



## INTRODUCTION

The SNAP & Save program aims to increase access to healthy foods for recipients of the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP, formerly Food Stamps) while increasing market opportunities for farmers. Piloted during the 2015 summer market season, the program provides a dollar-for-dollar match of up to \$5 per market visit when SNAP users swipe their Electronic Benefit Transfer (EBT) cards for tokens at participating markets. Four Hampshire County markets participated in the pilot program: the Amherst Farmers Market, the Florence Farmers Market, the Northampton Tuesday Farmers Market, and the Northampton Saturday Farmers Market.

To qualitatively evaluate the success of the program, SNAP & Save participants at each of the markets were asked if they would be willing to either respond to a quick survey or a longer interview. 14 participants opted to respond to the survey and 19 participants opted to respond to the interview for a total of 33 participants providing feedback on the program. Below is a summary of that feedback.

## SNAP & SAVE AWARENESS

Interview respondents were asked how long they had been using SNAP at the markets and how they had heard about the program. Almost half of respondents started using SNAP at the markets during the 2015 season. About a third of respondents had been using SNAP at the markets for two seasons, and the remainder had been using it for three seasons or more.

The most common way for respondents to hear about SNAP & Save was at a participating market. A couple of respondents had heard about the program from friends, and one respondent cited a poster at a partner organization as her source of information about the program. However, a little fewer than half of respondents had seen posters or flyers about the program.

*"I saw a poster at the shelter in downtown Amherst and was glad that I could walk to it. I have some anxiety about riding the bus."  
-SNAP & Save participant at Amherst Farmers Market*

Both survey and interview respondents were asked for suggestions about how to advertise the program. Many respondents suggested that advertising or publicizing the program through local Mass Department of Transitional Assistance (Mass DTA) and Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) offices would be helpful. Respondents also suggested advertising through various community resources and organizations—such as the Northampton Survival Center, the Senior Center, the Valley Advocate, radio stations, libraries, banks, and churches. Some respondents also indicated that the program was not visible enough at the market.

## MARKET ACCESSIBILITY

Interview respondents were asked about their method of transportation for getting to the markets and whether they experienced any challenges getting there. The most common way for respondents to get to the markets was driving their own vehicles. Walking was also a common way for respondents to get to the markets, followed by biking.



The majority of respondents did not experience any challenges accessing the markets, and the Northampton Saturday market appears particularly accessible with the only challenge reported being traffic. A couple of respondents remarked that they liked how easy it was for them to get to the markets. However, one respondent pointed out that the Amherst Winter Farmers Market is not on a public transportation route.

### EXPERIENCE AT THE MARKETS

*"I feel welcome at the market, and the doubling makes it affordable."  
-SNAP & Save participant at Northampton Saturday Market*

Both survey and interview respondents were asked about their overall experience with using SNAP & Save at the markets. Every respondent, with the exception of one, said that they always feel welcome at the markets. However, the majority of respondents emphasized that they would not be able to afford the products at the markets without the \$5 match.

Respondents overwhelmingly expressed appreciation for the quality and variety of food at the markets. A good portion of respondents also expressed appreciation for the sense of community and atmosphere the markets provided.

When asked about their experiences using SNAP at the markets, every respondent had positive experiences with the program, but one respondent suggested that the tokens should be provided in different dollar amounts. A number of respondents also remarked that the process of redeeming SNAP dollars for tokens was easy.

*"This program allows me to buy dairy more affordably than at Whole Foods, which is where I would normally go due to allergies."  
-SNAP & Save participant at Amherst Farmers Market*

Survey and interview respondents were also asked what types of foods they purchased and what they did or planned to do with them. The most commonly purchased items were fruits and vegetables. Respondents also reported buying value-added items, such as maple syrup and honey, as well as meat and dairy. Many respondents reported cooking these foods or personally consuming them as-is. A number of other respondents reported feeding the food to their families.

### SNAP & SAVE INFLUENCES ON BEHAVIOR

*"The market exposes me to a variety of green things that I don't normally get exposed to. My favorites are garlic scapes and ramps, which I never had before coming to the market."  
-SNAP & Save participant at Northampton Tuesday Market*

Interview respondents were asked how the SNAP & Save program had influenced their eating patterns. Many respondents reported that they eat more healthfully because the SNAP & Save program makes healthy foods more affordable for them. Many also reported that the program increases the quality or variety of foods in their diets, and some reported that they would not go to the market as frequently or at all without the match. A couple of respondents reported that the program frees up dollars for them to spend on other financial obligations.



## SUGGESTIONS FOR IMPROVEMENTS

Both survey and interview respondents were asked if they had any suggestions for improving the program. The most common suggestion for improving the SNAP & Save program was to increase the match amount. Respondents reported that increasing the match amount would help them buy more fruits and vegetables, as well as a wider variety of foods.

Respondents also wanted more opportunities to take advantage of the program, suggesting that more farmers markets should participate and that convenience stores should be added. Some had suggestions about the tokens used as currency for SNAP redemptions, such as offering them in larger denominations, providing bags to hold them, or doing away with the token system altogether.

*“An increase to a \$10 match would help a great deal. My food stamps were cut severely, and this program helps me so much.”*  
*-SNAP & Save participant at Florence Farmers Market*

Some respondents reported that they would like to see more activities and sources of entertainment at the markets; for example, respondents reported that they would like to see activities for kids or demonstration tables that give them ideas about how to prepare the foods or stretch their dollars.

## CONCLUSIONS

Overall, SNAP & Save participants reported a positive experience with the program and relatively few challenges in using the program. Participants emphasized that without the SNAP & Save, they would not be able to enjoy frequent visits to the markets, which appear to provide participants with opportunities to increase health and variety in their diets while enjoying the community atmosphere. Major successes for SNAP & Save include the reported positive influence on eating behaviors and the apparent relief of some financial stress in accessing healthy foods. Looking forward, the SNAP & Save program could improve by evaluating the effectiveness of the token system, considering opportunities for the program to add locations, increasing the match amount, and identifying methods for advertising the program more successfully around the community.