

The **Pierce County Public Health Department** of Ellsworth, WI received **\$39,029** to increase access, availability and affordability of fruit and vegetables by low-income consumers by building the farmers market infrastructure in Pierce County, and implement new EBT capabilities at the markets.

[Final Report FY10](#)

Final Report

11/30/2012

County of Pierce—Farmers’ Market Promotion Program Grant

*Increasing Fruit and Vegetable Access,
Availability, and Affordability in Pierce
County, Wisconsin—New EBT Project*

*Grant #:12-25-G-1207
Ellsworth, Wisconsin*

County of Pierce—Farmers’ Market Promotion Program Grant

Increasing Fruit and Vegetable Access, Availability, and Affordability in Pierce County, Wisconsin—New EBT Project

Project Summary and Background Statement

As described in the 2010 application, this project proposed to increase fruit and vegetable sales by local farmers at Pierce County Farmers’ Markets and consumption amongst Pierce County Wisconsin residents. To accomplish this, funding under the Farmers’ Market Promotion Program [FMPP] was awarded. The goal was to promote the domestic consumption of agriculture commodities by increasing the number of farmers’ markets utilizing Electronic Benefit Transfer [EBT] in Pierce County from 0 to 3. During the 2010-2012 FMPP Grant, EBT capabilities were added to 2 Pierce County Farmers’ Markets.

Pierce County is a rural county in west-central Wisconsin with a population of about 41,000. According to the 2006-2010 United States Census Bureau, 10.3% of persons are below the poverty level in Pierce County. Overweight and Obesity related to lack of physical activity and low fruit and vegetable consumption were one of the three health priorities identified by the Community Needs Assessment conducted by the Pierce County Public Health Department in 2007-2008. At that time, the 2008 County Health Snapshot provided by the University of Wisconsin Population Health Institute showed that 80% of Pierce County residents have insufficient fruit and vegetable intake putting us below the state average of 77%. The 2010 County Health Snapshot also showed that only 36% of the county’s population had access to healthy foods compared to 46% for the state.

In 2009, there was a fruit and vegetable audit conducted to assess the availability, variety, and quality of fruits and vegetables in Pierce County. The tool used to conduct this audit was the Wisconsin Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Audit Tool developed by a researcher at the University of Wisconsin-Madison and the Wisconsin Nutrition, Physical Activity and Obesity Prevention Program, funded by a five-year Cooperative Agreement with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. At the same time the audit was conducted, a perceptions survey was also in progress with Pierce County residents. The perceptions survey was administered online and in person. The 2009 audit and survey showed that most respondents shop for fruits and vegetables at large supermarkets, small grocery stores and superstores/warehouse clubs. The superstores/warehouse clubs are greater than 10 miles away for most of the respondents. A majority rated cost and selection poorly at their usual place of buying fruits and vegetables and over half reported that the cost impacted their ability to purchase fruits and vegetables. The results of the Fresh Fruits and Vegetables Audit and Perceptions of Fruits and Vegetable Access

Survey reinforced the need to increase access to and consumption of fruits and vegetables in Pierce County by implementing EBT at farmers' markets.

Project Approach & Goals and Outcomes Achieved

To implement the goal of the project, a part-time coordinator was hired to implement the FMPP grant. The first step was to research farmers markets in Wisconsin and around the United States that are accepting Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program [SNAP]. Visiting other Wisconsin Farmers' Markets that are accepting SNAP/FoodShare [Wisconsin's SNAP Program] and the Pierce County Farmers' Markets was essential to gain insight for the success of the project. It was vital to meet the local farmers and vendors within the county at each farmers' market. Each farmers' market is unique with a different set of vendors, expectations and operation.

The goal was to have 3 EBT machines placed within the county, so a hand count of farmers' market shoppers/visitors was completed at four farmers' markets in the summer of 2011. Placement of the new EBT technology seemed like a simple decision, but it was not the case. Although all of the markets were aware of potential funding for EBT machines as they were aware of the FMPP application in 2010, there was hesitation expressed by all the farmers' markets. This is discussed in Lessons Learned below.



Sign at the Pierce County Farmers' Markets

In early summer 2012, one market, the River Falls Farmers' Market, was using the EBT technology at their Farmers' Market. Agreements and procedures for the market were established, equipment was ordered, and volunteers were trained for the implementation at this market in June 2012. The Prescott Farmers' Market was the second Pierce County farmers' market to implement the EBT in September 2012. Promotional signage, banners, tokens and other items were purchased. Nutrition information, vegetable information cards and cookbooks provided by the Pierce County Public Health Department were also available to be distributed at the River Falls Farmers' Market.

Marketing included local advertisements in newspapers, radio and websites and blogs that had the potential to reach all county residents. Information was provided in newsletters that would reach a specific target audience. There were flyers posted within government and county offices, churches and local businesses. A few specific avenues targeting SNAP-eligible populations included school supply night [school supplies provided to needy families], backpack program [provides food to children/families], community meals and the free medical clinic.

Lessons Learned & Problems and Delays:

The goal of the project was to promote the domestic consumption of agriculture commodities by increasing the number of farmers' markets utilizing EBT in Pierce County from 0 to 3. With 2 farmers' markets accepting SNAP at the end of the 2012 Market Season, there is increased fruit and vegetable access, availability, and affordability within Pierce County. It seemed like it would be a simple task to pick which farmers' markets and communities would benefit the most from the EBT technology, but it was complicated. Even though all of the markets were aware of potential funding for EBT machines in 2010 during the grant writing process, there was reluctance by the farmers' markets during the grant implementation period. This lack of support was not anticipated as there were letters of support prior to the FMPP application. It was an obstacle to overcome the hesitation the markets had in bringing EBT technology to their market. This is discussed further below.

As noted earlier, there were only 2 farmers' markets that implemented EBT during the grant period. There were 2 farmers' markets that did not want to participate with accepting EBT at their farmers' market. The first market to formally say they did not want to partake is a farmers' market that is overseen by a Chamber of Commerce. This happened in early spring and was a disappointment as there had been a lot of discussion of the program over the previous months. Another disappointment came when a second market also stepped back. The second market does not have a formal board or manager on-site at the market, thus there had been a lot of time and effort in finding volunteers to be at the market to operate the EBT machine during market hours. In June 2012, the volunteer market manager and the host business owner expressed lack of support and refused to allow EBT at this market.

Although the River Falls Farmers' Market took part in the FMPP grant, there were still some trials encountered. The River Falls Farmers' Market in River Falls, Wisconsin is the largest market in Pierce County. This is a stable market with a farmers' market board and volunteer market manager who is also a market vendor. Since this market manager is also a vendor, she is very busy during market hours and would not be available to operate an EBT machine at the market. The task was to inform and educate the market board and vendors about the benefits of having EBT at their farmers' market, as the market board expressed hesitation with time and logistics. Thus, the next task was staffing at the market to operate the POS terminal. Attending market meetings and reaching out to people in the community was beneficial. A local food group, the *Local Food Partnership*, was up for the challenge of making local food more accessible, available and affordable in the River Falls area. This enthusiastic group of volunteers enabled this project to be a success in 2012 and in the future. Although the River Falls Farmers' Market is an established market, they did not



EBT Wooden Tokens

have an area to have the EBT machine. A tent and other supplies were purchased to have the machine out of direct sunlight. This tent also functions as the River Falls Farmers' Market Community Tent and houses the EBT machine, resources and local information. The SNAP application delayed the start date of EBT acceptance to June 2012.

It was already in the early spring of 2012, when other Pierce County Farmers' Markets decided that they did not want to move ahead with EBT. It was decided to move on to the last market within Pierce County. There was reluctance initially expressed by the Prescott Farmers' Market which was the first delay. Extended delays with the SNAP application and lost paperwork with the EBT machine contractor unfortunately contributed to the unexpectedly late start for EBT/FoodShare to be accepted in the 2012 season at this market. The market was up and running with an EBT machine in mid-September 2012.

To sum it up, the three main challenges were lack of enthusiasm for the program, finding volunteers to operate the EBT machine and delays in processing with the SNAP application & the EBT machine contractor. Although the FMPP grant was researched and well-planned, there was a lot of effort and energy in work that would end in a dead-end. When working on a grant funded project involving multiple entities and groups the processes and steps took more time than anticipated. It is essential to have open communication and be familiar with 'locals' in the community. The coordinator of the FMPP grant did not live in either city where the chosen farmers' markets are located. This was a challenge to gain the trust of the farmers' market vendors and managers. Reaching out in the community proved to be the key to the success of the grant to ensure that it will continue into the future. Persistence was essential and looking ahead to the benefits of the program as a whole.

Beneficiaries and Partners

Those impacted by the FMPP Grant include the FoodShare [SNAP participants] within Pierce County and the local farmers and vendors at the River Falls and the Prescott Farmers' Markets. The implementation of EBT at farmers' markets has been positive. At both markets, the EBT sales totaled \$1203, from 102 transactions. As noted above, the River Falls Farmers Market is an established, well-organized market with a market board and a volunteer market manager, who is also a vendor/farmer, so it was felt that it would be difficult to manage the EBT at the market. Thus, the River Falls Farmers' Market collaborated with a group of individuals that calls themselves the *Local Food Partnership [LFP]*. The LFP is a group of individuals who are enthusiastic about the opportunity to assist in providing EBT for FoodShare participants within their community. The Local Foods Partnership's mission is "*to grow and sustain the network of local food production, distribution and consumption, thus improving our economic, environmental and social health.*" The collaboration between these two groups has been essential for the River Falls community to benefit from the EBT technology at their farmers' market.

The Prescott Farmers' Market is a small market overseen by a volunteer market manager. This manager also volunteers at Borner Farm Project, a small farm that sells at the market. The Borner Farm Project is within the city limits and *“seeks to draw members of the community together to learn how to grow, process, and prepare food in a sustainable manner.”* This partnership will benefit this small community in many ways as Borner Farm Project operates a CSA, a small store and provides educational opportunities within the community. The Prescott Farmers' Market has moved to a new, more visible location for the 2012 season. This has been a positive change for the market and the community. Although EBT was not at the market long, it was used several times in the 2012 season and will reach many in the future.



Local Food Partnership Volunteers and River Falls Hospital Staff

A local hospital's healthcare organization had funding to promote healthy communities. The Neighborhood Health Connection™ presented by Allina Health provided additional funds for the EBT user at Pierce County Farmers' Markets. The funds were used to promote the EBT at the farmers' markets to supplement the ability to purchase more local fruits and vegetables. In August and September 2012, the SNAP/ FoodShare participant received matching EBT Market Tokens for up to an additional \$10 on each market day. This promotion increased the buying power of the FoodShare participant and brought many new shoppers to the market. The Allina promotion provided \$707 in tokens that provided local foods to FoodShare participants and increased sales for the market vendors at both markets.

Not only did the SNAP participant benefit from the FMPP grant, Pierce County residents also benefited. With marketing for SNAP at the farmers' markets, the general public was more aware and reminded about the local foods. The vendors have noticed an increase in traffic at the farmers market. One market manager noticed new faces at the market, more families and a younger crowd.

Additional Information

During the grant implementation period in 2012, the Wisconsin Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Audit Tool and perceptions survey was repeated. There has been an increase in availability of local produce within Pierce County from 2009 to 2012. A few highlights are noted below:

- In 2009, there were 7 food pantries in Pierce County, which included one mobile food pantry. In 2012, there are still 7 food pantries, as one pantry was consolidated with another nearby pantry. However, since 2009, the mobile food pantry has an established new site. And there is another mobile food pantry to better serve the Pierce County residents.

- In 2009, there were 3 community gardens in operation in Pierce County. In 2012, there are 7 community gardens. Several are located at schools and most produce is donated to the local food pantries.
- In 2009, there were 2 Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) farms in Pierce County. In the three year time, one of the CSA's is now only a vegetable grower. But there are now 5 CSAs located in Pierce County that provided 92 shares or half shares during the 2012 season.
- In 2009, fruits and veggies had been primarily purchased at large supermarkets, small grocery stores or superstores or warehouse clubs. In 2012, the respondents are primarily shopping at small grocery stores, farmers' markets or Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) and large supermarkets. This is a positive change as more folks are possibly purchasing more local produce.
- Cost continues to be a barrier to purchasing fruits and vegetables in both 2009 and 2012.

A review of the WIC and Senior FMNP redemption rates the pre and post-implementation of EBT will also be assessed. The WIC and Senior FMNP redemption rates for 2012 are not yet available, but comparison of redemption rates show an increase in 2010 to 2011.

Funding to assist with the cost of providing EBT at the farmer's markets beyond 2012 was a concern voiced by the River Falls Farmers' Market, Local Food Partnership, Prescott Farmers' Market and the Borner Farm Project. Potential financial sources and ideas that will ensure that EBT technology at Pierce County Farmers' Markets have been researched. The commitment and collaboration between these groups was significant in the success of the FMPP Grant. The Pierce County Public Health Department will continue to assist the groups as needed. It falls within our *mission is to assure the health of the public, prevent disease and injury, and promote healthy behaviors...*

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HOW TO SHOP



AT A FARMERS MARKET

- Bring your own bags and a cooler with freezer packs to keep any meats and dairy cool while you shop.
- Arrive at the market early for the best selection; take time to walk through and preview the entire market.
- When using cash, farmers appreciate small bills and change.
- Ask farmers questions about how food is grown, how to prepare the produce and what's different about the varieties.
- Plan your recipes based on seasonal ingredients.



PROPER PRODUCE STORAGE 101:

Not all fresh food belongs in the refrigerator! Follow these guideline for optimal taste and shelf life:

ROOM TEMPERATURE

- Basil
- Tomatoes
- Potatoes and Most Root Vegetables
- Onions, Shallots
- Garlic

BEST IN THE FRIDGE

- Apples
- Leafy Greens (Lettuce, Kale, Collard Greens)
- Berries
- Cucumbers
- Celery
- Carrots
- Broccoli

See you at the market!

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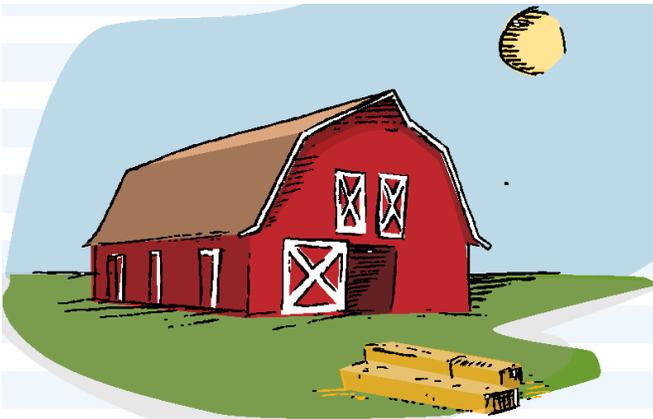
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EXPLORE THE MARKET



A Great Place To Find Good Food, Folks, and Fun!

Pierce County Farmers Markets



Nutrition Facts that Might Surprise You:

- You've heard dairy contains *calcium* – but did you know broccoli, kale, garlic, and tomatoes also contain calcium? Calcium builds strong bones, teeth and muscles.
- *Vitamin C* also helps to keep teeth and bones healthy, and can be found in peppers, onions, zucchini, and cauliflower.
- *Iron*, responsible for healthy blood, isn't just found in meat – leafy green vegetables such as collard greens and spinach also contain iron!
- To reduce the risk of heart disease, diabetes, and cancer, be sure to get plenty of *fiber* from vegetables and whole grain breads.

Pierce County Farmers Markets

🍎 Ellsworth Community Farmers Market
East End Park, Ellsworth
Between Crosscut Street & Wall Street
Tuesdays 3p.m.-6:30 p.m.

🍎 Prescott Farmers Market
200 Monroe Street, Prescott
Freedom Park
Great River Road Learning Center
Thursdays 2p.m.-6p.m.

🍎 River Falls Farmers Market
Locust & 2nd Street, River Falls
Downtown River Falls across from the
1st National Bank
Tuesdays 3p.m.-6p.m.
Saturdays 8a.m.-12p.m.

🍎 Spring Valley Farmers Market
Hwy 29—1 mile west of Spring Valley
Team Oil Travel Center
Thursdays 2p.m.-6p.m.



Coming in the Summer 2012

EBT/FoodShare at Pierce County
Farmers Markets

Locations have not yet been
determined



Learn more about FoodShare Wisconsin and
check eligibility at this website:

<https://www.access.wisconsin.gov>



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