

Bridging the Gap



Connecting Michigan Families with Local Food and Farmers 2013 SNAP Bridge Card Usage at Michigan Farmers Markets

Michigan ranks 2nd nationally in the number of farmers markets that accept SNAP.

In 2006, only three farmers markets in Michigan accepted Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) Bridge Cards. In 2013, 128 of more than 300 farmers markets across the state welcomed SNAP benefits via the Michigan Bridge Card as payment for fresh, healthy, locally grown foods. This effort, coordinated and supported by the Michigan Farmers Market Association (MIFMA), during 2013 resulted in:

- More than 42,000 SNAP Bridge Card transactions worth more than \$1.2 million dollars
- Improved access to fresh Michigan foods for lower income Michigan families
- Increased revenue for Michigan farmers

How many SNAP Bridge Card transactions occurred at farmers markets during 2013?

Eighty-four farmers markets reported 42,435 SNAP Bridge Card transactions during 2013. There were an average of 544 and a median of 124 transactions per market.

What does that mean in dollars?

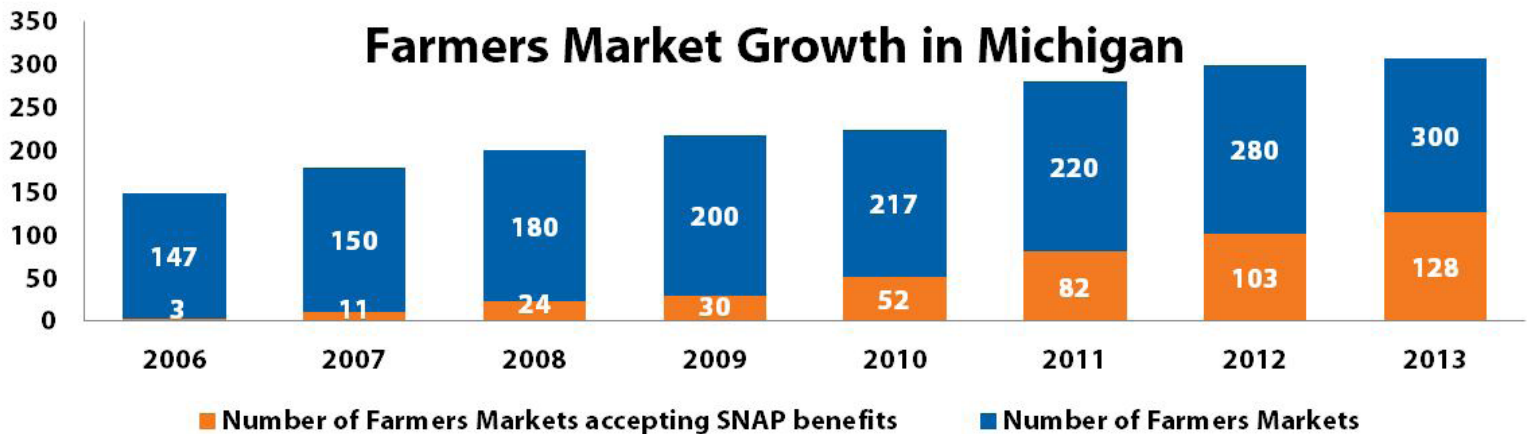
During 2013, 111 Michigan farmers markets reported \$1,207,522 in SNAP Bridge Card sales. SNAP sales at individual markets ranged from \$0 in sales to \$296,404 with a mean of \$10,977 and median of \$2,102 sales per market.

How did 2013 sales compare to the past?

Overall, SNAP sales reported by farmers markets were up in 2013 from 2012 by about 10 percent. Of the farmers markets that compared 2013 sales to 2012 sales, 45% reported that SNAP sales had increased, 39% reported that SNAP sales had decreased and 14% reported steady SNAP sales or lack of data to compare sales.

How many SNAP customers were new to farmers market shopping?

The 74 markets that reported the number of 2013 first-time SNAP Bridge Card customers counted 10,994 first-time users. The range was from 0 to 2,934 new SNAP customers per market.



The Michigan Farmers Market Association (MIFMA) is a member-based, statewide association with a mission to advance farmers markets to create a thriving marketplace for local food and farm products. MIFMA's Food Assistance Partnership provides networking opportunities, shares resources, and facilitates collaboration for individuals and organizations working to increase consumers' access to healthy, locally-produced foods through farmers markets. To learn more, call 517-432-3381 or visit www.mifma.org

Indicator	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013
Farmers markets accepting SNAP Bridge Cards	26	49	77	95	128
SNAP sales at Michigan farmers markets	\$297,078	\$705,969	\$898,194	\$1,096,590	\$1,207,522
Total number of eligible vendors at responding markets	517	913	1,405	1,792	2,584
Total time per month reported for accepting SNAP at MI farmers markets (in hours)		1,715	2,947	4,065	5,635

What does all this mean?

Farmers markets in Michigan are national leaders in their acceptance of SNAP benefits and they have worked hard for their leadership position. As the data show, markets continue to grow the program, with benefits to Michigan families, farmers and communities. But significant challenges exist:

- Technology is maturing but continues to be problematic for some markets, especially those in more rural areas. It can be very expensive, it may not be reliable, and most markets represent very small accounts and may find it difficult to get good service. Reliable technology is essential, not only to process customer purchases, but also to facilitate the required recordkeeping.
- Accepting SNAP Bridge Card payments can be a fairly complex program to provide – especially when tasks are shared across a volunteer staff and in markets that manage multiple food assistance programs, each with its own requirements and system. Although some markets enjoy stability in their manager and other helpers, many others are relatively new as markets, not just new to SNAP, and experience many staffing changes.
- There is no question that accepting SNAP costs markets money, money that is extremely difficult for them to find. Most farmers markets in Michigan operate as non-profits or as public entities, and many are operated entirely by volunteers. Few farmers markets in Michigan are organized in a way that provides the market organization a benefit as market sales rise. As SNAP sales increase at farmers markets, the markets attract more customers, and the vendors experience more profits. But, the market management has more work to do and often no additional resources to do it. It is important to examine ways in which the market as a whole can share in its vendors' financial success.
- The educational support and coordination that MIFMA provides is also costly, requiring that funds be raised to continue it. Respondents' comments illustrate how important MIFMA's leadership has been and will be in the future. Training, one-on-one mentoring, seeking funds, developing materials, creating statewide visibility and speaking on behalf of farmers markets are just a few of the key roles that MIFMA has played to support SNAP in farmers markets.

The paradox, of course, is that the more successful SNAP purchasing at farmers markets becomes, the greater the cost to the markets and to MIFMA in finding the time and dollars to support it. Start-up grants won't do the trick; sustainable support is needed to continue and expand this important program.



Every year since 2009, the Michigan Farmers Market Association (MIFMA) has surveyed all the Michigan farmers markets that accept SNAP Bridge Card payments. The rate of survey completion and return is very good, but not 100%. For 2013, full or partial responses were received from 111 farmers markets and/or groups that manage farmers markets. Respondents represented about 93% of the Michigan farmers markets that accepted SNAP Bridge Card payment during 2013. The numbers reported here are conservative and do not include all the activity in the state. The full report can be found online at www.mifma.org.