

**Hawaii's Volcano Circus** of Pahoehoe, HI, received \$25,018 to establish a new EBT program at the SPACE Market; increase purchases of locally grown produce by SNAP recipients; improve customers diets; and increase local farmers' income from locally grown, fresh produce sales.

[Final Report FY10](#)

## Final Performance Report

**Date:** 10/5/11

**Recipient Name:** Hawaii's Volcano Circus

**Title of Project:** Increasing Access to Local Produce in the Lower Puna District of Hawaii: New EBT Project

**Grant Number:** 12-25-G-1146

### Project Summary:

In the rural district of Puna, Hawaii Island, over 56% of the population is eligible for food stamps, and 90% of food is imported from the U.S. mainland. The number of individuals receiving food stamps here is high, and access to fresh, local produce is low. Even the many people who would prefer to buy local, fresh produce cannot because they are limited to those stores and markets that accept EBT. EBT-users often purchase from chain or local grocery stores that accept food stamps but import the majority of foods and produce they carry. Thus in most cases, small, local farmers are not being as strongly supported by this large percentage of the population as is possible, and many individuals do not include a large percentage of local fruits and vegetables in their diets. Prior to the start of the EBT program at SPACE Market, food stamps were accepted at only one farmers market on the island: in Hilo. Lower Puna residents had to drive an average of one hour each way to get to this market, which does not guarantee that produce sold there is even grown on Hawaii Island. (In many cases, vendors purchase large quantities of produce from discount/bulk stores and sell them for a profit at the market.)

Our project was designed to tackle these issues. Its goals were to 1.) increase access of Lower Puna's low income residents to locally-grown, fresh produce and 2.) increase local, small farmer income from sales of their crops at local markets.

### Project Approach:

To address the issues identified above, with help from FMPP funding, HVC established an EBT program at SPACE Market in Lower Puna.

### Goals and Outcomes Achieved:

We now have a successfully-running, self-sufficient EBT program established at our weekly farmers market. Through the program, we have brought more than \$50,000 in federal EBT dollars to our local farmers within the first year. Our EBT sales alone average \$980 per Saturday. (See the two graphs at the end of this report.) 70% of our vendors who sell EBT-eligible products reported an increase of at least 10% in their SPACE Market income due to the EBT program. 55% reported an increase in their SPACE Market income of more than 20%, 36% reported an increase of more than 30%, and 18% reported an increase of more than 50%.

21% of vendors who are not selling EBT-eligible items also reported an increase in sales of their products. This is due, we believe, to 1.) an increase in the number of customers at the market and 2.) an increase in the amount of cash in the pockets of our EBT customers who purchased produce here with their limited cash prior to the start of the EBT program simply because of convenience or preference. Now these customers are able to spend their additional cash on other local-made products such as a hot meal, clothing, soaps, and more.

With respect to customers, 81% of EBT customers surveyed reported an increase in their consumption of fresh, local produce due to the EBT program at SPACE. 92% of these increased their consumption of fresh, local produce by at least 10%. 85% reported an increase of 20% or more.

We also created a new part-time job to help with the volume of EBT sales during market. Our market, EBT program and this new position are fully self-sufficient, due to an increase in booth fees which we have now begun implementing to support costs. Fees are now \$16 per Saturday for food vendors (compared to \$50 food vendor fees charged at most markets in the area) and \$11 for non-food vendors (compared to \$35 fees charged at most markets in the area).

### **Beneficiaries:**

Farmers/vendors. Roughly twenty regular small local farmers who sell their EBT-eligible produce and food products currently at SPACE Market directly benefit from this project through an increase in sales to Market patrons who use EBT.

Low income individuals/families in Puna. Individuals and families who receive food stamps (56.4% of the population in Puna District), benefit from increased access to locally-grown, fresh produce in the Puna area.

Other neighborhood markets on Hawaii Island. By enhancing SPACE market with EBT access, HVC has established one of the first small, local neighborhood markets that accepts EBT. Because of this, lessons learned through this process can be applied to and used by other small, neighborhood markets throughout Hawaii Island and elsewhere that wish to consider using EBT in the future. Lengthy discussions have already been had with the Kohala Foundation, which contacted us last spring to get advice from us based on our experiences with the EBT program to share with other island farmers markets.

Local economy. In an area where 56.4% of the local population, including even many of the local market vendors, is on EBT, a large percentage of food purchased in the Puna area is bought with food stamps. Starting an EBT program at SPACE Market increased the number of local venues at which community members can purchase locally-grown produce using their food stamps, thus increasing the number of people able to buy primarily locally-grown produce and improving sales and income of local farmers. This stands to stimulate the local farm economy, particularly for farmers who depend upon their local sales at farmers' markets alone. It helps to decrease the need for imported produce and create a shift to a greater balance in food imports and exports in Lower Puna. The program has already generated more than \$50,000 for local farmers of Puna Makai.

### **Lessons Learned:**

Initially, we planned to track both specific dollar amounts and volume of produce sold by individual vendors and bought by individual customers at SPACE so that we could calculate the changes in vendor sales and amount of fresh, local produce consumed by EBT recipients as a result of the EBT program. This did not work the way we had initially envisioned. Many of the vendors in our small community did not want others in the community to know what they make each week at Market. Thus, we had to shift our questions and rely on vendors to tell us whether they felt that there was a change in their sales since the start of the EBT program.

With respect to gathering customer data, we did not set up a system early on to ensure that customers who answered the pre-program survey would also answer the 6 month and 1 year surveys, thus giving us direct

comparisons we could analyze ourselves. We also found that customers had a difficult time quantifying the amount of produce they were consuming. Again, instead we had to shift questions to simply ask customers whether their produce intake had increased, decreased or stayed the same over the past year. Also, one thing that surprised us was how difficult it was to get our customers to answer the customer surveys, even when we offered raffle tickets and held drawings for Market bucks, etc. We made sure to let everyone know that we wanted responses from everyone, not only EBT recipients (both to get a variety of data and to avoid drawing attention to our EBT recipients by having them be the only ones to complete the surveys). Some were quite upset that we were even asking them to complete a survey. Others may simply have not understood that they could complete one whether or not they received EBT. Perhaps in the future, instead of handing out raffle tickets, we need to give something tangible and fun to each person who completes a survey, such as a bag of popcorn, etc.

**Additional Information:**

Thank you, FMPP!! We're so happy to have the EBT program here and are grateful for your support in helping us start it!

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Average Weekly EBT Sales at SPACE Market (Program Year 1)



SPACE Market EBT Sales by Month (Year 1 of EBT Program)



