

The **University of Wisconsin Cooperative Extension Waukesha County** of Waukesha, WI received **\$90,449** to implement the use of EBT usage at 10 farmers markets; and to study the success of EBT programs at farmers markets by measuring increases in customer numbers, consumption levels for fruits and vegetables, and farmer income over a 2-year period.

[Final Report FY 10](#)

Final Performance Report

Date: May 17, 2013

Recipient Name: Waukesha County University of Wisconsin Cooperative Extension

Project Title: New EBT Project: Evaluating the Economic and Nutritional Impact of Electronic Benefits Transfer Machines at Farmers Markets in Low Income communities.

Grant Number: WI-046-2010-G-1206

Location: Wisconsin

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Project Summary

In Wisconsin nearly \$1.2 billion dollars in FoodShare (SNAP) benefits were distributed in 2012. Prior to 2000, farmers' market vendors and other local food producers were able to accept paper food stamp coupons. However, when Wisconsin transitioned from paper coupons to electronic benefits, farmers lost access to this clientele group and this group lost their access to locally grown products. This project was initiated to create easy, reproducible steps that farmers markets in Wisconsin could take to start their own EBT program and reestablish the SNAP participants connections to local agricultural products. We also wanted to measure the economic benefit of the program to the farmers' market vendors and the nutritional impact on the SNAP participants utilizing EBT at the farmers' market.

The project successfully completed a 12 page "How to" guide for Wisconsin farmers' markets to walk them through eight steps to create an EBT program. I also held and archived a three part webinar series focused on evaluating a markets capacity to run an EBT program, how to set up a program and sustaining a farmers' market EBT program. The research study also revealed that the primary beneficiaries of adding EBT to farmers' markets were SNAP participants who overwhelmingly said that it helped them increase their consumption of fruits and vegetables. Farmers' market vendors realized little economic benefit from adding the program to the farmers market. Farmers' market managers felt that it was complicated and time consuming to add EBT to the market but felt that it was a valuable service and were willing to seek outside funding to continue the program.

Project Approach

Ten Wisconsin farmers' markets who had not previously accepted SNAP benefits were identified to study the economic and nutritional impact of incorporating EBT technology into farmers markets. The farmers markets invited to be part of the study were originally identified using poverty data maps for the counties in Wisconsin with the highest amount of SNAP participation. These maps were then correlated with the locations of farmers' markets in those counties to identify markets that would be easiest to access for this part of the population.

Once the markets were identified, the researcher assisted markets with setting up their EBT program at the market. These activities included applying to accept EBT, creating a logging and reimbursement system, creating promotional signs, creating vendor signs, acquiring market tokens and creating vendor contracts. Each market identified a primary contact person for the market who then attended a day long training session to learn about the program, SNAP rules and reporting requirements.

Each farmers' market was required to keep records and submitted data on the number of vendors participating in the markets EBT program, the amount of SNAP benefits redeemed at the market and the quantity of tokens redeemed by vendor. Markets were also required to conduct a nutritional impact survey of SNAP participants who redeemed benefits at the market. This data was submitted monthly by each market in the study. Participating markets were required to submit data for the months of July through October for the 2011 and 2012 market seasons. At the conclusion of the study, the farmers' market EBT contact and participating vendors were surveyed about their perception and experiences with the program and asked to evaluate their likelihood of continuing the program after the research studies conclusion.

Goals and Outcomes Achieved

Data: Quite a bit of data about farmers market redemption and stakeholder perceptions were collected during this study. A brief summary of the data follows.

- **Vendor Participation:** Vendor participation varied with market size. The largest market had 57 participating vendors and the smallest 10. The number of participating vendors increased in year two (25-45%) for all of the markets that participated in both years of the study.
- **SNAP Market Redemption:** In 2011, all participating markets combined redeemed \$15,571 and in year two \$38,837 (an increase of 250%). Individual market redemption varied. In 2011 SNAP redemption for individual farmers markets ranged from \$178 - \$4,381. In 2012 the range was \$713-\$8,000. Weekly (individual) market redemption ranged from \$9.37 to \$251.07.
- **Farmers Market Vendors:** The average amount of SNAP benefits received by farmers' market vendors each week ranged from \$0.59 to \$17.93 per vendor. The average

amount of SNAP benefits received by an individual farmers' market vendor annually varied by market (\$47- \$1255)

- SNAP Participant Nutritional Impact: SNAP participants were asked when exchanging benefits for market EBT tokens if having EBT processing at the market enabled them to eat more fruits and vegetable. In 2011 87.5% of respondents agreed and in 2012 99.5% agreed.

Education: Several efforts were made in educating farmers' markets about EBT processing including the following:

- Wisconsin Fresh Market Fruit and Vegetable Conference 2012 (Farmers' Market Track) talk titles "Expanding your Customer Base: EBT at the Farmers' Market"
- A three session series held in conjunction with the Wisconsin Department of Health Services FoodShare program to teach farmers markets and individual farmers about providing EBT services to SNAP participants.

Session 1: "SNAP, EBT, FoodShare and the Farmers Market"

Session 2: "8 Steps to Creating a Farmers Market EBT Program"

Session 3: "Long Term Success with Farmers Market EBT Programs"

This webinar series is available through the UW-Extensions Community Food Systems Teams' website for viewing at <http://fyi.uwex.edu/cfsi/foodaccess/>

- Two talks were held to educate Cooperative Extension educators working with farmers' markets about Farmers Market EBT Programs including the Joint Conference for Extension Professions in Wisconsin and the National Urban Extension Conference in Kansas.
- A twelve page book was written titled "Creating a Successful EBT Program: A guide for Wisconsin Farmers Markets" and is currently in the final stages of publication. This will be distributed to all Wisconsin Farmers Markets free of charge. A free downloadable PDF will also be available through the UW-Extension Publication website.

Beneficiaries

SNAP Participants: This group saw the greatest benefit from incorporating EBT access into the farmers' market. It gave participants the ability to access fresh local agricultural products and, according to survey data, increased the amount of fresh fruits and vegetables consumed.

Farmers' Markets/Managers: The data we collected suggests that there is an increase in the number of people coming to the farmers' market by offering EBT as a payment option. Farmers' market managers also feel that they have benefited by providing an important service to their communities.

Farmers' Market Vendors: Although the financial gains to farmers' market vendors participation in the EBT program were modest, vendors felt a sense of giving back to the community and serving the nutritional needs SNAP participants.

Lessons Learned

Creating a farmers' market EBT program from scratch is a time consuming and expensive project. This grant program enabled me to offer markets participating in the research project a significant amount of assistance in starting and running the program. However, some markets had difficulty in the application process or lacked the infrastructure needed to become an authorized retailer and start the program. Once the staff and vendors were trained, most markets were able to comply with the monthly reporting requirements but a few still found this challenging.

In addition to this program being challenging for the market, the economic impact to farmers was far less than originally anticipated. In a follow-up survey, vendors noted that they valued the program, not because it benefited them financially, but as a community service. Most vendors stated that it would not make economic sense to pay to participate in the EBT program at their market.

To make farmers' market EBT programs sustainable, current expenses and staffing expectations must be covered. Considering the financial impact on farmers and the market, most markets chose to seek outside funding for the program through grants and sponsorships. Only one market in our study chose to charge a fee to vendors to participate after the research project was finished. This has led to a considerable reduction in the number of vendors participating in the program and the variety of products offered to SNAP participants. It has also covered only a small portion of the program expenses.

Because of the nutritional impact for SNAP participants, evaluating ways to increase the economic impact to farmers markets or reduce the cost of this program for participating markets should be investigated.

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