

BRIDGING the GAP

Connecting Vulnerable Families with Local Food and Farmers

2017 SNAP Bridge Card Use at Michigan Farmers Markets



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Vision: MIFMA places farmers markets at the forefront of the local food movement and works to ensure all residents have access to healthy, locally grown food and that Michigan farmers markets receive policy support.

Introduction

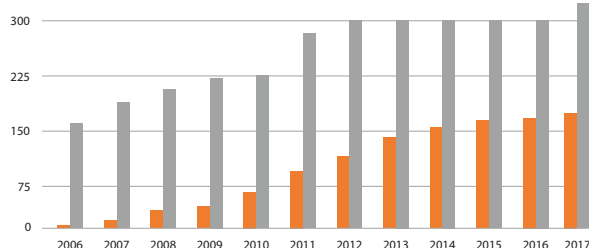
Since its inception in 2006, the Michigan Farmers Market Association (MIFMA) has maintained a focus on supporting farmers markets that accept food assistance benefits and promoting to food assistance recipients their ability to shop at farmers markets. The same year MIFMA began, only three Michigan farmers markets accepted Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits. Each year since 2009, MIFMA has surveyed all Michigan farmers markets that accept SNAP benefits to document the ways in which farmers markets increase access in their communities to fresh, local, nutritious food.



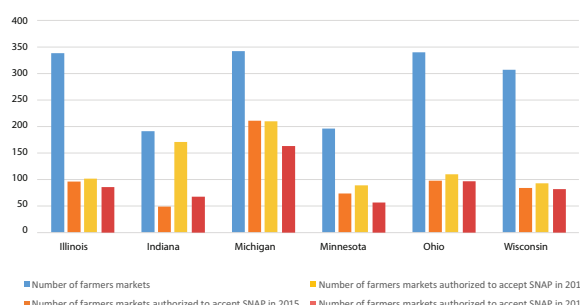
In 2017, an electronic survey was distributed to 164 farmers markets that either reported to MIFMA that they accepted SNAP benefits and/or were listed by the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) as being a farmers market authorized to accept SNAP. The survey yielded 128 full or partial responses. **Thank you to all of the farmers markets that responded to this survey! Without your cooperation and support, this report would not be possible.**

Growth of SNAP Acceptance at Michigan Farmers Markets

Number of Farmers Markets Accepting SNAP Bridge Cards Compared to the Total Number of Farmers Markets in Michigan from 2006-2017



Farmers Markets Authorized to Accept SNAP in Midwest



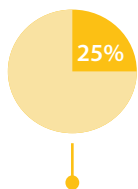
SNAP acceptance at Michigan farmers markets

The number of farmers markets accepting SNAP grew tremendously between 2009 and 2014, with modest continued growth from 2015 to 2017. With more than 300 farmers markets in Michigan, MIFMA celebrates the success of having more than 52 percent of the state's farmers markets accessible to SNAP clients, with 65 percent of Michigan's counties hosting one or more markets that accept SNAP. At the same time, MIFMA aims for continual growth, working with additional markets to develop the capacity to accept SNAP benefits.

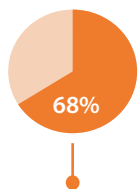
In 2017, 157 **farmers markets** in Michigan reported to MIFMA that they were authorized to accept SNAP benefits; seven markets were authorized to accept SNAP but reported no redemption. According to the **FNS**, in the 2017 federal fiscal year, 210 SNAP retailers were categorized as farmers markets. MIFMA and USDA FNS have unique lists because there are differences between their respective definitions of a farmers market and the organizations' ability to ensure alignment with that definition prior to including a market on their list.



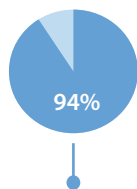
2017 snapshot



Markets that accept food assistance benefits entirely with the support of volunteers

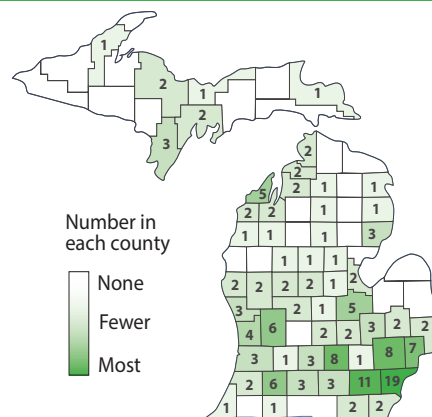


Counties with a market that accepts SNAP



Michigan population living in a county where a farmers market accepts SNAP

Farmers Markets Accepting SNAP By County



0-11,290

Range of transactions per market

479

Average number of transactions per market

\$0-\$122,301

Range of SNAP sales per market

47,460

Total SNAP transactions reported

\$13

Average SNAP consumer transaction

\$1,073

Median SNAP sales per market

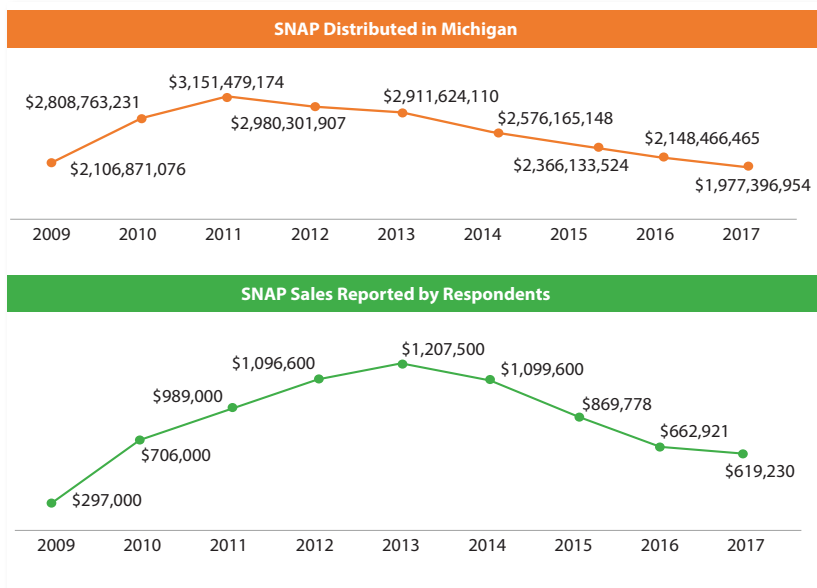
\$6,192

Average SNAP sales per market



Why are SNAP sales declining at Michigan farmers markets?

According to MIFMA's annual surveys, SNAP sales at Michigan farmers markets peaked in 2013 at \$1.2 million. Annually since 2013, the total SNAP dollars being spent at Michigan farmers markets has declined. USDA FNS data also reflects this trend. This trend has market managers, farmers and partners asking why. While we cannot offer a definitive answer, we can suggest several contributing factors including, but not limited to, a decrease in SNAP benefits distributed in Michigan and changes to the local food economy and farmers market industry.



Changes to SNAP eligibility requirements at a state and federal level as well as improvements to the overall economy have both contributed to a decline in the number of households participating in the program and the dollar value of benefits being distributed. According to the FNS, in 2013 approximately \$76 million was distributed to qualifying families. In 2017, only \$64 million was distributed—an 18.75 percent drop over four years. This decline in SNAP distribution may be a significant factor contributing to the decline in SNAP sales at Michigan farmers markets.

Other contributing factors may be related to the farmers market industry, including an increase in the number of farmers markets accepting SNAP, variation in promotion and outreach efforts, farmers market closures, farmers markets discontinuing acceptance of SNAP due to transitions in leadership and/or access to the resources needed to manage the program, weather impacts on the availability of fresh produce and/or the propensity of customers to shop at outdoor farmers markets, shifting of markets to new locations and/or construction projects temporarily limiting access to a market's location. Any of these changing conditions in the farmers market industry may be contributing factors. Further research and data collection could help illuminate the causes of this decline and elicit possible opportunities to reverse the trend in Michigan and nationwide.



Access to technology to facilitate SNAP sales

A point-of-sale device is one of the essential tools a market needs to accept SNAP benefits, therefore ensuring access to technology is one of the most important ways we can support farmers markets. Historically, authorized retailers were able to access a free, hard-wired point-of-sale device to use for the sole purpose of accepting SNAP benefits. Through a contract with Conduent, Michigan's Electronic Benefit Transfer (EBT) contractor, SNAP retailers have had access to these free devices with no transaction fees. The only costs associated with these devices is the electricity and landline required to operate them. Of the responding markets, 23 percent used a central, hard-wired point-of-sale device and token or scrip system, the majority of which are sourced from Conduent, so the market does not incur fees to operate the device.

Farmers markets and direct-marketing farmers often conduct SNAP transactions in locations that do not have access to electricity and landlines which means a wireless device is necessary to create access to fresh, healthy food for SNAP shoppers. Seventy-five percent of the 100 responding markets use a central, wireless point-of-sale device and token or scrip system.



All markets in Michigan that use wireless point-of-sale devices currently, and/or will in the near future, incur costs to operate them. Markets with broken, outdated, or expensive equipment are starting to discontinue accepting SNAP because of this barrier. Therefore, in 2017, one of MIFMA's advocacy goals was to have the State of Michigan invest in ensuring access to no-cost, wireless point-of sale-devices vital to sustaining and growing the ability of farmers markets to accept SNAP benefits.

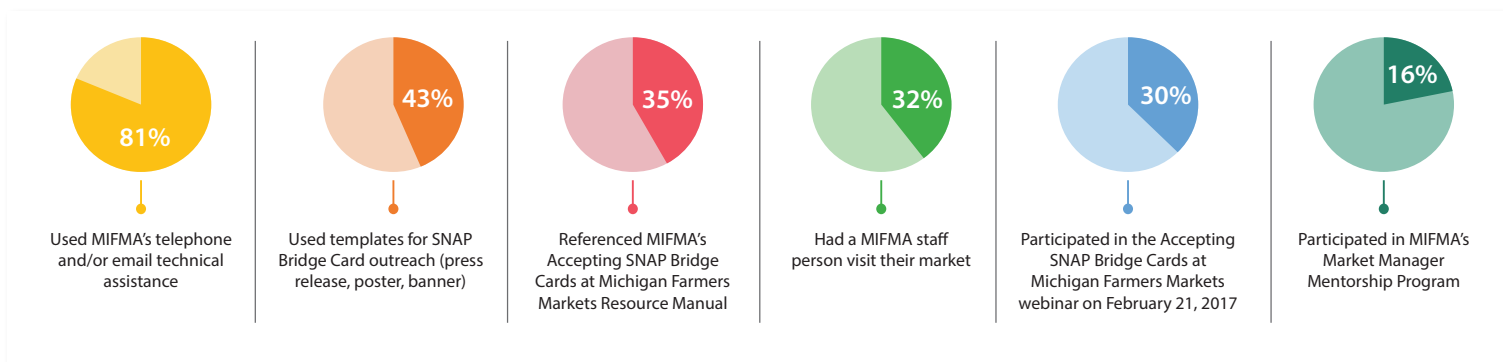
To achieve this, MIFMA partnered with Healthy Kids, Healthy Michigan to advocate for no-cost, wireless point-of-sale devices for farmers markets and direct marketing farmers starting in the 2018 market season. When Gov. Rick Snyder signed the 2018 fiscal year budget on July 14, the State of Michigan pledged this support by including much-anticipated—and much needed—dollars for these devices. Seventy-three of 100 responding farmers markets indicated a need for accessing a new wireless point-of-sale device.

Learn more about this advocacy achievement [here](#). Since the funding was allocated to the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services (MDHHS), MIFMA has pledged to work with the department to help implement this funding so it can have an immediate impact in the 2018 market season.

MIFMA's support of farmers markets accepting SNAP

MIFMA places farmers markets at the forefront of the local food movement and works to ensure all residents have access to nutritious, locally grown food and that Michigan farmers markets receive policy support. In order to increase access to farmers markets for vulnerable families in Michigan, MIFMA supports farmers markets that accept food assistance benefits by providing training and technical assistance, facilitating networking among market managers and community partners and performing outreach to food assistance recipients promoting that their benefits can be used at Michigan farmers markets. MIFMA also advocates at the local, state and federal level for policies that support and enhance the ability of farmers markets to increase food access.

In 2017, numerous tools and resources were provided by MIFMA to farmers markets that accept SNAP. Eighty-four percent of respondents reported using one or more of the tools or resources MIFMA provides. Survey respondents reported the following tools and resources as the most utilized:



Suggested Citation:

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