

Bridging the Gap

Between Local Food and Michigan Families



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Each year since 2009, the Michigan Farmers Market Association's Food Assistance Partnership has surveyed all of the farmers markets in Michigan that accept Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits via the Michigan Bridge Card. The purpose of the annual survey is to gain a better understanding of how the process is working at Michigan farmers markets and to learn what support is needed by markets in order to maintain their ability to accept these benefits. Survey questions have remained consistent each year to allow for comparisons between market seasons. The following narrative describes survey results from the 2011 market season followed by a chart that compares 2011 results to previous years.

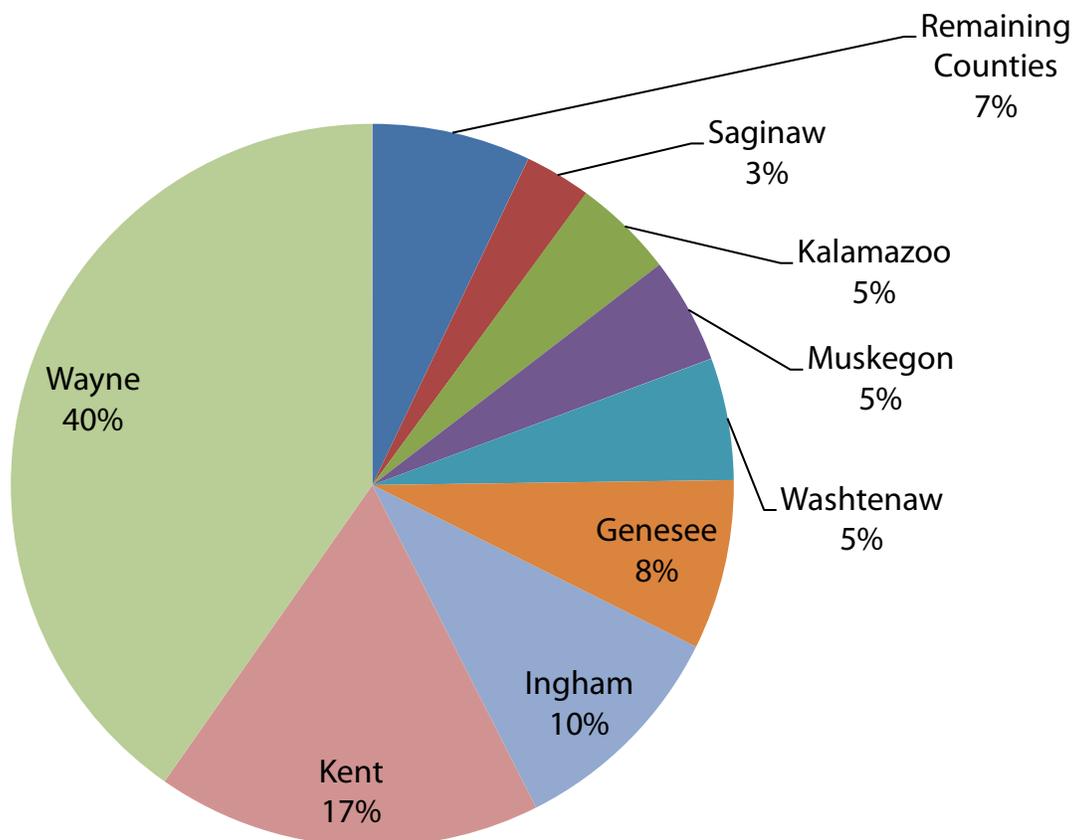
In 2011, a total of 77 farmers markets across the state of Michigan accepted Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits as a form of payment for fresh, healthy and locally produced foods.

These markets were organized by 70 unique nonprofit organizations, municipalities, chambers of commerce, or other groups interested in food security and community development (some organizations run more than one farmers market). Five additional markets were equipped to accept SNAP benefits but did not redeem any in the 2011 season. In 2011, of the 77 markets that accepted SNAP benefits, 55 completed the year-end survey and their responses are analyzed and illustrated in this report. Information on the dollar value of SNAP sales that took place at Michigan farmers markets was collected from all 77 markets that participated.

2011 SNAP Highlights

In 2011, a total of 77 markets accepted SNAP benefits, including 31 that were participating for the first time. Ten of those markets are open year-round.

Michigan Bridge Card Sales by County



SNAP sales at farmers markets in Michigan in 2011 totaled \$898,194.75. Farmers markets accepting SNAP for the first time contributed \$50,030.41 worth of sales or 2.2% of total sales, while farmers markets that have been participating for one or more years contributed the remaining \$843,666.40¹. Sales volumes ranged from \$17 per market to \$327,674 per market. On average, markets experienced \$11,665 worth of SNAP sales in 2011 with a median sales volume of \$1,712.5. On average, markets recorded \$1,613.88 in SNAP sales if they were in year one, and \$21,632.47 if they had been accepting SNAP benefits for two or more years.

Transaction volumes ranged from three to 16,160 and totaled 51,816 transactions statewide. The average number of transactions per market was 1,080. First-year markets averaged 160 transactions each, while returning markets averaged 1,631 transactions.

The average consumer SNAP transaction was \$16.40. First-year markets had a slightly higher average transaction of \$17.75, compared to a \$15.59 average transaction for returning markets. Markets participating in the Double Up Food Bucks incentive program that matches SNAP purchases up to \$20 also had a lower average transaction amount than markets that did not participate in the program. Participating markets had an average transaction amount of \$15.54, while non-participating markets had an average transaction amount of \$17.98.

¹ Some information for the amount of Bridge Cards sales that took place at Michigan Farmers Markets was provided in aggregate form by either an organization that operates several farmers markets or by USDA FNS and cannot be attributed to a specific farmers market.

In 2011, 45% of farmers markets collected information on the number of first-time SNAP customers that attended their market as an indicator of the number of customers that are drawn to the market because of the SNAP program.

Based on this information, at least 3,328 SNAP clients utilized their benefits at a farmers market for the first time in 2011, averaging 85 new customers per market that tracked this information.

At the end of the season, unredeemed currency represented on average 9% of a market's annual SNAP sales. At individual markets, unredeemed tokens or scrip accounted for between 2 and 31% of total SNAP sales.

There are many explanations for why a farmers market's SNAP sales increase or decrease over time. From 2010 to 2011, only three markets reported decreases in SNAP sales, while the remaining markets reported increases in SNAP sales. When asked to explain the phenomenon at their market(s), market managers gave the following responses:

Factors Contributing to an Increase in SNAP Sales at Michigan Farmers Markets

- Participation in the Double Up Food Bucks Program (17)
- Increased outreach efforts/consumer awareness (12)
- Increase in SNAP population (2)
- Increased signage
- Working with community partners
- Word of mouth
- Less stigmatization associated with use of the Bridge Card
- SNAP clients developing a habit of shopping at the market
- Increase in the number of vendors participating
- Participating in the program for a full season
- Increased attendance at the market



Factors Contributing to a Decrease or Reduction in the Growth Rate of SNAP Sales at Farmers Markets

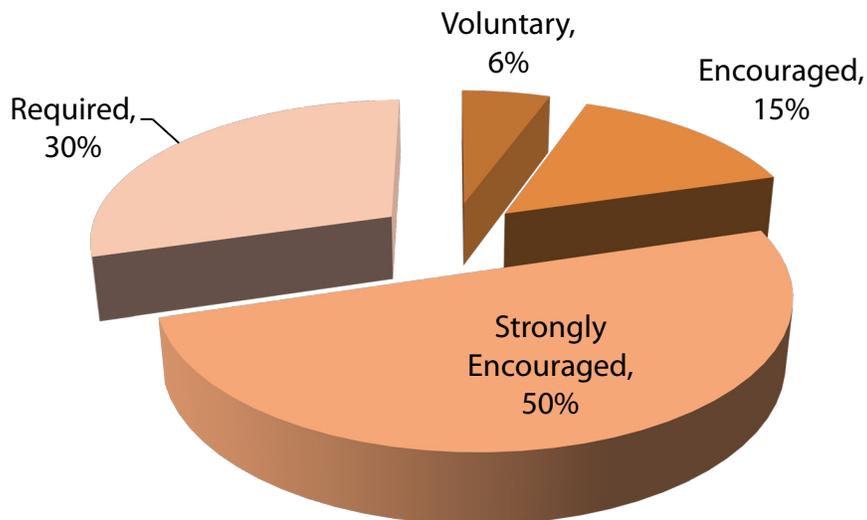
- Change in location of the market (2)
- Market location not accessible to SNAP clients
- Road closure near the market location
- Changes to dates and times when the market operates
- Participation in the Double Up Food Bucks Program
- Competition from nearby market which began accepting SNAP this year
- Competition from nearby market participating in Double Up Food Bucks
- More customers are growing gardens at home
- SNAP users prefer other retail outlets
- Poor growing season
- Cuts to SNAP benefits

Vendor Participation

Markets approach vendor participation in SNAP sales in different ways. Of the 55 markets that responded to this survey, participation in SNAP sales is voluntary at 6%, encouraged at 15%, strongly encouraged at 50%, and required at 30% of markets.

On average, a farmers market in Michigan that participates in this program has 27 eligible food vendors, of whom 87% participate by accepting SNAP benefits. Markets report having as few as five and as many as 120 vendors who are eligible to accept SNAP benefits. The median number of eligible vendors is 16 and the most common number is 8. Farmers markets responding to this survey that accept SNAP on behalf of their vendors represent 1,405 farmers and vendors who would not be able to accept Bridge Cards without their assistance (these may not be unique vendors as many vendors sell at more than one farmers market). It is estimated that more than 1,900 vendors benefit from farmers markets that facilitate Bridge Card purchases across the state.

Vendor Participation in SNAP



Program Administration and Implementation

Of the 77 Michigan markets that accepted SNAP benefits in 2011, all but one did so using a central point of sale device and alternative redemption system (tokens or paper scrip) to conduct transactions between SNAP clients and multiple vendors.

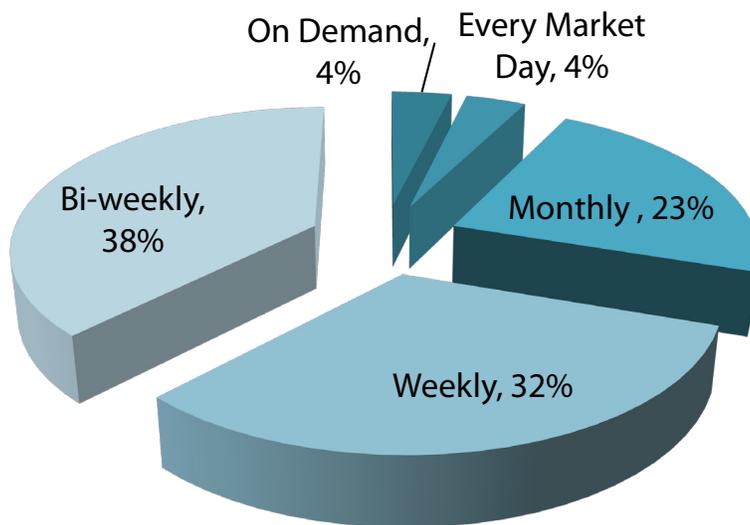
Markets that use alternative redemption systems must then reimburse vendors for the tokens or scrip that they submit on a predetermined schedule. The majority of markets (70%) reimburse vendors on a weekly or bi-weekly basis. Other reimbursement frequencies include monthly (23%), every market day (4%) and on demand (4%).

Of the markets that accept SNAP benefits, about 45% also accept credit cards and/or debit cards as payment options.

Of the markets that accept SNAP benefits, 53% are able to utilize the free, hardwired point of sale device provided by Michigan's EBT state contractor and therefore do not pay any transactions fees for Bridge Card sales. The remaining 47% do not have access to electricity and a landline phone line at their market location and therefore must use wireless technology and incur the monthly costs associated with this kind of technology.

The most common concerns about wireless point of sale devices are reliability, overcoming technical difficulties, the cost of operation, and confusion over what markets are being charged for/hidden fees.

Frequency of Vendor Reimbursement



Accounting

Accounting and recordkeeping are vital aspects of a successful SNAP program. Paper records are the most frequently utilized accounting method, used by 75% of responding farmers markets, including 16 that report using only paper records. In addition, 60% of responding markets report using Microsoft Excel spreadsheets to aid in accounting, while 16% use Quickbooks™ accounting software. Other accounting methods used by farmers markets accepting SNAP benefits include other accounting software and having a finance department of a sponsoring organization assist in accounting for the farmers market.

Staffing

One of the biggest investments in a successful SNAP program at a farmers market is time. Respondents reported that volunteers and paid staff across the state dedicated a total of 2,946.5 hours monthly facilitating SNAP programs at farmers markets in Michigan. Accepting SNAP benefits requires a dedication of 61 hours per month on average per market. The process takes between 2 hours per month and 500 hours per month at markets across Michigan. The median amount of time spent is 32 hours and the most common amount of time spent is 50 hours. Based on the average hourly investment each month per market, it is estimated that 4,000 hours is spent each month by volunteers and paid staff across the state to accept Bridge Cards at Michigan farmers markets.

Of our survey respondents, 83% of the people who are primarily responsible for accepting SNAP benefits at farmers markets are paid employees and the remaining 17% are volunteers. On average, an organization facilitating a SNAP program at one or more farmers market has 1.9 paid staff and 1.5 volunteers dedicated to operating the SNAP program. Some organizations have no paid staff, while others have as many as 6 involved in the SNAP program. The median number of staff is two, while the most common number of paid staff is one. Organizations have as few as no volunteers and as many as 6 volunteers involved in the process. The median and most common number of volunteers is one.

Each month a paid staff person spends on average 24 hours managing the SNAP program and each volunteer averages 14 hours. Paid staff spend as few as one hour per month and as many as 105 hours per month. Fifteen hours is the median length of time spent by paid staff each month, while 40 hours is most common. Volunteers spend as few as two and as many as 96 hours per month helping to facilitate SNAP programs at farmers markets. Just over 6 hours is the median amount of time spend by volunteers each month, while 10 hours is the most common.



Each year the US Bureau of Labor Statistics estimates the hourly value of volunteer work. In 2010, the estimated value of one hour of volunteer time in the United States was \$21.36². Based on this value, the total value of volunteer contribution to maintaining successful SNAP programs at Michigan farmers markets is estimated at nearly \$157,000 (14 hours/month* \$21.36/hour*6.8 months/year³*77 markets).

Incentive Programs

In Michigan, the statewide incentive program known as Double Up Food Bucks (DUF) greatly impacts the experience of accepting SNAP benefits at farmers markets. DUFB matched SNAP purchases, up to \$20 per market day, at 42 farmers markets across the state in 2011. Of the markets that responded to this survey, 67% participated in the DUFB program in 2011. Participating markets were asked to rate their experience with the program on a scale of one to five, with one representing a negative experience and five representing a very positive experience. The average rating was 4.64 and comments were overwhelmingly positive.

Outreach Strategies

Market organizers were asked to rank the ten most common outreach strategies based on their effectiveness in creating consumer awareness that their farmers market accepts SNAP benefits. In 2011, the most effective outreach strategies based on their average ranking were as follows:

- Signage and Banners
- Word-of-Mouth
- Working with Community Partners
- Print Media
- Newspaper
- Website
- Social Media
- Educational Events at the Market
- Newsletter
- Radio



New and Innovative Outreach Strategies

Beyond ranking the effectiveness of the most commonly used outreach strategies, respondents were asked to describe any new and innovative outreach strategies they were employing at farmers markets that were accepting Bridge Cards. A sampling of these new and innovative outreach strategies were as follows:

- "Bus ads – expensive but awesome!"
- "We walked around the neighborhood surrounding the market, passed out flyers and talked to people."
- "We offered stipends for resident volunteers to go door-to-door in their neighborhood distributing flyers for the market. This built the face-to-face rapport between neighbors and led to an influx of word-of-mouth buzz in the community. As a result, our average customer attendance doubled this year from last year."
- "Our market received several grants to offer children a free backpack filled with produce. We served over 500 children and their families and also promoted the Bridge Card program."

² Independent Sector. *Value of Volunteer Time Accessed March 30, 2012 from http://www.independentsector.org/volunteer_time.*

³ On average a farmers market accepting Bridge Cards is open 6.8 months each year.

Indicator	2009	2010	2011
Number of farmers markets accepting Bridge Cards	26	49	77
Number of organizations managing farmers markets that accept Bridge Cards	25	42	70
Responses to survey	26	48	55
First year markets	6	21	31
Year round markets	6	6	10
SNAP sales	\$297,077.88	\$705,969.40	\$898,194.75
SNAP sales at first year markets	\$32,488	\$35,645.50	\$50,030.41
Percent of SNAP sales at first year markets	10.9%	5%	2.2%
Range of SNAP sales	\$50-\$100,000	\$50-\$246,791	\$17-\$327,674
Average amount of SNAP sales	\$12,378.25	\$17,219	\$11,665
Median amount of SNAP sales	\$3,333.50	\$1,146	\$1,712.50
Average SNAP sales at first year markets	\$5,414.66	\$2,228	\$1,613.88
Average SNAP sales at experienced markets	\$13,229.49	\$23,940	\$21,632.47
Range of transaction volumes	33-4,175	2-11,816	3-16,160
Total transactions reported across the state	7,335	22,560	51,816
Average transaction volume	489	683	1080
Average transaction volume for first year markets	136	134	160
Average transaction volume for experienced markets	617	1,149	1,631
Average consumer transaction amount	\$17.77	\$16	\$16.40
Average transaction amount for first year markets	\$16.14	\$20	\$17.75



Indicator	2009	2010	2011
Average SNAP transaction amount for experienced markets	\$18.36	\$14	\$15.59
Average SNAP transaction amount for markets participating in DUFB		\$14.51	\$15.54
Average SNAP transaction amount for markets not participating in DUFB		\$16.79	\$17.98
Percent of SNAP sales represented by unredeemed currency statewide	12%	4%	9%
Range of SNAP sales per market represented by unredeemed currency	0-36%	3-22%	2-31%
Number of markets reporting a decrease in SNAP sales from the previous market season	0	3	3
How markets approach vendor participation	26% voluntary 9% encouraged 35% strongly recommended 30% required	2% voluntary 9% encouraged 55% strongly encouraged 30% required	6% voluntary 50% strongly encouraged 30% required 15% encouraged
Average number of eligible vendors per market	31	22	27
Percent of eligible vendors participating statewide	86%	95%	87%
Total number of eligible vendors in the state	517	913	1,405 at responding farmers markets 1967 estimated statewide
Range of the number of eligible vendors per market	10-100	2-125	5-120
Frequency of reimbursement to vendors for SNAP sales	58% weekly 26% bi-weekly 16% monthly 5% other	43% weekly 20% bi-weekly 17% monthly 11% on demand 9% other	38% bi-weekly 32% monthly 23% monthly 4% daily 4% on demand
Percent of markets that accept debit and credit in addition to SNAP	58% credit 53% debit	43% credit 48% debit	43% credit 46% debit of responding farmers markets
Percent of markets utilizing wireless point of sale devices	47%	51%	53%
Accounting methods	63% paper records 53% Microsoft Excel 32% Quickbooks	89% paper records 50% Microsoft Excel 26% Quickbooks	75% paper records 60% Microsoft Excel 16% Quickbooks
Total time per month dedicated to accepting Bridge Cards at Michigan farmers markets		1,715 hours/month	2,946.5 hours/month at responding markets Estimated at 4,000 hours/month statewide

Indicator	2009	2010	2011
Average number of hours per month spent facilitating Bridge Card acceptance at a farmers market		43 hours/month	61 hours/month
Range of time spent facilitating Bridge Card acceptance per farmers market		3-280 hours/month	2-500 hours/month
Percent of people who are primarily responsible for accepting Bridge Cards that are paid employees		81%	83%
Average number of paid staff per market		1.7	1.9
Average number of volunteers per market		1.4	1.5
Range of number of paid staff per market		0-5	0-6
Range of number of volunteers per market		0-25	0-6
Average time spent per month by paid staff at one farmers market		17.24 hours/month	24 hours/month
Range of time spent per month by paid staff at one farmers market		1-80 hours/month/ staff	1-105 hours/month/ staff
Average time spent per month by volunteers at one farmers market		8.83 hours/month	14 hours/month
Range of time spent per month by volunteers at one farmers market		1.2-60 hours/month/ volunteer	2-96 hours/month/ volunteer
Value of volunteer hours spent accepting Bridge Cards at Michigan Farmers Markets based on the US Bureau of Labor Statistics hourly value of volunteer work		\$49,649.15	\$156,577.34
Ranking of most effective outreach strategies	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Signage 2. Word of Mouth 3. Newspapers 4. Flyers 5. Working with Community Partners 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Signage 2. Working with Community Partners 3. Word of Mouth 4. Flyers 5. Newspapers 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Signage and Banners 2. Word of Mouth 3. Working with Community Partners 4. Print Media 5. Newspapers

About the Michigan Farmers Market Association's Food Assistance Partnership

Everyone should have access to fresh, healthy, local food. Farmers markets are a great place to purchase fresh Michigan produce and to connect with local farmers and your community.

The Michigan Farmers Markets 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. Our focus is on those consumers who are eligible for food assistance including the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP); Farmers Market Nutrition Program/Project FRESH for both Women, Infants and Children's (WIC) clients and seniors; and similar programs.



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