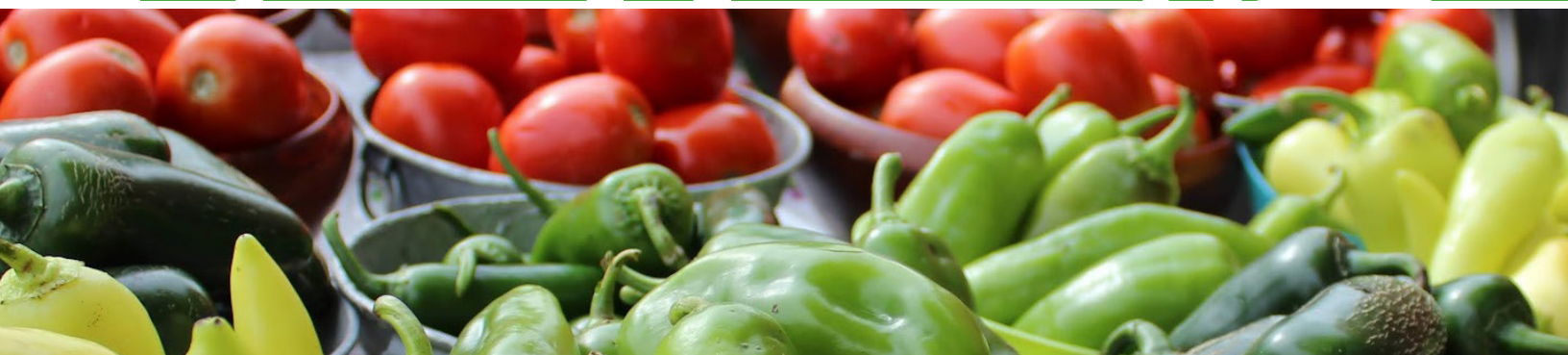




Accepting SNAP Bridge Cards at Michigan Farmers Markets

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- **The Farmers Market Coalition** for gathering together the farmers market community on a national scale to share best practices around market management and accepting food assistance benefits.
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We also thank the 160 farmers markets across Michigan that accept Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits; by working with and for you, we are able to share with other markets how to make this work successful.

Preface

The **Michigan Farmers Market Association (MIFMA)** first compiled this resource in 2009 for managers and organizers of Michigan’s farmers markets in order to increase access to nutritious, locally produced food. Based on collective experiences, it has been revised regularly to reflect our growing expertise with food assistance programs at community-driven marketplaces, including farmers markets.

MIFMA offers opportunities for members to network, share resources, and collaborate to increase access to nutritious, locally produced foods at community-driven marketplaces including farmers markets. Our focus is on increasing access for consumers who are eligible for food assistance programs, such as the **Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)**, the **WIC Farmers Market Nutrition Program (FMNP)**, the **Senior FMNP**, **nutrition incentive programs**, **Produce Prescription Programs**, and similar programs. In Michigan, WIC FMNP is currently known as **Michigan WIC Produce Connection** and formerly as **WIC Project FRESH**, and Senior FMNP is referred to as **Senior Project FRESH**.

In 2006, only three of Michigan’s 150 farmers markets were authorized to accept SNAP. The following year, MIFMA formed a partnership with an eight-member coalition that aimed to increase the number of farmers markets that accept SNAP benefits. Through the work of the then titled Food Assistance Partnership, the number of farmers markets accepting SNAP rose from 11 markets in 2007 to approximately 130 in 2013. Likewise, the value of SNAP benefits redeemed at Michigan farmers markets rose from \$15,833 in 2007 to approximately \$1 million in 2013.



MIFMA continues to work in partnership with many individuals and organizations across the state and country to increase food access through community-driven marketplaces including farmers markets.



MIFMA leads the efforts in Michigan to increase the number of farmers markets accepting food assistance benefits and has helped grow that capacity to have more than 160 farmers markets at the start of 2023 accepting SNAP and more than \$1.6 million in SNAP¹ benefits redeemed at Michigan farmers markets and farm stands in 2020.



Michigan currently leads the Midwest in these efforts and ranks fourth nationally in the number of farmers markets that accept SNAP benefits and fifth in the dollar value of SNAP redeemed at farmers markets annually².



MIFMA supports market managers and organizers in their efforts to welcome food assistance recipients to their markets. By increasing the number of participating community-driven marketplaces, we work to strengthen our local economies and improve access to fresh food for all Michigan families.

¹Food and Nutrition Service U.S. Department of Agriculture. (2021, March). SNAP redemptions report. Food and Nutrition Service U.S. Department of Agriculture. <https://www.fns.usda.gov/snap/redemptions-report-fy-2013-2020>

²United States Department of Agriculture Food and Nutrition Service (2021) Comparison of SNAP Authorized Farmers and Markets FY 2013 and FY 2020. Provided March 2021.



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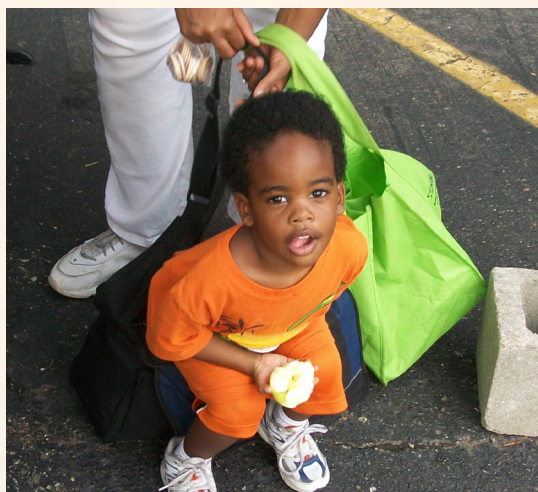
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Jacob Wants a Peach

Monique was running late from work to pick up her son, Jacob, from the Head Start program. Her supervisor had been explaining a special training program coming up that would enable Monique to be promoted to a better-paying position. As a single mom, Monique has to do all she can to support herself and her young child.



As she strapped Jacob into his car seat, he began to cry. “Honey, what’s wrong?” the young mom asked her cranky three-year old. “I want a peach!” Jacob wailed, his eyes filling with tears. “Okay, Jake, okay. We’ll go to the farmers market and get you some peaches right now,” Monique declared, wiping away his tears.

Monique and Jacob are regular shoppers at their neighborhood farmers market. Monique likes the fresh fruit and vegetables she can buy at the market with her SNAP Bridge card, and Jake likes the hustle and bustle of the people at the market, along with the peaches.

Monique and Jake are soon parked in the market parking lot, and off they go to buy some SNAP Bridge card tokens. Monique hands her SNAP Bridge card over to Sue, the market volunteer. “I’d like to get \$10 worth of tokens today,” Monique tells her. Sue swipes the card through the market’s wireless point-of-sale device, punches some buttons, and soon turns the machine around to face Monique. “Enter your PIN, please,” Sue asks Monique. A few more button pushes, and the transaction is complete. The little machine spits out a paper receipt that shows the \$10 purchase, along with the balance Monique has remaining in her SNAP Bridge card account. The market keeps this receipt. Sue then prints a second copy of the receipt and passes it over to Monique, along with ten wooden coins, each worth \$1. All of the vendors at Monique’s market accept these tokens for the purchase of any eligible foods.

Monique and Jacob take their tokens and then move on to the vendor stall, where there are peaches heaped in baskets at the front of his table. “One basket of peaches, please,” Monique tells Harold.

“That will be \$4,” Harold replies, and Monique then hands him four of her \$1 tokens. The peaches go into Monique’s shopping bag, all but the one that she hands to Jacob, who responds with a broad smile as he sets to work consuming his juicy, delicious prize.

Introduction to the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)

The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, or SNAP, is a federal nutrition assistance program administered by the **United States Department of Agriculture Food and Nutrition Service (USDA FNS)**. Based on participants' incomes and family sizes, SNAP provides participants with monthly benefits to purchase approved food items; it is the nation's largest nutrition assistance program. Low-income households are able to use their monthly SNAP benefits to shop for food items at authorized outlets, including farmers markets.

Food Assistance Goes Electronic

Although the program is still often referred to as “food stamps,” the days of the paper food stamps are long gone. SNAP benefits are distributed through an **Electronic Benefits Transfer (EBT)** system that uses plastic cards that work like debit cards. When a shopper uses the card to purchase food, funds are transferred electronically from the shopper's SNAP account to the retailer's account. Because Michigan's EBT card features an image of the Mackinac Bridge, the card is commonly called the **Bridge card**. In Michigan, the **Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS)** administers SNAP and refers to it as the **Food Assistance Program (FAP)**.



Becoming an Authorized Retailer: The Path for Farmers Markets

Most people know that grocery stores and convenience stores are able to accept the SNAP Bridge card for food purchases. What you should know is that community-driven marketplaces, including farm stands and farmers markets, can also accept SNAP benefits as a form of payment for food purchases.

To accept SNAP benefits, a farmers market must submit an application to FNS to become an “authorized retailer.” Retailers can be qualified to accept SNAP if they meet at least one of two criteria for the types and amounts of food products they sell:



- They offer a minimum of 3 items for sale in all of the following categories: breads or grains; dairy; fruits and vegetables; and meat, poultry and fish.
- At least 50% of their total retail sales come from food items in any of the categories listed above.



The application a market submits to FNS for authorization to accept SNAP benefits will ask questions to determine if a market meets one or the other of these qualifications. Most farmers and markets qualify under the second pathway.

In addition to these minimum qualifications for a retailer, only certain types of foods can be purchased using SNAP benefits.

Approved items include³:

- Food or food products for human use such as breads, meat, dairy, cereals, edible seeds, mushrooms, fruit, and vegetables
 - Prepared food items that are packaged in a way that they can be taken home to eat at a later time are eligible for purchase, such as a cupcake that is in a covered/sealed container
- Plants or seeds for use in a home garden to produce food for personal use such as tomato plants

SNAP benefits cannot be used to purchase:

- Beer, wine, or liquor
- Cigarettes or tobacco
- Marijuana and CBD products
- Any nonfood items, such as pet foods, soaps, paper products
- Non-food producing seeds or plants
- Vitamins and medicines
- Hot foods or food that is meant to be eaten at the time and place of purchase

³Food and Nutrition Service U.S. Department of Agriculture. (2023, November 17). What can snap buy?. Food and Nutrition Service U.S. Department of Agriculture. Retrieved from <https://www.fns.usda.gov/snap/eligible-food-items>

Why Should You Accept SNAP at Your Farmers Market?

When you accept SNAP benefits at your farmers market, you help your vendors and shoppers, which strengthens your market.

Vendors Gain Sales

Markets that accept food assistance benefits can see an across-the-board increase in vendor sales. In Michigan, over 1.4 million people received SNAP benefits in November 2022, spending \$362 million on eligible food items that month alone⁴. Total annual SNAP expenditures in 2022 for the state of Michigan exceeded \$4.38 billion⁵. But SNAP dollars can be spent only at authorized retail outlets. By becoming an authorized retail outlet, you make it possible to welcome these dollars into your market. A SNAP program that brings additional revenue into the market may help you recruit and retain vendors. Initiating and supporting programs that increase vendor sales demonstrate a market's dedication to improving the viability of its vendors.



Shoppers Gain Access

Accepting food assistance benefits also helps consumers, particularly those who struggle with food insecurity. Community-driven marketplaces such as farmers markets can be important sources of nutritious foods for families, especially in food insecure areas, where full-service grocery stores are not available.

Providing shoppers who use SNAP with a venue to purchase nutritious, locally produced foods and to interact with the people who produced that food is a valuable service to your community. Personal interactions with producers allow consumers to ask questions about selection, preparation, and storage of fresh goods. It also helps to develop healthy and conscientious consumers.



⁴Department of Human Services (2022) Green Book Report of Key Program Statistics: November 2022 (pp. 4-7). Retrieved from https://www.michigan.gov/mdhhs/-/media/Project/Websites/mdhhs/Inside-MDHHS/Reports-and-Statistics---Human-Services/Green-Book/2022_11_GreenBook.pdf?rev=b658a7b969634e64aadb9e9c8532a320

⁵Food and Nutrition Service U.S. Department of Agriculture. (2023, July 27). Snap retailer management year end summary dashboard. Food and Nutrition Service U.S. Department of Agriculture. Retrieved from <https://www.fns.usda.gov/data/snap-retailer-management-dashboard>

Is This Something You Want to Do?

As a market manager or organizer, you know how much work goes into creating a successful farmers market. Every task, from collecting stall fees to conflict resolution, requires time, energy, and money. Accepting food assistance benefits at your market is no different. Resources are always scarce, so it is important that you give careful consideration before your market enters into this commitment. Please read the entire manual before you get started, so you have a clear understanding of the process from start to finish.

This resource manual guides you through the process of deciding if accepting SNAP is right for your market. It will help you understand the resources needed to accept food assistance benefits and to gauge whether your market has the time, energy, and capital necessary to make the program successful.

Before starting this process, consider the following:

Capacity of Staff and Volunteers:

The process of setting up your SNAP acceptance will take time. There will be ongoing duties and day to day basic operations. We know that market managers are already very busy. It is very important to make sure your market has the staff and volunteer capacity to set up and operate the program.

Cost:

Participating markets need financial resources to purchase **alternative redemption systems** (tokens or paper scrip) and other materials/equipment. Can your market cover these costs? Where will the market gain the financial resources necessary to incorporate this program into its operation?

Organizational Capacity:

What is the organizational capacity of your market? Do you have the ability to keep good records and reimburse vendors on a timely basis? If not, are there other organizations that would be interested in partnering with you to undertake these activities?



If your market is already thriving and has the organizational capacity to support smooth operations, then adding a food assistance program is probably a good fit for your market. However, if your market is currently struggling with aspects of market development, like vendor recruitment and retention, consumer outreach, and financial support, then now may not be the best time for you to take on the SNAP program. Your energy and resources are probably better spent developing a stronger, more stable market, with the goal of becoming an authorized SNAP retailer somewhere down the road. You can learn more about MIFMA's educational programming for market managers at the [MIFMA website](#).



How to Use this Resource Manual

This resource manual will help you decide if your market should accept food assistance benefits. If you decide to become an authorized SNAP retailer, it will assist you in implementing this food assistance program.

This guide is divided into sections. The first section explains the steps you will need to take to develop a SNAP redemption program at your market. The remainder of the manual is devoted to topics relevant to the maintenance and improvement of your SNAP program, such as working with vendors, covering the costs associated with the program, recordkeeping, working with volunteers, and promotion and outreach.

After reading this manual, you will probably still have questions. That's why we've included a list of organizations that can provide you with more information – see the lists of contacts at the end of this manual. There's also a resource list at the end that identifies further sources of information, as well as a glossary that covers useful terms, programs, and acronyms.

Finally, this resource has evolved through the years as the result of the collective experiences of many of the Michigan market managers who are members of MIFMA. Our aim is to enable more markets to accept food assistance benefits. If we have left out information that you think is useful, join the conversation: please let us know, so we can include your expertise in the next version of this document. You can contact MIFMA by phone at 517-432-3381 or through our website at www.mifma.org.

This manual was revised and printed in February 2024. For the most up-to-date information, please contact MIFMA and/or visit www.mifma.org.

Setting Up a SNAP Bridge Card Redemption Program at Your Market

First Things First: How Will You Set Up Your SNAP Program?

To start a SNAP redemption program at your market, you'll need answers to these questions:

- Who will be responsible for administering the program?
- Which system will shoppers use to redeem their benefits at the market?

These two issues are intimately related. The resources and unique conditions at each market will determine the most appropriate arrangements for that market. Once you answer these two questions, it will be clear who should submit the application for authorization to FNS. As the prevalence of **SNAP incentive programs** like the Double Up Food Bucks program grows across Michigan, you may also want to consider how an incentive program would be implemented when organizing your SNAP redemption program.

Step 1: Designating a Responsible Party and Choosing a Program Model

The first step in developing a SNAP redemption program at your market is determining who will be responsible for the administration of the program. Since the responsible party will be legally responsible for the appropriate handling of SNAP funds and may be required to submit their social security number with the FNS application, this decision is a serious one.



FNS has clear, but strict, expectations of retailers who accept SNAP benefits. The responsible party must enforce FNS rules and regulations and keep specific records in case there is an audit of the SNAP program. If an error does occur, authorization to accept SNAP benefits can be revoked and your market could be penalized if the error is found to be the result of intentional misconduct or negligence. In general, it is understood that unintentional errors occur, and if proper steps are taken to correct the situation and prevent it from happening again, penalties can be avoided.

Because of the level of responsibility associated with this role, you should carefully consider who will be designated the responsible party for your SNAP program.

Below we describe three models for administering the SNAP program at farmers markets, each with different implications as to who is ultimately responsible to FNS:

- 1) Individual Vendor Model
- 2) Farmers Market Central Terminal Model
- 3) Partnership Organization Model

A wide variety of Michigan farmers markets use these models to organize their SNAP programs. We also provide specific examples of Michigan markets that are currently or have used these models in the past to accept SNAP.

As you read the descriptions and explanations, you can think about which model will best suit your situation.

Individual Vendor Model Example: Flint Farmers' Market

At the Flint Farmers' Market, individual vendors who sell eligible food products are authorized to accept SNAP by USDA FNS. Each individual vendor uses their own **point-of-sale device (POSD)** and is therefore able to conduct transactions directly with SNAP consumers. Flint originally adopted this model because the market did not have staff consistently available during all market hours to complete SNAP transactions. **This model for administering SNAP programs at farmers markets allows the responsibility to reside with individual vendors at the market. Vendors who sell eligible food products at a farmers market complete their own applications to become approved retailers by USDA FNS.** Once authorized, the vendors can then obtain their own POSDs and carry out transactions directly with SNAP clients.



This individual vendor model allows shoppers using SNAP to skip the step involving a central POSD and an alternative redemption system. Instead, SNAP consumers present their SNAP Bridge cards directly to vendors and complete their purchases directly with them. This system also allows payments to be made directly to vendors instead of through the market, thus absolving the market of responsibility for reimbursing vendors for their SNAP sales.

Vendors like this system because the federal funds go directly into vendors' bank accounts within 48 hours of the transactions being processed. However, under this system, vendors will be responsible for the cost of obtaining POSDs and paying any bank processing fees, unless another entity can be secured to support these costs on behalf of the vendors.

Farmers Market Central Terminal Model Example: Downtown Marquette Farmers Market

The Downtown Marquette Farmers Market is organized by the Marquette Downtown Development Authority (DDA). At this market, the market manager is responsible for the SNAP Bridge card program and facilitates the program by completing SNAP Bridge card transactions at the Market Manager Booth.

The operating organization of the market, the DDA in this case, takes responsibility for managing the federal funds needed to reimburse vendors for their SNAP Bridge card sales. Federal funds from the SNAP program are deposited into a bank account held by the DDA. The DDA writes reimbursement checks from this account to participating vendors at the end of every month.

With this model, the responsibility for creating and managing the SNAP program lies with the operating organization of the market. The market facilitates SNAP Bridge card transactions using one central POSD and is responsible for reimbursing vendors with the federal funds obtained from those transactions. **If a central terminal model is to be used at the market to accept SNAP benefits, USDA FNS expects the operating organization to apply for authorization on behalf of the farmers market.** The operating organization may sponsor the farmers market, employ the farmers market manager, and/or host the board of directors that manage the market.



Once FNS approves the application, the market becomes an authorized retailer. You will receive a seven-digit authorization number and SNAP permit from USDA FNS. This authorization allows the market to accept SNAP Bridge cards on behalf of any vendor at the market who sells approved food items.

To implement this administrative model, the market needs one POSD and an alternative redemption system. A single, centrally located POSD is used to swipe the shoppers' SNAP Bridge cards, thus drawing funds from their SNAP accounts when they make purchases at the market, and depositing those funds into the market's designated bank account. The funds deposited into the market's bank account will be used by the market to reimburse individual vendors for their SNAP sales.

An alternative redemption system like tokens or paper scrip is used to keep track of vendors' SNAP sales. At the end of the market day, vendors turn in to the market manager the tokens they have collected from shoppers. The market manager issues a receipt to each vendor for their redeemed tokens. The alternative redemption system allows market managers to tally the reimbursements due to vendors for their SNAP sales.

Partnership Organization Model

Example: Downtown Ypsilanti Farmers Market

The Downtown Ypsilanti Farmers Market began as a partnership between four different entities: the Washtenaw County Public Health Department, the Ypsilanti Food Co-op, Michigan State University Extension, and Growing Hope, a nonprofit organization in the community. **Each partner played an important role in the market including Growing Hope, which was responsible for managing the day-to-day operations of the market, while the Ypsilanti Food Co-op was responsible for managing the food assistance programs at the market.**

When the market first began, the Ypsilanti Food Co-op was the FNS authorized retailer for the market and operated one wireless POSD at the market to benefit all of the participating vendors. The Co-op's bank account received the federal funds obtained through SNAP Bridge card sales at the market, and the Co-op reimbursed the vendors at the end of every month.

Although management of the market and the food assistance programs operating there now both fall under Growing Hope, this Partnership Organization Model worked well for the market for many years.



Notice that this model also uses **one central POSD and an alternative redemption system to conduct SNAP transactions**. However, a partner organization receives the federal funds and is responsible for reimbursing the vendors. The process is identical to that of the Downtown Marquette Farmers Market described above as an example of the Farmers Market Central Terminal Model. The only difference is that a partner organization is responsible for reimbursing the vendors and as such, responsibility for the program with FNS lies with a partner organization instead of with the operating organization of the farmers market.

This partnership organization model is useful in situations where the market is associated with or works closely with another community organization. If the community organization is strongly committed to food access or to serving SNAP-eligible populations, they may be willing to administer the SNAP program on behalf of the market.



In this model, the partner organization applies for authorized status from FNS and obtains a POSD that is used for accepting Bridge cards at the market. Federal SNAP funds are deposited into a bank account held by the partner organization. The partner organization is responsible for reimbursing vendors for their Bridge card sales. As with the Farmers Market Central Terminal model, an alternative redemption system (tokens or paper scrip) is used to track the value of SNAP sales from individual vendors so that the partner organization can distribute reimbursements to the vendors from the funds they received from the Bridge card transaction.

If your organization manages multiple markets, do you have to complete a “Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program Application for Stores” for each market?

Yes. An FNS authorization number is assigned when the market’s “Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program Application for Farmers Markets” is approved. Each market location must have its own FNS authorization number and therefore an application must be submitted for each new market location where SNAP benefits will be accepted. There are exceptions to this rule for Direct Marketing Farmers and “Delivery Routes,” more commonly called “Mobile Markets.” These retailer categories must provide a list of their locations to FNS and utilize a POSD that has the capabilities to track location.



Step 2: Completing the USDA FNS Application

After deciding to implement SNAP acceptance at your market, the next step is to apply to the USDA FNS for authorization to accept SNAP benefits. Based on your decision about who will be responsible for the SNAP program at your market, either the individual farmers, the operating organization of the market, or the partner organization that will be implementing the program will complete the application.

Once you submit your application and it is approved, you will receive an official seven-digit FNS authorization number and permit to accept SNAP benefits in exchange for qualifying products. SNAP purchases authorize the transfer of shoppers' government benefits from a federal account to a retailer's account as payment for their purchases.

As an authorized retailer, you are responsible for ensuring that products sold to shoppers using SNAP qualify as allowable purchases. Selling products that are not permitted under SNAP regulations, such as hot prepared foods, can result in penalties, including loss of FNS authorization. This penalty applies to individual vendors and to markets accepting benefits on behalf of its vendors. In the case of the latter, it remains true if only a single vendor is found in violation. For this reason, it is very important that you train individual vendors about proper procedures and SNAP benefit redemption rules and create SNAP procedures that are clearly explained in your market policy.

FNS recommends that you complete the application to become an authorized SNAP retailer online at www.fns.usda.gov/snap/apply-to-accept. In order to complete the application online, you will first need to designate a username and password. Once you receive a confirmation email that your account has been created, then you can return to the link above to log in and begin completing the application. Please note that you do not need additional USDA account authorization to complete this application; you only need a username and password.

The next section of this resource manual explains the application process and timeline.

The USDA defines farmers markets as “multi-stall markets at which farmer-producers sell food products they produced (fruits, vegetables, meat, dairy, grains, etc.) directly to the general public, at a central or fixed location.”⁶

Advice for Completing the FNS Application



There are two applications for retailers:

- ▶ **Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program Application for Stores:** Community-driven marketplaces that do not meet the definition of a farmers market, including individual farmers, CSA programs, and mobile markets, should complete this application.
- ▶ **Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program Application for Farmers Markets:** Community-driven marketplaces that meet the definition of a farmers market, including operating organizations or partner organizations applying to accept SNAP on behalf of 2 or more vendors at a central location, should complete this application.



⁶United States Department of Agriculture Food and Nutrition Service (2024) SNAP Retailer Application. Retrieved from <https://www.fns.usda.gov/snap/apply-to-accept>

USDA FNS provides step-by-step instructions on their website for completing the online farmers markets SNAP authorization application.

Below is additional guidance on how to answer some of the questions on the application.

Question: Ownership Type

This question asks you to indicate your market's "type of ownership." To answer this question, you should select the type that applies most closely to your farmers market. Here are the definitions of the ownership types:

- **Privately Held Corporation:** a corporation owned by a few people for which shares have no public market.
- **Publicly Owned Corporation:** a private company that has a class of shares traded in the public market.
- **Sole Proprietorship:** a business or financial venture that is carried on by a single person and is not a trust or corporation. A sole proprietor (sole owner) has unlimited liability.
- **Partnership:** a form of business organization created by an agreement between two or more persons who contribute capital and/or their services to the organization.
- **Limited Liability Company (LLC):** a business form that provides limited personal liability, as a corporation does. Owners, who are called members, can be other corporations.
- **Nonprofit Organization:** an organization that conducts business for the benefits of the general public and is therefore granted tax-exempt status by the Internal Revenue Service (IRS)

If you are a nonprofit organization, documentation of nonprofit status must be submitted with the application (i.e. IRS exemption letter or Articles of Incorporation for a Domestic Non-Profit Corporation).

- **Government Owned:** a government owned and operated facility for the purpose of providing some goods or service to citizens. This includes city, town, county or municipal ownership.

Most farmers markets are either government owned (municipal, town, county), managed by a nonprofit, or sole proprietorships. Sole proprietorships include a loosely connected group of vendors in which there is no legal association, but for which a single market manager is taking responsibility for the group.

Question: Responsible Official Information

If there is a governing board of some sort for your market, is it sufficient to provide information about its officers rather than about each board member?

Yes. Provide information for at least one of the officers. If there are no officers or board members, provide information for the market manager.

Is someone required to provide photo identification and their social security number?

Unless a farmers market is managed by a nonprofit or a unit of government, someone with the market must provide photo identification and their social security number. Whether they are an officer, board member, or a market manager, photo identification and documentation of social security number must be provided to FNS for the individual responsible for the operation of the SNAP program at the farmers market. Markets managed by a nonprofit or a unit of government will be asked instead to provide the Employer Identification Number (EIN) as an alternative to providing a social security number.

Question: Retail Sales

Can I estimate my market's retail sales?
If so, how do I estimate my market's annual sales?

Yes, if you do not track vendor sales at your market you can enter an estimate for this question. There are multiple ways to estimate your annual retail sales. For a farmers market with multiple vendors, one of the most accurate ways to estimate annual retail sales is to ask all of your vendors to estimate how much they sell in a month (in dollars), then multiply their estimates by the number of months your market is open. Add all the vendor estimates to calculate your annual retail sales.

Supporting Materials to Submit with the Application

Supporting documents, including a business license (if applicable) and photo identification, must be uploaded to the online application. To ensure timely processing of your FNS application, fill out the online application form completely and correctly. Take the time to completely review the information you've provided in the application before submitting it. We also recommend keeping a copy of the application for backup purposes and as a record of what information was provided to FNS.

Along with the application, supporting documents help FNS staff understand who you are and therefore will assist in faster processing of your application. Submit the following materials with your application:



- **Certification and Signature Statement** generated from the online application and signed by a Responsible Official.
- **Copies of photo identification** for all owners, partners, officers and Responsible Officials listed on the application. Photocopies of driver's licenses or Michigan state IDs will fulfill this requirement.
- **Social Security Number verification** for all owners, partners, officers, and Responsible Officials listed on the application, and in community property states for spouses, must be provided unless your market is managed by either a nonprofit or a unit of government. Photocopies of social security cards will fulfill this requirement.
- **Copy of one current license required to operate your business in your name.** Copies of a health permit, food inspection permit, sales tax permit, seller's permit, lottery license, or beer or wine license can all be accepted.

This may not pertain to most farmers markets. Some municipalities will issue a license to operate a market while others do not; there is no license required by the Michigan state government to operate a farmers market. If you have a local business operator's/seller's/vendor's license, you may submit that with your application. If you do not have a local permit, provide a statement that no local permit is required and that is why you are not submitting one.
- If owned by a nonprofit organization, a **copy of IRS 501(c)(3) determination letter.**
- If your market is sponsored by a unit of government, an **official letter declaring the governmental unit as the market owner** is also requested. For example, if the market is managed by a township, a letter on township letterhead acknowledging that the township manages the farmers market signed by the township supervisor would be appropriate.

Keep in mind that FNS processes thousands of retail store applications each year. They receive only a small number of applications from farmers markets to become SNAP retailers. In 2021, FNS reported that more than 6,100 of their authorized SNAP retailers were classified as farmers markets or direct marketing farmers, accounting for only 2.4% of total authorized retailers nationwide⁷.

FNS wants to process applications from farmers markets as quickly as possible. During the application process, you may be asked to provide additional documentation, such as a list of vendors. Failure to comply with any request for information will likely result in the denial of your application. Incomplete applications will not be processed, delaying the review of your market's application and authorization to accept SNAP benefits.



⁷United States Department of Agriculture Food and Nutrition Service FY 2021 Year End Report. Retrieved from <https://fns-prod.azureedge.us/sites/default/files/resource-files/2021-snap-retailer-management-year-end-summary.pdf>.

I've Submitted My Application: Now What Happens?

Once you submit the application to FNS for authorization to accept SNAP and all additional documents, **FNS has up to 45 days to approve or deny your application for a SNAP permit.** A FNS representative may contact you with additional questions or visit your location to make sure it is eligible to participate. After you've submitted your application, you can check on its status by returning to the application portal. It is recommended to check in weekly. Once your application is accepted, you can begin implementing a SNAP program as soon as you receive your acceptance email from FNS.



If your application is denied because your market does not meet the eligibility criteria, you must wait six months before you can submit a new application.

If you are approved by FNS and the information you submitted on your application changes, you must update the information by contacting the USDA FNS Retailer helpline at 1-877-823-4369. You will need to provide them with your FNS number so that they can attribute the changes to your permit.

Step 3: Obtaining a Point-of-Sale Device (POSD)

As a FNS authorized retailer, the most important tool you will need is a POSD. A POSD may be a small machine that has a keypad and through which you can process an EBT, credit, or debit card, or you may use an app on a smart device with one or more attachments. EBT technology makes it possible for funds to be transferred electronically from the federal government to the bank accounts of authorized retailers per the request of the clients receiving benefits. All authorized retailers need to have a checking account for funds to be transferred to.



Like a debit card, a SNAP Bridge card calls for a certain amount of funds to be transferred electronically from one financial institution to another. A POSD is necessary to read the SNAP Bridge card and to allow the shopper to input their Personal Identification Number (PIN) to authorize the payment. The POSD will confirm that the client has the funds in their account to cover the total sale amount, and then will transfer the money to the account associated with the machine, for example, the checking account for the farmers market.

Funds are transferred within 48 hours from the federal government to the responsible party's account (72 hours if a banking holiday interferes). You should not worry that the client doesn't have sufficient funds to cover their transaction, because the POSD machine will deny the transaction if that is the case. The machine provides a receipt that shows the denial, along with the client's actual account balance.



Selecting Your Point-of-Sale Device



How Does my Market Obtain a Point-of-Sale Device?

Federal statute requires that farmers markets and direct marketing farmers be provided with a hardwired device that they can use to accept SNAP benefits without incurring any costs. These devices must be plugged into a landline phone line and electricity to operate. **To access one of these devices, contact the state agency that implements the SNAP program in your state.** Because many markets do not have access to these devices where they operate and because other advantages exist for utilizing wireless devices, hardwired devices have been rendered nearly extinct in farm-direct settings. While your market may still be able to access a free, hardwired device from your state, we recommend investigating options for obtaining a more modern wireless device for increased functionality and access to better shopper service.

The information in this section will help you determine what kind of POSD is best for your farmers market and from where you can access one.

Understanding Wireless Device Options

POSDs can operate without being plugged in based on two different kinds of connections: 1) utilizing cell-phone technology for data transfer, or 2) utilizing wireless internet access, or Wi-Fi, to complete transactions via the Internet. These mechanisms are not the same. Usually, a wireless machine will use a cell-phone signal; however, POSDs that use the internet are also available and could be beneficial if your market is located in an area with access to reliable wireless internet service. If the machine uses cell-phone technology, be sure to ask which service provider it uses to make sure the provider covers your geographic area.

Michigan's State-Funded Option for Wireless Devices

MIFMA has advocated for the State of Michigan to provide wireless devices at no cost to farmers and farmers markets that accept SNAP Bridge cards. The State of Michigan provided funding in both 2018 and again in 2021 that will remain available until at least September 30, 2025. MIFMA is currently working with Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) to utilize this state appropriated funding to provide no-cost wireless POSDs to direct marketing farmers and farmers markets. This funding covers the initial cost of the equipment and the ongoing fees associated with processing SNAP transactions. The retailer is responsible for any fees associated with credit or debit card transactions if they choose to also accept these payment methods through the available devices. This does require that your retail location either have a strong cell signal or access to Wi-Fi where SNAP transactions are conducted. You can learn more about this equipment and apply to receive a device at <https://mifma.org/for-markets/food-assistance/#SNAP>.



Other Options for Accessing a POSD

Since 2012, it has also been a priority of USDA FNS to assist farmers and farmers markets in obtaining the wireless point of sale devices necessary for accepting SNAP benefits in locations where access to phone lines and electricity were not available. Currently, USDA FNS is working with the National Association of Farmers Markets Nutrition Programs (NAFMNP) to provide farmers markets and direct marketing farmers with access to a mobile app through their MarketLink program, covering fees for one to two years. You can learn more about the national program by visiting www.marketlink.org.

Farmers markets in need of a specialized POSD also have the option to purchase, lease, or rent a device from a wide variety of companies. If you choose to pursue this option, you should do some research to find a company that best suits the needs of your operation. When you are speaking to potential **Third-Party Processors (TPPs)**, you should make clear that you are interested in accepting SNAP Bridge cards/EBT. Not all TPPs are equipped to process EBT transactions and they might assume you are interested only in accepting credit and/or debit cards.

A great place to start when you are looking for a TPP is your local bank. Use your relationship with them to see what services they can offer or what recommendations they can make as to which company you should work with.

Purchase, Rent, or Lease?

A wireless POSD can be purchased, rented, or leased. Each option comes with advantages and disadvantages. The following table identifies some of the most important considerations, but you should also consider aspects that are unique to your own situation before making a decision.

| Purchasing a POSD | | Renting or Leasing a POSD | |
|--|---|---|---|
| Positive | Negative | Positive | Negative |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • One-time initial investment • Cost can often be covered by a one-time grant, sponsorship, or donation | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Capital investment ranging from \$500 to \$1200 • You own the machine and are responsible for its maintenance, storage in the off- season, and possible necessary upgrades | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No initial capital investment • The company owns the machine and is responsible for maintenance and necessary upgrades • You may be allowed to turn it in at the end of the season and not be responsible for storage | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can cost \$50 or more per month in addition to transaction fees • Funding must be sustained over time • Some companies may not allow you to suspend service during months when your market is not operating or allow you to rent seasonally |

Just like with all technology, options for POSDs are always changing and evolving. The best advice we can offer is to explore all the options fully and determine what is best for your farmers market. Talk to other vendors, market managers, and mobile merchants to see what they recommend. Ask lots of questions!

Is there an App I can use to accept SNAP benefits on a Smartphone?

As of 2023, USDA FNS has approved one app that has been designed to process SNAP transactions. The app is called TotiPay Go and was created by the Novo Dia Group of Austin, Texas. The app is currently available for IOS and Android devices. Individuals wanting to utilize this app can do so through a contract with a program called MarketLink that works with a company called WorldPay Inc to process transactions. Find out more at www.marketlink.org.



What Can the Market Expect to Pay in Merchant Fees?

All POSDs, except the free state-funded equipment available in Michigan, incur some transaction and monthly fees. In the industry, these fees are referred to as “Retail Merchant Account Fees” and can include transaction fees, statement fees, application fees, and monthly minimums.

| Retail Merchant Account Fee | Range of Possible Costs ⁸ |
|--|--|
| Application Fee | Up to \$100- One-time fee for new shoppers |
| Wireless Network Access Fee | \$15-50 per month |
| Monthly Minimum | \$5-20 per month |
| Monthly Service Fee | \$5-10 per month (May be charged once annually) |
| Payment Card Industry (PCI) Compliance | \$10-30 per month (if annual survey is not successfully completed) |
| EBT Transaction Fee | \$0.04-0.20 per transaction |
| Batch Fee | Up to \$0.25 per “Batch” receipt |

Before signing a contract, carefully read the service application and/or ask for a sample billing statement to see what charges you will be subject to.

POSD Troubleshooting

As is the case with most technological devices, there will be times when your POSD does not seem to work properly. This Troubleshooting Guide addresses some common problems.



⁸These examples are based on information collected from third-party processors responding to a Request for Proposals from the Michigan Farmers Markets Food Assistance Partnership in May 2010. Based on experience working with third-party processors and farmers markets since 2010, these ranges of possible costs are still relevant.

POSD Troubleshooting Guide

What to do if...

A SNAP Bridge card won't scan. SNAP Bridge cards are often difficult to scan. You may need to enter the SNAP Bridge card number into the POSD by hand. To enter the SNAP Bridge card number manually, refer to your POSD instruction manual and/or follow the on-screen prompts.

Trouble processing a SNAP Bridge card may also be due to the fact that the Bridge card you are attempting to swipe is from the WIC program. In Michigan, three different food assistance programs use an EBT Bridge Card: Summer EBT for Children, WIC, and SNAP. Make sure that when you are processing a SNAP transaction, the shopper is using their SNAP or Summer EBT for Children Bridge card, not a WIC Bridge card.

A SNAP Bridge card is denied. A SNAP Bridge card is denied when the cardholder's account does not contain sufficient funds. In the event that a SNAP Bridge card is denied, you should not dispense tokens or complete the sale. Instead, you can direct the shopper to pay with a different currency or reduce the dollar amount of their purchase based on their remaining card balance.

You are having trouble with your data connection. For wireless devices, check that you have a connection to a local cell tower or a Wi-Fi network. If you have a wired device, check your phone line or network cable as it connects to the jack. You may want to keep a spare or shorter one on hand in case the first one breaks. A broken cable will make it impossible to conduct transactions with a hardwired POSD. See the next section on using manual vouchers as a back-up. If the problem cannot be fixed on-site, you may need to contact your phone service provider and arrange for a technician to come examine and/or repair your utilities after your operations close for the day.

The POSD does not power on or process transactions. You can process SNAP Bridge cards manually by calling an automated processing center. You will need to fill out vouchers when processing EBT manually. After the automated processing center approves the transaction, you can dispense tokens to the shopper.

An Alternative or Back-Up to a Point-of-Sale Device: Manual Vouchers

Manual vouchers can be used by authorized retailers to process SNAP transactions without the use of a POSD. They can only be used as a back-up in case a problem occurs with a wired or wireless POSD.

To process SNAP transactions with manual vouchers, you must follow a two-step process:

- ▶ Use a carbon copy receipt provided to you by your TPP to collect the necessary information. You will need to call an automated processing center and enter all of this information to confirm the transaction. Once the transaction is authorized, you will record an authorization number on the receipt and a hold will be placed on the cardholder's account for that dollar value. Do NOT collect and record any information (such as the shopper's PIN number) that is not requested on the manual voucher.
- ▶ To complete the transfer of funds, manual vouchers must be mailed to a processing center or entered into a POSD within an allotted time frame (usually 4-10 business days). The funds will not be transferred to your account until you complete this second step.

The process takes 3-5 minutes per transaction and requires that you have a phone onsite. We recommend that you have manual vouchers at the market in case a problem arises. That way your ability to accept SNAP benefits is not disrupted if a problem occurs with your POSD. Manual vouchers can be obtained from the TPP you are working with.

Please note that not all TPPs allow manual voucher transactions, and not all devices are able to clear the vouchers as required by current processes. Check with your TPP to see if this option is available to your market.

Online SNAP

Starting in the spring of 2020, USDA FNS began allowing approved retailers the ability to accept SNAP for online purchases. Previously, all SNAP purchases were required to be made in person, face to face. This new process is still being rolled out by FNS, however retailers can learn more about the process by visiting <https://www.fns.usda.gov/snap/online-purchasing-pilot>.

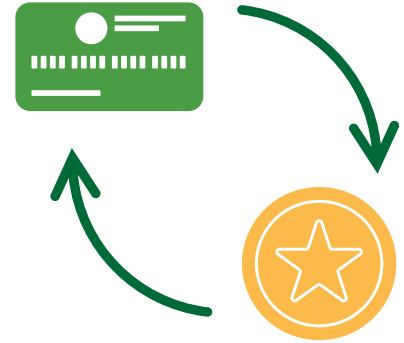
When considering processing SNAP for online purchases, please note that SNAP benefits cannot be used for any non-food items, and this includes common delivery or processing fees associated with online marketplaces. As FNS is developing this new capacity for the SNAP program, it can take considerably longer to become authorized for online SNAP payments than it typically takes for regular SNAP authorization. The retailer's website is required to go through thorough reviews to make sure it meets all FNS requirements which can take 3 months or more.



Step 4: Setting Up an Alternative Redemption System at a Farmers Market

When the entire farmers market uses only one POSD, the farmers market must set up an alternative redemption system to allow the market to track the SNAP sales carried out by each vendor and to reimburse each vendor appropriately.

The alternative redemption system requires shoppers shopping with SNAP Bridge cards to come to a central location where they exchange their SNAP benefits for a currency used by the farmers market, usually wooden or metal tokens or paper scrip. This type of system is called an alternative redemption system because it uses a currency that is accepted only in your market. The alternative redemption system can take one of two forms: (1) tokens or paper scrip or (2) receipts. The type of alternative redemption system you choose will depend on the organization and resources of your market. FNS SNAP policy requires that any token or scrip be in physical form and does not allow for any electronic, digital, or card-based currencies.



Tokens or Paper Scrip

Most alternative redemption systems use either tokens (also referred to as wooden nickels) or paper scrip as an alternative currency. Here's how it works: The shopper approaches the central POSD run by a farmers market staff member or volunteer. The shopper then decides how much of their SNAP benefits they would like to spend at the market that day. The staff member or volunteer processes the SNAP Bridge card transaction using the central POSD and enters the amount the shopper requests before instructing the shopper to enter their PIN. The POSD will indicate if the amount is authorized and a receipt will be printed by the POSD. The staff member or volunteer then gives the shopper the number of tokens or paper scrip equal to the amount that has been approved.



The shopper can then spend the tokens/scrip on eligible products with vendors selling that day. Vendors accept the tokens or paper scrip for eligible products just like they would accept cash, except that they cannot provide cash change. The vendors turn the tokens or paper scrip in to the staff member or bookkeeper, usually on a daily or weekly basis, and they are reimbursed according to a predetermined schedule.

The farmers market operating organization reimburses vendors with the federal funds obtained through the SNAP Bridge card transactions made through the POSD. Under this system, the market must provide the tokens or paper scrip that will be used.

Tokens

Tokens are commonly made out of wood, aluminum, or plastic and can be ordered online from a variety of companies that make promotional giveaway items. If you would like a recommendation for where to purchase tokens, you can contact MIFMA. Wooden tokens are cheaper than metal coins, but must be counted by hand. Metal or brass coins are considerably more expensive, but last longer and can be counted using a coin counter.

Careful consideration should be given to the design of tokens. Tokens should be unique, appealing, easily recognizable, and instructional. Tokens should show the name of your farmers market and/or the market's logo (if one exists), and the phrases "Eligible Food Items Only" and "No Change Given".



As more and more farmers markets accept SNAP, you should be sure to consider the design of tokens of nearby farmers markets to ensure that your tokens can be easily distinguished from other tokens circulating in your area. FNS does not require that tokens be serialized, as that feature often doubles the cost of purchasing the tokens. However, serialization is encouraged, since it helps protect against fraud. Because the tokens are usually close to the same size and diameter as a poker chip, many markets find it helpful to use poker-chip counting tubes and storage devices to organize their tokens.

Paper Scrip

As an alternative to the bulky and sometimes expensive token system, you can design and print your own paper scrip. Markets find it helpful to use perforated business card templates to make printing and separating scrip easy. FNS requires that scrip be serialized to deter duplication. Markets also find that laminating the scrip can help deter duplication and extend the longevity of the paper scrip.



Differentiating Currencies and Providing Change

If your market accepts a number of different payment types such as credit cards and SNAP, a different token or paper scrip system is necessary for each one, and the various forms of currency must be distinguishable from each other. One way to distinguish currencies is to make tokens or paper scrip different colors or sizes for different types of payment. For example, paper scrip for credit card purchases could be green, while scrip for SNAP is blue. Color-coding enables easy recognition of various payment types, especially during busy market hours.

The distinction among currencies is important because different forms of currency can be used to purchase different items and are subject to different rules when it comes to providing change. Cash, for example, can be given as change for credit card purchases, but not for SNAP purchases. To avoid giving change, it is best to encourage shoppers using SNAP to buy in even dollar amounts and to ask vendors to work with shoppers to round up or down to the nearest whole dollar.

Crediting Unspent SNAP Tokens/Scrip

If a shopper using SNAP does not spend the entire value of the scrip or tokens purchased that day, the shopper is legally entitled to return the tokens to the market and ask that the unspent SNAP benefits be credited back to their account. The market must be willing to credit unspent SNAP benefits back to the shopper's SNAP Bridge card. Please note: Unspent SNAP benefits may only be credited back to the shopper's SNAP account before the POSD is batched out at the end of the day. Your market is not obligated to extend that same service to credit and debit shoppers. Most of the time, however, shoppers using SNAP retain the tokens and spend them at the market the next week.

Keeping Currency Safe

Tokens and paper scrip are an alternative to cash at a farmers market. Just like cash, these forms of currency need to be managed carefully. This point must be emphasized because the tokens or scrip look like "play money." They are real money and must be treated like U.S. currency – watched over, guarded, and locked up when appropriate.

When designing tokens and paper scrip, make sure that they cannot be easily duplicated and that scrip is printed on paper or a medium that is not capable of being photocopied. Placing sequential serial numbers on all paper scrip is required and numbering tokens is recommended by FNS to help prevent fraud and ensure that the market and vendors are properly reimbursed. You may also want to incorporate sideways or upside-down letters or symbols into your design as they are not easily replicated.

It is necessary to find a secure place to store the POSD, tokens or scrip, and supplies when not in use and to identify a person who is responsible for their proper storage. Keep tokens or paper scrip secured in a cash box, storage box, or safe. Do not leave tokens or paper scrip unattended. Ensure that every vendor at your market is aware of and follows the procedures for handling and redeeming currency.

Outstanding or Unredeemed Tokens or Paper Scrip

One thing you need to be aware of when using an alternative redemption system is the phenomenon of outstanding or unredeemed tokens or scrip. Tokens are unredeemed when they have been purchased by shoppers but not (yet) turned in to the market for redemption by any vendors.

For example, if your market sold \$100 worth of SNAP Bridge card tokens in a day, but your vendors turned in only \$80 worth of SNAP Bridge card tokens at the end of that market day, there are \$20 worth of unredeemed tokens circulating, somewhere "out there." They may be in the pockets and purses of your shoppers, waiting to be spent in the coming weeks. Or they may have been spent by the shoppers but are now in the cash boxes of your vendors, who are waiting to turn them in next week or next month or at some later date in the future. Or, the tokens may be lost and will never show up again.

In the meanwhile, however, that \$20 is going to be deposited into the market's bank account associated with your device and therefore will become a \$20 liability to the market. By "liability," we mean your market has received and now possesses funds that it owes to someone else.



FNS does not currently have a policy that describes how markets should handle outstanding tokens or paper scrip. How to handle outstanding/unredeemed tokens or scrip is therefore a decision you and your organization will need to make. According to the [Farmers Market Legal Toolkit](#), markets may adjust their operating budgets to account for potential outstanding tokens or scrip.



One way to reduce the number of outstanding tokens or scrip is to print an expiration date on them. Even with an expiration date, a market cannot prevent shoppers from redeeming tokens or scrip that were obtained a week, a month, or even a year or more ago. After the tokens have expired, it is acceptable to roll the value of the unredeemed currency into your operating budget. This approach can be costly, since you must reprint tokens or scrip after every expiration date.

If you decide against an expiration date, then prevention is the best strategy. Make sure you educate your shoppers. Tell them that if they do not use all of their tokens or scrip, they can return it that day to be credited back to their SNAP account or they can use it at the next market day. Make the tokens eye-catching and large enough to grab a shopper's attention so that they don't get lost in a large purse or baby bag. Also, emphasize to your vendors how important it is for them to submit all of the currency they receive for reimbursement, even if they only collect a few dollars. Remind them that every dollar counts in an accounting ledger! Clear communication and a thriving marketplace can help reduce the amount of outstanding currency.

Receipt System

The second option for an alternative redemption system at farmers markets uses paper receipts. In a receipt system, shoppers receive a receipt from each vendor after they select the products they want to purchase. The shopper leaves the items at the vendor's stand and brings the receipt(s) to the central POSD to pay for their items with their SNAP Bridge card. The shopper receives a receipt from the staff person or volunteer who conducts the SNAP Bridge card transaction and then returns to the farmer/vendor with this paid receipt to pick up their purchases. A staff person or volunteer keeps track of the receipts. Vendors are reimbursed on a predetermined schedule by the responsible party using the federal funds obtained from the SNAP Bridge card transaction.



In some markets that have tried this system, both vendors and shoppers found the system to be cumbersome and more time-consuming than the token or scrip model. Vendors have also complained that holding SNAP purchases for shoppers takes up valuable space that they can use to display saleable products. Shoppers using SNAP can also feel that this system singles them out amongst other shoppers in the market and can contribute to a feeling of being stigmatized for utilizing this form of federal food assistance.

However, in other markets this system thrives. **The advantages of the receipt system over the token or scrip system are two-fold: (1) the comprehensive paper trail it generates, which allows you to track SNAP purchases within the market; and (2) the elimination of the risk of outstanding tokens or scrip.** Shoppers using SNAP benefits are charged immediately and directly for the exact total of their purchase(s).

Cash Assistance on a Bridge Card

Occasionally, EBT accounts may also contain non-SNAP cash assistance benefits⁹ that are issued to clients to assist with other types of expenses besides food, such as utilities and rent. **These are not food benefits; instead, they are financial assistance issued under one of the following three programs: (1) the Family Independence Program, (2) the Refugee Assistance Program, or (3) State Disability Assistance.** Purchases made with this form of financial assistance follow the same rules as a regular bank debit card. These purchases are not restricted to food items and cash change can be given.



- **If your market accepts only SNAP benefits and not debit and/or credit cards**, we recommend that you do not accept these cash assistance benefits in order to avoid confusion at your market. Instead, encourage shoppers to use their SNAP benefits at your market for food purchases and to access the cash assistance benefits on their EBT card at another location.
- **If your market accepts debit and/or credit cards, as well as SNAP benefits**, then cash benefits on a shopper's EBT card can be exchanged for the same tokens that you distribute to shoppers using debit or credit cards, and such purchases should be recorded in the same manner.

Remember: change can be given for cash assistance benefit transactions and they are not limited to food purchases, which is why it is important to distinguish them from SNAP transactions.



Step 5: Covering the Costs of Implementing the SNAP Program at Your Marketplace

Funding is one of the most important concerns about implementing any new program. Your business plan, mission, and opportunities for outside support will dictate how your community-driven marketplace decides to fund this initiative. This section describes possible funding sources for the SNAP program at your marketplace beyond just rolling the expenses into the general operating budget.

Shopper Support: Credit/Debit Fee for Service

If your market accepts credit and debit cards through an alternative redemption system, shoppers can help pay for this service and help underwrite the cost of administering the SNAP redemption program. How does this work? You can charge a small fee for the use of the market's tokens or paper scrip, thus receiving a small amount of money every time a credit or debit transaction is conducted. Markets that have employed this strategy typically charge \$1 or \$2 per transaction and report recouping as much as 50% of their administrative costs.

⁹Cash assistance distributed on the SNAP Bridge card should not be confused with Cash Value Benefits distributed on the WIC Bridge card.

Shoppers acknowledge that you are providing them with a service by agreeing to this form of payment and typically have no problem supporting the market with this small fee, especially since the fee is lower than that charged by most ATM machines. Whether you call it a “Token Rental Fee” or simply ask for a donation, asking credit and debit shoppers to help finance the program is a viable option.

Keep in mind that this service fee can only be requested from credit or debit card users. The FNS contract that authorizes you to accept SNAP benefits explicitly states that you cannot charge shoppers using SNAP a fee for their transactions. Also, make sure you are clear that the fee you are charging is for the use of your tokens or paper scrip because it is not acceptable for you to charge a shopper for the use of their credit or debit card.

Vendor Support: Percentage of Sales

Another way to fund the costs of your SNAP/credit/debit program is by sharing those costs with the vendors who are benefiting from the additional sales created by the program. As an alternative to increasing stall rental fees, you can charge vendors a percentage of their sales to cover the market’s investment in this process. Being clear and transparent with your vendors regarding the expenses your market incurs to operate the program and why you are asking them to help support it is paramount to making the system work.

Markets in Michigan that are using this strategy are charging vendors between 2 and 5% to recuperate administrative costs. For example, if a vendor submits \$20 in tokens at the end of the market day, the operating organization could claim a 5% administrative fee and reimburse the vendor \$19 instead of the full amount.

$$\begin{aligned} &\text{Value of Total Token Sales*} - 5\% \text{ Administrative Fee} \\ &= \text{Reimbursement to Vendors} \\ &\$20 - (\$20 \times 0.05) = \$19 \end{aligned}$$

***Token sales can be from credit, debit, SNAP, and/or incentive program transactions.**

Asking vendors to share the costs helps emphasize the value of the service your market is providing and charges vendors in proportion to the amount they benefit from the program. If a vendor isn’t experiencing an increase in sales, they won’t be disadvantaged by this policy. Remember: you cannot charge shoppers using SNAP, but you can collect fees from the vendors for their SNAP sales.



Financial and In-kind Contributions from Community Partners

Community partners may be interested in providing financial support for a food assistance program at your community-driven marketplace, or they may have access to people or resources that could assist with the implementation of the program.

As you reach out to community partners, look for partners that share your goals. Communicate the objectives of your program and its intended purposes. Tell them how the program will improve food access and food security and how it will affect the health of your community by increasing the consumption of fruit and vegetables, which can in turn decrease the prevalence of chronic diseases. There are likely to be organizations that will want to support your program because it benefits your community.

Possible community partners include Chambers of Commerce, civic involvement organizations, food banks and hunger relief agencies, service organizations, food cooperatives, churches, and local clubs, among others. In addition to financial contributions, community partners may also be willing to recruit volunteers to help facilitate the program and assist you with outreach to consumers in your community.

Roles for Partnering Organizations

There are many ways in which a partnering organization can support a marketplace that has become authorized to accept SNAP benefits. Partnering organizations can assist in one or more of the following ways:

- ▶ By helping to inform SNAP clients that the market now accepts SNAP benefits
- ▶ By providing staff and/or helping the market recruit and train volunteers that can manage SNAP transactions and/or the vendor reimbursement process
- ▶ By offering the market financial support to offset the costs associated with accepting SNAP benefits

Grant Funding

Another source of financial support to consider is competitive grants. Developing local food systems and increasing food access are important areas of work that many government agencies and foundations are interested in supporting.

Keep in mind that grants are competitive and that it takes time and expertise to draft a well-written grant proposal. Ask for help from experienced grant writers and gather letters of support from your community partners to strengthen your proposal. Don't wait until the last minute to begin drafting the proposal. Start researching and drafting the proposal far enough in advance to allow someone sufficient time to review the final draft before submission. Also, make sure you provide all the supporting documents requested with your proposal. You don't want your application to be rejected because you forgot a seemingly insignificant document!



Maintaining and Improving Your SNAP Program

Recordkeeping

Recordkeeping is vital to the success of your farmers market and its SNAP program. Keeping good financial records will enable accurate and prompt reimbursement to vendors and can help reduce stress. In the event that FNS were to audit your market, these records can demonstrate that the program is properly run.

Markets operating **alternative redemption systems** must maintain the following records for each day of market operations:

- ▶ The number of SNAP transactions
- ▶ The total dollar amount of SNAP transactions
- ▶ The number of scrip or tokens distributed to shoppers
- ▶ The number of scrip or tokens redeemed by each vendor
- ▶ When and for how much each vendor is reimbursed



This information should be recorded for the market as a whole. Maintaining a record of these figures allows the market to determine the value of outstanding tokens or paper scrip. This information is vital for the market to monitor, as you are financially responsible for the currency in circulation.

In addition, you need a record of the number of tokens or paper scrip accepted by each individual vendor. You or your market's bookkeeper must keep records to ensure that vendors are properly reimbursed for their sales. Both the vendors and the market should count the number of tokens or scrip collected and calculate the total amount of sales. You may choose to aggregate figures into weekly, biweekly, or monthly reports. Some vendors prefer to keep alternative currency until they have enough to make it worth turning in for reimbursement. Your market will need to decide whether this practice will be allowed.



If your market accepts multiple forms of payment (for example, if your market accepts SNAP, an incentive program like Double Up Food Bucks, as well as credit and debit cards), then it is important to keep track of each different type of payment separately.

In contrast to required financial recordkeeping, other information is **optional** to record. You should weigh the importance of the information collected against the staff or volunteer time and energy required to record such data. How extensive your recordkeeping is should match the needs and resources of your individual market.

Tracking the number of shoppers using SNAP for the first time at your market is a valuable record to maintain along with your financial records, though it is not required. With this information you can determine how many new shoppers using SNAP the market is attracting and compare it to the number of returning shoppers. Then you can develop goals to attract more new shoppers and/or better serve your loyal returning shoppers.

If your farmers market operates by the individual vendor administrative model, there will be less recordkeeping that the market needs to do. Instead, the responsibility will fall on individual vendors.



For more information about data collection at farmers markets, including volunteer engagement and sharing metrics with market supporters, please check out [MIFMA's Data Collection Toolkit](#).

Working with Vendors

Vendors are critical to the success of farmers markets operating alternative redemption systems for food assistance programs. As such, clear and frequent communication with your vendors about the program is vital to its success.


Before you implement a food assistance program, you should communicate with vendors the goals of the program, why the market is participating, and the potential for the program to increase their sales.

Some markets find that vendors are initially hesitant to participate in the program because of the delay in receiving payments. These concerns can often be eased with clear explanations of how the program will work, exactly when reimbursements will be issued, and information about its potential for improving their bottom line.



If vendor concerns continue to be strong, vendor participation is voluntary. Vendors that decide to participate can demonstrate the advantages of the program. Vendor interest can also be encouraged by asking them to take part in the planning and organization of the program.

Once the program has begun, participating vendors need to know:

| What the market expects of them, including: | What they can expect from the market, including: |
|---|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• What currency they can accept and for which items, as well as what the currency looks like• When change can be given for tokens and scrip and when it cannot• How to train their employees so that they, too, understand the program• What signs should be displayed at their booth• When they should turn in collected tokens or scrip | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• How often they will be reimbursed• How the money will be distributed to them (i.e., check, direct deposit, or cash)• Who they can approach with questions about the program  |

We recommend that you communicate this information in multiple formats, as some people retain information better that they hear while others learn better by reading. For example, offer an in-person training session for all vendors and their employees in which the information is presented orally and provided on handouts that they can review later. We also recommend that you create a one-page reference sheet for vendors to use at their booths that includes important program information in an easy-to-access format (probably laminated).

Obtaining Signed Agreements with Your Vendors

As part of the communication process for markets with multiple vendors, it is important to require that vendors acknowledge in writing their responsibilities to the program and its administrator. As a FNS authorized retailer, the market has made a commitment to the federal government for which you are responsible. As such, the program must be implemented according to federal rules and regulations.

It is your responsibility to make sure vendors who are involved in the program (and their employees) know the rules and regulations that apply to them and agree to abide by them. Vendors need to sign an agreement that states they have been trained, that they know and understand the rules, and they agree to abide by them. Check out MIFMA's website for an example of a [vendor agreement template](#).



Working with Volunteers

Volunteers can be an important part of any program, especially since staff time is often limited. Accepting SNAP can be a time-consuming task during the initial planning stages, as well as in the day-to-day operations of the program. For this reason, volunteers can play an important role in the program and its success.

When a centrally operated POSD is used to accept SNAP benefits, someone must always be available to run the POSD and issue the alternative currency. If your market doesn't have a person on staff who can do this job and you cannot hire someone, finding a volunteer to fill this position is essential.

For more information about recruiting, training, and retaining volunteers at farmers markets, check out MIFMA's [Promising Practices for Volunteers](#) resource from our [Data Collection Toolkit](#). Below we provide suggestions that pertain specifically to how volunteers can support SNAP redemption programs.



Training Volunteers

It is important that volunteers who are responsible for using the POSD understand, in detail, the steps that must be taken to complete a successful transaction. Volunteers need to know how to use and troubleshoot the POSD and be aware of any pertinent information that must be collected.

More training is required if the volunteer is also in charge of bookkeeping and gathering redeemed tokens or paper scrip from vendors. See the following page for examples of volunteer duties and responsibilities, which can serve as a guide for training volunteers at your farmers market. You should adjust these examples to reflect the actual responsibilities of the volunteer and any procedural differences in your market. During training, give each volunteer plenty of opportunities to perform their tasks while under supervision. This approach helps the volunteer feel comfortable with the tasks and ensures that the trainer is confident that the volunteer can perform the tasks correctly.

It is likely that problems with the POSD will arise or a shopper will pose a question that a volunteer will be unable to answer, especially early in their time at the market. Make sure volunteers know whom they should speak to when this occurs.



Example Volunteer Duties or Responsibilities

Before the Market Begins

1. Make sure you have all of the supplies you need, including your log sheets, a pen, tokens or scrip, POSD(s), table, signage, and a receipt booklet.
2. Before shoppers start to arrive, get set up by assembling your table and hanging any banners or signs.
3. Turn on the device, allowing for any automatic updates, and confirming battery status (wired devices may require additional steps). Then await your first shopper. Interact with those passing by while you wait. Explain to those that ask or seem curious that your market now accepts SNAP Bridge cards.

During the Market

1. It is important to greet the shopper and confirm their level of knowledge about how your SNAP Bridge card program operates, including requesting how much they would like to have debited from their account for the day's shopping.
2. Swipe the card or punch in the card number by choosing the manual entry option (the magnetic strip can be faulty on SNAP Bridge cards, but that does not mean that clients do not have sufficient funds).
3. While entering the purchase amount, explain that you can do this only in one-dollar increments and that they cannot receive change back, although they can save leftover tokens or scrip for another market day. The shopper then must enter their PIN. Please note that many POSDs have a time limit on transactions and can time out if a PIN is not entered promptly.
4. While the POSD is processing, ask the shopper the necessary questions for your log (i.e., name, zip code, first-time user, etc.).
5. Dispense tokens or scrip to the shopper. Save the merchant copy of the receipt for your records and give the shopper their copy of the receipt.

After the Market has Closed

1. Use the "batch" feature of your POSD to get a print-out of the day's transactions. You can check your hand-written log sheets against this accumulative receipt to confirm the total shopper sales for the day.
2. During market tear-down, interact with each vendor so that you can record on a log sheet how many SNAP and credit/debit tokens or scrip they are submitting for reimbursement. Once you have a total sale amount, write each vendor a receipt and explain to them when they can expect to be reimbursed.
3. Gather and sort tokens or scrip to organize them for the next market.
4. Pack up all your supplies so they are ready to go for the next market.
5. Store market supplies in a safe and secure place.

SNAP Promotion and Outreach

Growth of SNAP redemption programs at community-driven marketplaces is highly dependent on consumer awareness of the program. Many shoppers using SNAP are not aware that they can use their benefits to shop at locations other than grocery or big box stores. **The following section provides ideas to help you do one of the most important things a new SNAP retailer can do: grow relationships.** You already know how important it is to maintain relationships and open lines of communications with your vendors and shoppers. It is equally important to maintain communication with community partners and your region's media, including newspaper reporters, television reporters, and radio personalities.

To make the best use of your resources, concentrate your outreach and advertising on areas where there are large numbers of people using SNAP. It is also important to recognize that people who are SNAP eligible are integrated into their larger community and are mobile. Using the following outreach methods can also spread broad awareness of the marketplace and its programs to all area residents. Once shoppers using SNAP learn about the program at the marketplace and have good experiences, word of mouth can become a powerful tool for increasing awareness about the program.

Consider reaching out to families with children. Nearly 40% of individuals receiving SNAP benefits are children. Involving children in the experience promotes a festive, community atmosphere.



Printed Outreach Materials

Outreach materials like flyers, posters, and door hangers are great ways to draw shoppers and new vendors to your marketplace. It is important when designing these materials to consider the following:

- All outreach materials should include the location and operating dates and times.
- The language used should be simple and easy to understand. If someone only glances at the sign, they should be able to pick out the important information easily.
- Use color, pictures, or unique designs to grab the readers' attention, but do not make the flyer too busy. A great way to catch the attention of shoppers using SNAP is to include a picture of the SNAP Bridge card. This image is universally recognized by the population you are trying to target and will also be easily recognized by those who might have trouble reading.
- Consider the potential shoppers you would like to reach. Are there populations within the targeted community that speak another language? If so, consider printing bilingual flyers or multiple versions of the flyer in different languages. Be sure to consult someone fluent in the language(s) to ensure proper translation and grammar.



When designing promotional materials such as signs, posters, and flyers, it is also important to keep in mind the purpose of and intended audience for each item. There are three types of materials to consider: internal educational materials, vendor posters, and external outreach materials.

Internal educational materials are designed for use during marketplace operations at your location. These materials give shoppers instructions about how to use their SNAP benefits, such as purchasing tokens or scrip at farmers markets operating an alternative redemption system. Posters can be displayed at various locations throughout the marketplace, including entrances and at the market bank or wherever the central POSD is located. You can also use sandwich board signs, which are inexpensive, easy to set up, and reusable.

Vendor posters are designed to attract and inform shoppers that a particular vendor accepts SNAP benefits. Distribute them to vendors who accept SNAP tokens or scrip and ask them to hang them in visible locations at their booths. These posters signal to shoppers that they can purchase products at these booths using their SNAP benefits. They are another great way to give instructions on how to use SNAP Bridge cards for the purchase of tokens or scrip. You can also make SNAP buttons for vendors to wear.

The last type of signage is designed for locations outside of your market. **External outreach materials** inform shoppers that your market accepts SNAP and the hours and location of the marketplace, along with any other important information. Ask businesses in the surrounding area if they are willing to post them for you. Inform them that marketplace shoppers often stay in the area and continue shopping after they are done at the market, and this could be beneficial to nearby businesses.

Posters and flyers could also be posted in places that are likely to be visited by food assistance clients. Some examples include:

- Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) clinics
- Public aid offices
- Public health centers/clinics
- MSU Extension offices
- Health/nutrition fairs
- Bus/rail vehicles, stops, and stations
- Shopping centers
- Places of worship
- Food banks, pantries, and soup kitchens
- Schools
- Child care centers
- Libraries
- Community/civic centers
- Public housing and apartment complexes
- Senior citizen housing
- YMCAs and Boys & Girls Club of America
- Recreation facilities (athletic fields, public swimming pools, beaches)
- Laundromats
- Thrift shops
- Camp grounds and motels
- Tourist information centers

Aside from flyers and posters, other printed outreach materials include banners and postcards or other items for direct mailings. With appropriate zoning approval, vinyl banners can be attached to buildings or fences, or strung between posts over a main street or near the market.

Use a roadside trailer to post a sign, use highway signs posted on roads leading into town, or get included on municipal town signage at the edge of town. Find information regarding signs on the [Michigan Department of Transportation Web site](#). Other ideas include billboards and other paid signage such as bus and rail ads or having a float in a town parade. Postcards are another form of advertising that can have multiple uses. Postcards can be mailed to shoppers or can be distributed at the marketplace.



Interacting with the Media

It is important that your marketplace develops good relationships with individuals who work in the local media. **Coverage from local media provides an opportunity to reach large audiences without spending much, if any, money on advertising.** News releases and Public Service Announcements (PSAs) are great ways to let people know your marketplace now accepts SNAP benefits. In order for a news release to have an impact, it must contain information that is newsworthy.

The most important thing to remember when sending or emailing a news release or PSA to a local media outlet is that the information needs to be relevant to the outlet's readers, viewers, or listeners. People want to know what's in it for them and how the story impacts the community at-large and what the value is. Most radio stations will run PSAs at little to no cost. Ask about PSAs when you meet with a radio advertising agent or when you call the station.

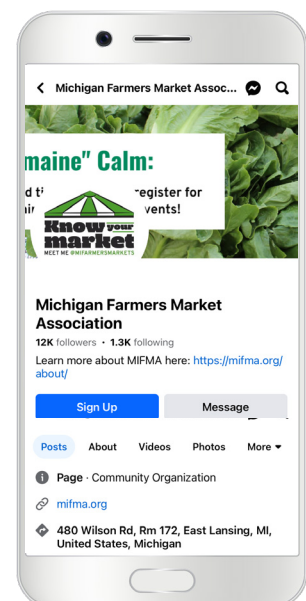
Another opportunity for radio or television (TV) exposure is to host a remote broadcast. Remote broadcasts are often done by local media outlets in efforts to cross-promote (as is often the case in radio) or to aid in the telling of a story (when a TV reporter is "live on the scene"). Contact a radio or TV affiliate in your area to assess the level of interest in doing a TV story or a radio event at your marketplace. Some story and event ideas to consider: your marketplace has started accepting SNAP, nutrition education classes are being held at your marketplace, or an incentive program is being offered that increases shoppers' buying power when they use their SNAP benefits.



Utilizing Social Media

Social media can be a great, low cost way to reach your audience. Platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, and TikTok tend to be some of the most popular. It is not recommended that you try to use all three platforms if you don't have the capacity or time to manage each of them. If you want to start with just one, use Facebook (www.facebook.com) and consider boosting your posts. When you boost a post, you pay a small amount to promote these posts and make sure they are seen by a greater number of Facebook users.

When posting to any social media site, make sure your posts are clear and concise. Do not use jargon or acronyms; spell things out and use terms that shoppers can relate to such as "SNAP Bridge cards" when you are referring to SNAP. Use the SNAP Bridge card image on some of your posts so that shoppers can visually identify what you are posting about. Let shoppers know what they can purchase with their SNAP Bridge card by sharing images of vendors' produce and their SNAP signs. This will help to create familiarity and comfort between the vendor, shopper, and market as a whole. Be creative in using Facebook and other forms of social media to promote your message.



Reaching Out Through Partners

Developing outreach partners is another effective way to promote your marketplace and its food assistance programs. Using their multiple networks, community groups can share information quickly and efficiently and help reach a broad audience with your message. Start by seeking partners within the local community that provide programs and services for low-income individuals and/or groups that are involved with food system work, such as food policy councils, emergency food organizations, or community garden groups. These groups are likely to be willing to promote the program because they already work with the populations you wish to reach or are interested in the positive benefits your marketplace and food assistance programs provide. Other groups that may make good partners include neighborhood organizations, parent teacher organizations, faith-based organizations, and public housing councils.

Ask community partners to spread the word that healthy, locally-produced foods are available and can be purchased using SNAP benefits at your marketplace. These groups can help promote your food assistance program by passing out flyers, including information in newsletters, and by word of mouth. Another option is to ask if you can include your marketplace information in their direct mailings. Make sure you explain to potential partners why spreading the message is important and how it can help the people they serve.

Nutrition Education

SNAP-Education (SNAP-Ed) is a nutrition education program designed for individuals using SNAP benefits. The goal of SNAP-Ed is to improve the likelihood that persons eligible for SNAP benefits will make healthy food choices within a limited budget and choose physically active lifestyles consistent with the current Dietary Guidelines for Americans and MyPlate recommendations. Funding for the SNAP-Ed program comes from FNS, which distributes money to state agencies that submit an annual SNAP-Ed plan. This plan outlines the state's nutrition education activities and budget for the following year. The state then distributes this money to various organizations such as community health groups and university extension offices to carry out the educational activities.

Your marketplace can contact local groups that are taking part in SNAP-Ed to see if they are interested in working with your market to provide nutrition education programs or information to shoppers. Information about current SNAP-Ed implementers in Michigan can be found at <https://map2healthyliving.org/>.



More information on SNAP-Ed, including resources for healthy diet education, are available from the National Agricultural Library Food and Nutrition Information Center. Other nutrition education resources are available from the USDA at myplate.gov.

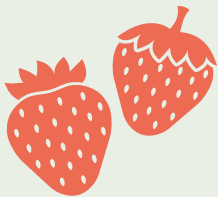
The use of “Food Navigators” is a popular SNAP-Ed program. Created by the Michigan Fitness Foundation in partnership with MIFMA, Food Navigators provide nutrition education and shopper support for those shopping at farmers markets and within other retail settings. Specifically, they can help educate shoppers on how to utilize different programs, like their SNAP benefits or a nutrition incentive program, and what food items are eligible within each designed program. You can learn more about the Food Navigator Program by going to <https://michiganfitness.org/food/farmers-market-food-navigator>.



Access to recipes is a vital portion of Nutrition Education and can have a huge impact on a produce item and can help boost sales of that product within at a farmers market. Programs like MI Harvest of the Month provided access to dozens of curated recipes designed to help shoppers utilize easy to access ingredients for home meals. You can learn more about MI Harvest of the Month by going to <https://mihotm.recipes/>.

SNAP Incentive Programs

SNAP Incentive programs, also called Nutrition Incentive Programs, are another way to draw food assistance shoppers to your marketplace. Although there are a variety of nutrition incentive programs, the basic premise is the same: when shoppers using SNAP spend their benefits at community-driven marketplaces, they receive additional benefits from the incentive program to spend at the marketplace.



Incentive programs benefit everyone:

- Shoppers obtain additional fresh produce while using the same amount of SNAP benefits
- Vendor sales increase
- The marketplace develops loyal shoppers who make it a habit to shop there

Nationally, many Nutrition Incentive Programs are supported by the Gus Schumacher Nutrition Incentive Program (GusNIP). In 2020, USDA’s National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA) created the Nutrition Incentive Program Training, Technical Assistance, Evaluation, and Information Center (NTAE) to support prospective and current GusNIP grantees operating both Nutrition Incentive and Produce Prescription programs. The NTAE created the Nutrition Incentive Hub to be a centralized resource that boasts multiple ways to interact via community of practices, discussion boards, regular webinars and access to resources both for program organizations and retailers. To learn more, visit www.nutritionincentivehub.org.

Funding for incentive programs can come from a variety of sources, including local community granting organizations, national nonprofits, and federal programs. Incentive programs can be limited to a single marketplace or can be more widely operated. In Michigan, many markets participate in a state-wide SNAP incentive program called Double Up Food Bucks.



Double Up Food Bucks

Double Up Food Bucks is a nutrition incentive program that allows shoppers using SNAP to increase the amount of money they can spend on produce bought at a farmers market, farm stand, or grocery store.

While shopping at a farmers market or with direct marketing farmers, shoppers using their SNAP Bridge card to make purchases are provided incentive benefits to enhance their purchasing power. These benefits are often in the form of Double Up tokens or the Double Up Loyalty card. The benefits are provided as a 1-to-1 match, up to a given cap, currently set at \$20 per day. Double Up tokens are valued at \$2 each and can be used to purchase Michigan-grown fruits and vegetables. These benefits are available for immediate use during the shopping trip.

For grocery stores that participate in the Double Up Food Bucks program, incentives are provided in multiple ways. For example, benefits may be provided after the purchase of fruits and vegetables, allowing for additional fruits and vegetables to be purchased at a future time. Double Up is a program of a national nonprofit called Fair Food Network and helps extend SNAP benefits for shoppers while also helping increase sales for Michigan farmers. For more information about Double Up Food Bucks, visit www.doubleupfoodbucks.org.

Evaluating the Success of Your SNAP Program

As the individual or organization responsible for the SNAP program at your farmers market operating an alternative redemption system, you should evaluate how well the program is working and if it is creating the intended opportunities for shoppers, vendors, and the marketplace.

You can do a basic evaluation of the SNAP program at your farmers market by using the financial records discussed in previous sections of this manual: the number of SNAP transactions, the total dollar amount of SNAP transactions, the number of tokens or paper scrip distributed to shoppers, and the number of tokens or paper scrip redeemed by vendors. Knowing the number of shoppers using SNAP for the first time at your market can also be very beneficial in your evaluation.

By analyzing this data, you can determine if there are increases in SNAP transactions and total sales at the market throughout the season and how much of these sales were to new shoppers. This assessment can help you determine if the market has been effective in reaching out to shoppers using SNAP or if different outreach and promotion strategies are needed.

The data you collect can help determine at which vendors shoppers using SNAP are making the most purchases and therefore who benefits most from the SNAP program. This information can be useful when you are trying to recruit new vendors to the farmers market.

SNAP programs at any location take time to grow. Don't be discouraged if there is not a large demand right away. Be patient and make sure that the program is well organized and is simple for shoppers to use. A well-run program is the best promotion you can have, because word of mouth is a powerful tool.



Additional methods of evaluation at farmers markets can help you gain information beyond that of basic recordkeeping. Make sure to check out MIFMA's [Data Collection Toolkit](#) for more information about evaluating farmers market impacts. MIFMA also offers support to community-driven marketplaces for collecting and analyzing data, through methods such as Rapid Market Assessments (RMAs). RMAs can be beneficial because they involve individuals from outside the market taking part in the evaluation process. RMAs can help you gather more in-depth information about the whole market, not just the SNAP program. For more information about Rapid Market Assessments, visit [MIFMA's website](#).



Glossary of Terms

Alternative Redemption System: A system that allows all vendors at a farmers market to benefit from one POSD. The market offers a central POSD to shoppers using SNAP to exchange their benefits for a currency they can use with any participating vendor in the market. Currency is usually a token, such as a wooden nickel, or paper scrip.

Bridge Card: The EBT card issued to SNAP and WIC food assistance program recipients in Michigan that is similar to a debit card and is used to purchase food products and to access cash assistance benefits. The name comes from the picture of the Mackinac Bridge on the face of the card.

Community-Driven Marketplace: Farmers markets and other programs directly facilitating the exchange between consumers and producers of local food and farm products. These include mobile markets and food box programs in addition to farmers markets.

CSA (Community Supported Agriculture): A way to buy local food directly from a farmer. You purchase a “share” and become a farm “member”¹⁰. A share is traditionally a box of whatever the farm is harvesting each week, with the same selection of produce offered to every CSA member.¹¹

DHHS (Department of Health and Human Services): Michigan’s public assistance, child and family welfare agency that directs the operations of public assistance and service programs through a network of over 100 county Department of Health and Human Service offices around the state.

EBT (Electronic Benefits Transfer): An electronic system that allows a recipient of food assistance benefits to authorize transfer of their government benefits from a federal account to a retailer’s account to pay for food products.

FMNP (Farmers Market Nutrition Program): A USDA FNS program that provides seniors and WIC clients with fresh, unprepared, locally grown fruits and vegetables with the goal of expanding the awareness, use of and sales of local produce at farmers markets.

FAP (Food Assistance Program): A Michigan DHHS program that supplements the food purchasing power of low-income individuals and families. The USDA funds 100% of the benefits paid out through this program, while the state and federal governments share its administrative costs. This state program is synonymous with SNAP at the federal level.

Farmers Market: Defined by MIFMA as a public and recurring assembly of farmers or their representatives selling direct-to-consumer food and products which they have produced themselves. The USDA defines farmers markets as “multi-stall markets at which farmer-producers sell food products they produced (fruits, vegetables, meat, dairy, grains, etc.) directly to the general public, at a central or fixed location.”

FNS (Food and Nutrition Service): This service administers the nutrition assistance programs of the USDA including WIC and SNAP. Their mission is to provide children and needy families better access to food and a healthier diet through food assistance programs and comprehensive nutrition education efforts.

¹⁰About CSA. FairShare CSA. (n.d.). Retrieved from <https://www.csacoalition.org/about-csa>

¹¹MI CSA Network. (n.d.). Types of CSAs. MI CSA Network. Retrieved from <https://www.michigancsanetwork.org/types-of-csas>

Michigan WIC Produce Connection (formerly WIC Project FRESH): A program providing WIC participants with coupons to purchase locally grown fresh fruits and vegetables at participating farmers markets. This state program is synonymous with FMNP at the federal level.

MIFMA (Michigan Farmers Market Association): A member-based, statewide association with a mission to place equity at the forefront of supporting the viability of community-driven marketplaces so that they can connect ALL consumers to local farms and businesses.

Operating Organization: An entity that makes management decisions about the market, likely including hiring/supervision of the market manager, hosting the market's decision-making body, selecting vendors, etc.

Produce Prescription Programs (PPR): Evidence-based interventions that increase access to fruits and vegetables and support healthy behavior change for individuals and families through partnerships among healthcare, community-based organizations, and food retailers. PPR Programs target patients facing food insecurity and those with diet-related chronic diseases with the long-term goal of improving health outcomes, addressing health-related social needs (HRSN), and lowering healthcare costs.

POSD (Point-of-Sale Device): The machine used to conduct credit, debit, and EBT transactions. Many are wireless; some hardwired devices require a telephone line and electricity.

Senior Project FRESH: An educational program providing senior participants with coupons to purchase locally grown fresh fruits and vegetables at participating farmers markets. This state program is synonymous with Senior FMNP at the federal level.

SNAP (Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program): A nutrition assistance program administered by FNS that helps low-income people and families buy the food they need for good health. The program was formerly known as the Food Stamp Program.

SNAP Incentive Programs: Also known as Nutrition Incentive Programs, these programs increase the purchase of fruits and vegetables by low-income consumers participating in SNAP by providing incentives at the point of purchase.

SNAP-Ed (Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program Education): This program provides education to people who are eligible to receive SNAP benefits. The goal of SNAP-Ed is to improve the likelihood that persons eligible for SNAP will make healthy food choices within a limited budget and choose physically active lifestyles consistent with the current Dietary Guidelines for Americans and MyPlate.

Summer EBT for Children: A nutrition assistance program that provides funds for purchasing well-balanced and nutritional food for breakfast and lunch during the summer months when school meals are not provided.

TPP (Third-Party Processor): A company that conducts credit, debit, and EBT transactions and provides the software and/or hardware to retailers so that sales can take place.

USDA (United States Department of Agriculture): The federal department that administers programs related to farming and the food system.

WIC (Women, Infants, and Children): A USDA FNS program targeted toward women, infants, and children that serves to safeguard the health of low-income women, infants, and children up to age 5 who are at nutritional risk by providing nutritious foods to supplement diets, information on healthy eating, and referrals to health care.



Contacts

For more information about accepting SNAP at your farmers market, contact:

Joe Lesausky
Food Access Director
Michigan Farmers Market Association
Ph: (517) 432-3381
joe@mifma.org

For more information about Michigan WIC Produce Connection contact:

Michigan Department of Community Health
Women, Infants and Children (WIC) Division
mdhhs-produceconnection@michigan.gov

For more information about Senior Project FRESH, contact:

Behavioral and Physical Health and Aging Services
Administration
Aging and Community Services Division
MDHHS-SeniorprojectFRESH@michigan.gov

For more information about the SNAP incentive program called Double Up Food Bucks, contact:

Ricardo Ortiz
Program Director
Fair Food Network
Ph: (734) 213-3999 x203
rortiz@fairfoodnetwork.org

To reach the FNS Farmers Market Helpline, call 312-353-6609 or by emailing SM.FN.ROB-WC1RetReply@usda.gov

Additional Resources

Visit MIFMA's YouTube Channel for short videos on accepting SNAP Bridge cards at Michigan farmers markets at www.youtube.com/user/MIFarmersmarkets.

For more information about SNAP, visit the USDA FNS website at www.fns.usda.gov/snap/.

For more information about FAP, visit the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services website at www.michigan.gov/mdhhs.

For more information about farmers markets accepting SNAP, visit the USDA FNS Farmers Market website at <https://www.fns.usda.gov/snap/farmer-producer>.

For more information about Market FRESH, visit the Michigan Aging & Adult Services Agency website at www.michigan.gov/marketfresh.

For more information about Michigan WIC Produce Connection, visit the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services website at <https://www.michigan.gov/mdhhs/assistance-programs/wic/farmersmarket>.

For more information about Michigan Harvest of the Month, visit the Michigan Fitness Foundation website at <https://michiganfitness.org/food/mi-hotm> and the Michigan Nutrition Network's page at <https://snap-ed.michiganfitness.org/>.

For more information and resources from the "They Learn From Watching You" campaign, visit the website at <http://theylearnfromwatchingyou.org/>.

For more information about Michigan Fresh, visit the Michigan State University Extension website at http://msue.anr.msu.edu/program/info/mi_fresh.

For more nutrition education information and resources, visit the Michigan State University Extension website at <http://msue.anr.msu.edu/topic/info/nutrition>.

For more information about the usage of POSD technology within farmers markets, visit Produce Perks Midwest. <https://produceperks.org/new-report/>.

For additional resources on accepting SNAP benefits for your farmers market, and other best practices through a legal lens visit the Farmers Market Legal Toolkit <https://farmersmarketlegaltoolkit.org/>.

For more information about the NTAE Center and the Nutrition Incentive Hub for Nutrition Incentive resources visit <https://www.nutritionincentivehub.org/>.

For additional resources about operating nutrition incentives within farm direct settings please visit the Farm Direct Guide Site <https://farmdirectincentives.guide/>.

