00	288.00	851.00
PARK CITY HARVEST FARM STANDS	1,181.00	22,152.00	2,415.00	14,064.00
NORWALK MARKET BOX PROGRAM	144.00	525.00	0.00	669.00
TOTAL:	2,568.00	31,380.00	6,858.00	25,810.00

Total Federal Benefits spent in 2009: \$40,806.

Total Double Value Coupon Funds distributed in 2009: \$25,810.

Partly due to the support received through the USDA Farmers Market Promotion Program, in 2009 Wholesome Wave's three Park City Harvest farm stands sold over \$33,000 in fresh, locally grown fruits and vegetables to Bridgeport community members in areas with few supermarkets and limited access to fresh produce. Since the initial planning of the farm stands, Wholesome Wave hosted regular meetings with community members and representatives from city and state agencies, nonprofit organizations, community-based organizations and for-profit entities. This group, the Healthy Bridgeport Alliance, actively participated in facilitating and steering farm stand development, and in the outreach and planning of the Grand Opening event. Customers receiving federal benefits used SNAP, FMNP and cash to purchase over \$33,000 in produce throughout the season, sourced from three mid-size Connecticut farms: Ceccarelli Farm, Borelli Farm and Blue Hill Farms. This financial support to our local farmers was a great addition to their sales throughout the season.

Wholesome Wave also collaborated with the University of Connecticut (UCONN) Extension SNAP educators and local chefs in order to implement Healthy Cooking demonstrations. UCONN Extension SNAP educators implemented more than 5 healthy cooking and healthy eating demonstrations throughout the season, through which participants were given information on preparing healthy food. Chef Peter Gorman, of the Unquowa School in Fairfield, also implemented a cooking demonstration, at which customers shopping at the farm stand participated in preparing a meal based on produce purchased from the farm stand that day. In addition, recipes were distributed through the market box program weekly during the 2008 season, using ingredients specific to that day's offerings. Cooking demonstrations and tastings, combined with distribution of recipes, and nutrition/food education materials, provided the community with the resources to prepare healthy meals.

Wholesome Wave ran the Norwalk Market Box Program, in addition to the farmers markets and farm stands, throughout the 2008 and 2009 seasons. Once a week, Wholesome Wave used our refrigerated truck to bring boxes of farm-fresh produce purchased wholesale from farmers market vendors to the Norwalk Community Health Center, located in the underserved community of South Norwalk. In 2008, produce for this program was sourced from the Westport Farmers Market, while in 2009, we sourced produce from farmers participating in the Downtown Bridgeport Farmers Market and the Park City Harvest Farm Stands. This program enabled Wholesome Wave to provide access to affordable fresh food to residents without transportation to our markets, while further increasing and diversifying our farmers' buying markets. The market boxes of produce, retailed for \$25, were further discounted to an affordable \$6 per box for recipients of FMNP checks and EBT Food Stamps. During the 2008 program, discounted boxes were also offered to low-income cash-paying customers that had been previously screened by the Health Center. Approximately half of our sales went to WIC FMNP customers.

In 2008, Wholesome Wave brought more than \$5,000 in revenue to our farmers through the purchase of produce for 291 Market Boxes from July 31st to October 23rd. We estimated that about 100 families were served through this program, and by October we had reached our goal of selling 30 boxes weekly. Any unsold boxes were donated to South Norwalk Shelter.

In the 2009 season, we purchased produce from farmers for 155 boxes from September 9th to October 29th. We estimate that more than 55 families were served through the program, and we sold about 13 boxes weekly. About 45 boxes were donated to the South Norwalk Shelter. Please see section F for more information on the variation of this program's results from 2008 to 2009.

Wholesome Wave worked with Project for Public Spaces (PPS) this year to design and publish a free handbook, available online and in print, for market managers interested in or already implementing SNAP acceptance programs at their farmers markets. The handbook walks the market manager through the requisite steps for setting up SNAP at farmers markets and making it successful – from assessing the market and customer, to finding funding, promoting SNAP use, creating partnerships, adopting incentive programs and other useful resources. The handbook also includes case studies of creative and successful SNAP programs implemented in farmers markets across the country, representing diverse locations and experiences.

D. BENEFICIARIES

Food stamp use nationwide is at an all-time high, helping to feed one in eight Americans and one in four children, according to the U.S. Department of Agriculture and the Census Bureau. In order to ensure their economic viability, small-scale Connecticut farmers must expand beyond serving middle class and affluent communities into untapped and densely populated urban markets. However, in conversations with vendors participating in Wholesome Wave's Westport and Fairfield Farmers Markets in 2008, farmers expressed an inability to commit to new markets, particularly in underserved communities where sales are modest and cannot offset

the cost of farmers' exhausted resources of labor and transportation. Likewise, conversations with mid-size farmers revealed that they would also benefit from increased sales if additional outlets were established. Our Double Value Coupon Program increased the redemption of Federal benefits at participating farmers markets, increasing farmers' sales and increasing consumption of fresh, healthy food by lower-income community members.

Wholesome Wave's Double Value Coupon Program was developed to increase the buying power of lower-income community members at farmers markets, thereby increasing the buying market for local farmers. This programming targeted the following beneficiaries:

- Lower-income community members in and near Danbury, Westport, Norwalk and Bridgeport
- Small and mid-size farmers in Connecticut
- Farm stand vendor (a Bridgeport resident and produce vendor)

As shown in the table above, customers shopping with SNAP, and WIC and Senior FMNP purchased over \$40,000 in fresh, Connecticut-grown fruits and vegetables with their Federal benefits at the participating locations throughout the season. Combined with our Double Value Coupon Program, over \$60,000 of fresh, healthy food was purchased by lower-income community members in Fairfield County from sales at participating farmers markets and farm stands, ultimately benefitting our local growers.

E. ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Please visit the Park City Harvest (Bridgeport farm stand) website, here:

www.parkcityharvest.org

Please see promotional materials attached, including examples in Spanish and Portuguese:

Market Box Program, Norwalk, fliers and brochures:

- MBP brochure eng.doc
- MB brochure esp.doc

Park City Harvest Farm Stand, Bridgeport, 2009 announcement postcard:

- pch announcement postcard.pdf

Park City Harvest Farm Stand, Bridgeport, 2009 launch press release:

- PR_ Park City Harvest.doc

Park City Harvest Farm Stand, Bridgeport, 2009 fliers:

- pch Flier2 eng.pdf
- pch Flier2 esp.pdf

Park City Harvest Farm Stand, Bridgeport, 2009 banners:

- Backnextsummer banner.pdf
- PCH banner.pdf

Double Value Coupon Program coupon design:

- dvcp coupon 2009

Double Value Coupon Program flier for Westport Senior Center:

- westport senior_flier.pdf

Danbury Farmers Market, Danbury, 2009 flier:

- Danbury Flier _port 2009.pdf
- DanburyFLYER-eng.pdf

F. LESSONS LEARNED

In 2009, our Market Box Program began relatively late in the season, due to both delays in purchasing our refrigerated truck (used for market box delivery to Norwalk) and to staff changes at the Norwalk Community Health Center. We therefore did not sell as many boxes of fresh produce as we had originally expected, and sold fewer boxes per week compared to our 2008 season. This may also have been due to less variety in the produce compared to the previous year's Market Box Program. The decrease in variety was due to the fact that we sourced most of the produce from a single farm stand (and supplemented with produce from a farmers market smaller than the Westport market) rather than sourcing produce from the Westport Farmers Market, as we did for the 2008 season's Market Box Program. As a result, we have learned that successfully implementing the Market Box Program depends on consistency in the program from year to year, greater outreach within the target community and a substantial variety in produce weekly.

Perception of higher prices at the farm stand was identified as an impediment to SNAP redemption. In light of this, our field workers researched prices of local supermarkets and price comparisons were shared with potential costumers. Having price comparison information on site was a significant aid in proving that our produce was comparable in most areas to that of area supermarkets.

This project was very well received in the target communities by community members receiving WIC and Senior benefits. However, participation by SNAP recipients was relatively low. We attribute the lack of SNAP participation to insufficient outreach targeted towards SNAP recipients as most of our outreach was regularly targeted to WIC and Senior recipients. Therefore, in the future we plan to focus on raising SNAP participation through improved outreach.

In analyzing our procedures for the Double Value Coupon Program, we have learned that there are many advantages both to using a chit system and using a token system. In both the 2008 and 2009 seasons, we implemented the DVCP program through use of tokens: customers received twice the amount of the SNAP or FMNP that they redeemed at the market/stand that day in tokens. Therefore, customers received their tokens before they completed their shopping. In evaluating our program, we have realized that this could cause some tokens to go unused throughout the season or cause some customers to wait to use all of their tokens until the end of the season. As a result, we have determined that it would be more beneficial to us, to the community member and to the farmers to distribute tokens only after the customer has purchased items. We will also implement a limit to the match each customer can receive daily (up to \$10). This will be done through a combination chit/token system whereby the customer

selects items to be purchased, receives a chit stating the amount owed from each farmer, pays at the EBT/token booth, and receives tokens matching up to \$10 of that day's payment. This will encourage immediate redemption as well as reduce the amount of tokens leaving the farmers markets and farm stands daily. This system also provides the incentive funds to the customer only after s/he has purchased produce.

Plans for 2010:

All of our successes and lessons learned from the past two years have been instrumental in shaping our plans for the upcoming 2010 season. This season, Ceccarelli Farms will manage Bridgeport's Park City Harvest Farm Stands in two locations: the Department of Health and Social Services and St. Vincent's Hospital. Successful sales in 2009 encouraged this farm's direct involvement in sales to Bridgeport's community members. This new structure, with direct interactions between the farmer and community members, is optimal. The farmer brings the produce directly from his farm, providing the freshest produce for the community and conducts direct sales to community members. The farmer is also able to offer mixed pricing where available, selling some items in bulk at wholesale prices, and other items for retail value. Wholesome Wave will continue to implement the DVCP at these two stands where funding is available.

The third farm stand location, in the South End at 134 Columbia St., may be transformed into a new Market Box Program in 2010, funding permitting. This farm stand location was not successfully utilized by the community during the 2009 season, which resulted in unsatisfactory returns for the vendor. Instead of continuing this program, we have decided to take a different approach, with an added emphasis on strengthening our relationship with the community, if funds are available.

In a new form of program promotion, Wholesome Wave will be handing out new recipe cards in market boxes, at markets and at stands this season. The cards were printed this winter and offer basic information about our mission and programs, along with a seasonal recipe that uses ingredients available in the farm-fresh produce.

G. CONTACT PERSON

Cristina Sandolo
Project Director of Nourishing Neighborhoods
Wholesome Wave Foundation
189 State St
Bridgeport, CT 06604
Tel. 203.226.1112 ext.12
Fax. 203.873.0949
cristina@wholesomewave.org
www.wholesomewave.org