



CONNECTING TO YOUR COMMUNITY

Welcoming Federal Nutrition Benefit Users to your
Farmers Market, Farm Stand, and CSA Best Practices

Know your Community

A farmers market (or direct marketing farmer) that is dedicated to creating a welcoming, inclusive environment that reflects the needs of all its customers is going to be well positioned to create a successful market community. To create this environment, a market needs to be flexible and consider all of its customers' needs.

Market organizers should know the demographics of their community, including how many residents are currently participating in SNAP, <https://www.fns.usda.gov/ops/snap-community-characteristics-maryland>.

Knowledge of the cultural and socio-economic diversity of the community will be important in order to understand the needs of the customer base and to identify potential barriers to shopping at the market, such as language differences, transportation needs, physical accessibility for the elderly, differently abled bodies and families; even product variety.





Outreach and Promotion

Promoting your benefit program is necessary to raise awareness of your program within and outside of your community as well as attract new customers to your market. Outreach efforts should begin prior to the start of your program and continue regularly once the program is under way. When choosing what media outlets or forms of advertising to utilize, it is important to consider how to best reach benefit-eligible audiences in your community. Some ways to promote your benefit programs may include:

- Signage at the market and around the community
- Social media posts
- Postcards
- Newspaper or radio ads
- Info table at local events or service providers

Consider writing a press release about your market and benefit programs. Send it to local news stations for wide distribution. Holding a program launch event at your market can also be a fun and effective way to draw new customers to your market.

Consider reaching out to families with children. More than 50% of individuals receiving SNAP benefits are children. Involving children in the farmers market promotes a festive, community atmosphere.

Advertising

When thinking about how to target your advertising, consider what newspapers your benefit customers read, and the radio stations they listen to. If they use public transportation, what bus or train lines do they frequent? Are there church bulletins or neighborhood newsletters where you could advertise SNAP, FMNP, and eWIC at your farmers market or farm stand?

A targeted effort, rather than an advertising campaign for the entire town or city, will cost less and will be more effective in reaching the intended audience. The best advertising is free advertising in the form of news stories about the market or calendar listings in the local paper.



Get to know your local reporters and pitch stories about your benefit acceptance, new and interesting products at the market, and upcoming events. Submit press releases because many local newspapers will simply re-print them. After you have developed a relationship with several reporters they will look to you for stories.

These days, a lot of people are interested in healthy, nutritious foods, including many local politicians. For example, A SNAP project at the market is a feel-good story that most politicians will support. Invite them to a special event welcoming SNAP customers to your market and invite the local press to cover the story.

Printed Outreach Materials

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

- All outreach materials should include the location, operating dates and times of the market.
- 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 SNAP users' attention is to include a picture of the SNAP Independence 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 customers 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. This could be a local source, volunteer, or a market ambassador!



Social Media and Newsletters

Social media can be a great, no or low cost way to reach your audience. 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 Independence cards” when you are referring to SNAP or "Senior Coupons" when referring to Senior FMNP. Use the SNAP Independence card image on some of your posts so that customers can visually identify what you are posting about. Let customers know what they can purchase with their eWIC card by sharing images of vendors’ produce and their eWIC signs. This practice will help to create familiarity and comfort between the vendor, customer and market as a whole.

With free software for creating newsletters like Constant Contact and MailChimp widely available, writing a farmers market or farm stand newsletter is a viable marketing mechanism for many.

A best practice is to send out weekly newsletters during the farmers market or peak season (and less frequently during the offseason for markets that are not year-round). Additionally, it is best to keep newsletters short and sweet. Include benefit acceptance, seasonal availability, events, and vendor spotlights. A sign-up sheet should be readily visible at market, and market managers and farmers should encourage shoppers to sign up.

Community Partnerships

Launching and maintaining successful benefit programs requires a variety of partners, representing diverse groups from your community that can work to get the word out to potential benefit customers, promote your matching programs, and possibly assist with funding efforts. Farmers markets and direct marketing farmers should partner with a wide range of groups, including agriculture organizations, “buy local” initiatives, food access and poverty focused groups, as well as government and non-governmental civic groups.

Most likely, your market is already working with some partners to build community, reach out to a new audience, and create cross-promotions, but you may want to explore new partnerships that will specifically support your work. Think “outside the box” about who might be able to support your efforts. Not all partners need to be associated with agricultural issues or nutrition education to be a good fit. The key to good partnerships is that both partners benefit from the relationship.



Where to Look

- City, state and federal government agencies
- Local public health department
- SNAP administrative agency
- Local transportation department
- WIC office
- Senior Centers
- Schools
- Hospitals, clinics and healthcare agencies
- Tenant Associations
- Food Pantries
- Anti-hunger and anti-poverty organizations
- Places of worship
- Economic development entities
- Neighboring farmers markets
- State farmers market associations
- And many more...



While some of your market's partners will be central to the success of a certain benefit, others may just play a small but useful role, such as purchasing new banners for the market that promotes SNAP.

SNAP-Ed

Maryland SNAP-Ed is a program within University of Maryland Extension that creates healthier environments and improves the health and wellbeing of limited income families across Maryland. SNAP-Ed programs encourage a nutritious and active lifestyle through increased food access, drinking more water, and promoting physical activity. SNAP-Ed provides comprehensive programs that consist of nutrition education lessons, social marketing programs and policy, system and environmental-level changes at partnering sites.



SNAP-Ed connects local farmers and farmers' markets with low income Marylanders to increase access to locally grown fruits and vegetables. SNAP-Ed supports farmers with marketing and promotion efforts, encouraging EBT acceptance at markets and farm stands, and helps to foster community connections through market tours and farmer visits to local SNAP-Ed sites.

Eat Smart shares healthy recipes and weekly blog posts with nutrition and physical activity ideas to help your family make healthy choices, <https://extension.umd.edu/programs/family-consumer-sciences/snap-ed/eat-smart>

Incentive Programs

In addition to accepting benefits, a market may also want to consider offering a Match program to incentivize participants to redeem their benefits at the farmers market.

In a Match program, for each \$1 in federal nutrition benefits spent at the market, SNAP recipients receive an additional credit towards purchases (often limited to fresh fruits and vegetables) at the market. For example, a market may offer a 1:1 SNAP Match program where for every \$1 spent in SNAP, the SNAP recipient receives an additional \$1 to spend at the market. The match amount that a market offers will depend largely on their funding available for such a program.

While match programs can draw in more business from benefit recipients at a market, it is important to note that these programs require additional funding, planning, bookkeeping, and staff or volunteers to implement and sustain.



Maryland Market Money



Maryland Market Money (MMM) is a statewide food access program that feeds Marylanders and supports farmers. MMM removes economic barriers for Marylanders experiencing food insecurity, providing a dollar-for-dollar match for purchases made using federal nutrition benefits at participating Maryland farmers markets, farm stands, and CSAs.

Maryland Market Money can be spent on any SNAP-eligible food items.

Would you like to boost market sales and improve food access in your community? If your answer is yes, you should offer the Maryland Market Money incentive program at your farmers market, farm stand, or CSA!

<https://www.marylandmarketmoney.org/mmm-application>

THANK YOU!

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More Resources > <https://www.marylandmarketmoney.org/news/maryland-market-money-promotion-and-outreach-resources>