

There are indications that SNAP incentive programs have positive economic benefits.

Evidence suggests that SNAP incentives result in economic benefits to the communities where farmers' markets are located and to the farmers and their employees who work at the markets. Further increase in the use of incentives is likely to result in a bigger impact on the viability of local growers and their communities. Vendor surveys show that a considerable number of farmers are increasing production and growing more diverse crops as a result of the incentive program. Further analysis of the economic impact of farmers' markets incentives is planned for the 2012 season with particular attention to the economic benefits that accrue when goods are purchased directly from locally-based producers and the economic multiplier impact in the community.

Private funding has played a critical role in supporting the use of SNAP incentives, but additional public funding would provide the opportunity for further growth and experimentation.

Fundraising absorbs a lot of the energy of these organizations and limits the reach of the programs because the opportunities to use incentives to increase SNAP participation outstrip available funds. Private partners have generously contributed to incentive programs with the hope that if the strategic use of incentives is successful, public funders will become interested and provide additional support. So far, public

funding has been fairly limited, with support coming from the Farmers Market Promotion Program and USDA Specialty Crop Block Grants, state agriculture viability programs, and other state sources. If a substantial increase in public funding occurs as a result of Farm Bill reauthorization, there will be an opportunity to expand incentive programs and to learn more about ways to maximize their effectiveness. At this point, both the Senate and House Agriculture Committees have demonstrated strong bi-partisan support for expanding this well documented demonstration project on effective utilization of incentives to encourage healthier eating and stronger economies.



SNAP HEALTHY FOODS INCENTIVES

CLUSTER EVALUATION

EXCERPT FROM 2011 FINAL REPORT

FULL REPORT AVAILABLE DECEMBER 2012
AT WWW.FAIRFOODNETWORK.ORG

OVERVIEW

OF THE

Cluster Evaluation for SNAP Healthy Food Incentives



This report features four organizations — Fair Food Network, Market Umbrella, Roots of Change, and Wholesome Wave — that have been actively involved in encouraging low-income consumers to use their food assistance benefits at farmers' markets by matching their Supplemental Nutrition Assistance (SNAP, formerly known as food stamps) benefits, enabling the customer to purchase additional fresh, local food.

In order to learn from the experience of the four organizations while taking into account the variability in their approaches, cluster evaluation methodology was selected for the evaluation. The study examined available data on all the markets supported by the organizations participating in the evaluation and a sample of 30 markets was selected for closer examination.

CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

Incentives represent an effective strategy for increasing SNAP sales at farmers' markets.

SNAP incentives offer a viable and promising tool for increasing the use of SNAP benefits at farmers' markets and for increasing the purchase and consumption of fruits and vegetables among low-income individuals and families. Data from the organizations involved in the cluster evaluation show a substantial increase in SNAP redemptions when incentive programs are implemented. SNAP incentive programs typically result in at least a doubling of redemptions and in some cases substantially more. SNAP sales at



of customers report an increase in the purchase or consumption of fruits and vegetables.



farmers' markets have increased dramatically since 2007, but are still a very small proportion of total SNAP sales, suggesting that there is ample room for continued accelerated growth at farmers' markets.

Intermediary organizations play an important role in promoting SNAP incentives.

Intermediary organizations, such as FFN, MU, ROC, and WW, have played a critical role in expanding incentive programs. They have been able to locate and support markets with the capacity to implement incentive programs and have enhanced the markets' capacity and motivated other markets to seek private support.

Customer and vendor surveys show the incentive programs are popular and result in promising changes in customer purchasing behavior and vendor sales.

Over 80 percent of customers participating in FFN and WW surveys of the incentive program report an increase in the purchase or consumption of fruits and vegetables. More than half of the customers surveyed reported that incentives were important in drawing them to the farmers' market. More than half of the vendors surveyed reported that the incentive program was having a positive impact on their sales.

