

Farmers Market SNAP Self-Assessment Tool

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This tool is for use by farmers markets managers to self-assess the vitality and scope of their SNAP/EBT programs, and includes links to resources for each topic. It is estimated that this assessment will take 30 minutes to complete, with more time needed to finish any further actions.

Glossary

SNAP: Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, formerly known as food stamps.

SNAP regulations: The rules for accepting SNAP that are put in place to prevent fraud and misuse of funds. Details of SNAP regulations for merchants who accept SNAP can be found here:

<https://www.fns.usda.gov/snap/retailer/training>

SNAP eligible foods/SNAP approved foods: The types of food that are allowed for purchase using SNAP funds; including vegetables, fruit, honey, dairy products, baked goods, meat, food bearing plants and herbs.

EBT: Electronic Benefit Transfer, an electronic system that allows state welfare departments to issue benefits via a magnetically encoded payment card. SNAP funds are disbursed to families via accounts that can be accessed with EBT cards, similar in use to a debit card.

EBT Toolkit: [There is an online toolkit](#) for Virginia market managers located on the Virginia Family Nutrition Program website (eatsmartmovemoreva.org) that contains a step-by-step manual for setting up a SNAP program as well as free accounting, marketing and outreach tools.

USDA: The United States Department of Agriculture

FNS: The Food and Nutrition Service. FNS oversees all nutrition programs run by the USDA, including SNAP, school lunches, senior feeding programs and more.

SNAP incentive program: Programs that provide SNAP participants with matching funds to increase their ability to purchase SNAP-eligible food items. These vary in the matching funds they provide; for example, some programs provide a dollar-to-dollar match while others may provide a dollar for every \$5 spent at the market. Sometimes referred to as “SNAP doubling programs”.

SNAP vendor reimbursements: Most markets that accept SNAP use a scrip system to distribute SNAP funds to shoppers. (When a shopper's SNAP funds are drawn down from their SNAP account to the market's checking account, the shopper is given wooden tokens to spend like cash in the market on SNAP approved foods. This is a SNAP fraud prevention tool, as SNAP benefits cannot be exchanged for cash.) Markets must therefore reimburse their vendors for accepting wooden tokens for food. For example, if a vendor makes \$15 in token sales over a market day, the market will then write that vendor a \$15 dollar check to reimburse them for those sales.

VCE: Virginia Cooperative Extension

VAFMA: Virginia Farmers Market Association

VFM: Virginia Fresh Match network

Note: If the embedded links in this document do not work, please try copying and pasting the link directly into your web browser.

Self-Assessment Questions

Pre-market Season

1. Do vendors understand SNAP regulations and what purchases are allowed using SNAP?

- Yes
- No

If no: A list of approved foods is here: <http://www.fns.usda.gov/snap/eligible-food-items> Consider adding a list of approved foods to vendor packets and vendor agreements.

A sample EBT vendor agreement can be found in the USDA's SNAP Handbook here in Appendix C: <https://www.ams.usda.gov/sites/default/files/media/SNAPat%20Farmers%20Markets%20Handbook.pdf>

2. Do vendors have information about SNAP shopper habits at farmers markets?

- Yes
- No

If no: Review the USDA report from 2014 (link below) that talks about SNAP shopper habits at farmers markets with your vendors. These can help vendors to market their specific products and lead to more sales. <https://fns-prod.azureedge.net/sites/default/files/FarmersMarkets-Shopping-Patterns-Summary.pdf>

3. Do vendors have quick talking points to educate shoppers about how to shop with SNAP at the farmers market?

- Yes
- No

If no: Consider giving vendors talking points explaining how your market's SNAP program (and any incentive program your market may have) works from a shopper's point of view. An example can be found in the EBT Toolkit

<https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/0BxuPUnm8D19EZ21SaVM5d3VRYWM>

4. Do vendors clearly display all prices?

- Yes
- No

If no: Make enforcing clear price signage a market policy.

5. Do you have your accounting system for SNAP vendor reimbursements set up?

- Yes
- No

If no: Examples of market accounting tools can be found in the Virginia EBT Toolkit at <https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/0BxuPUnm8D19EN3ZIMUVZNIREc1E> and are discussed in the EBT Manual for Virginia, titled "Applying For and Starting Your SNAP Program" (found in the EBT

Toolkit), and in [USDA's SNAP Handbook](#) (see second link in question 1). The main way to ensure that vendors stay happy with your SNAP program is to ensure they receive their checks in a regular, timely manner.

6. Is your market's commitment to welcoming all shoppers included in your market's mission statement?

- Yes
- No

a. Is it included on your website, advertising and training manuals?

- Yes
- No

If no: Take the time to brainstorm with your market leadership a mission statement that includes language on welcoming all shoppers and make sure to post it on your website and in your training manuals for staff, volunteers and vendors. For help with mission statement writing, review "Foundations for a Successful Farmers Market" <https://pubs.ext.vt.edu/448/448-502/448-502.html> and these tips from South Dakota Cooperative Extension <https://extension.sdstate.edu/developing-vision-statement-farmers-market>

Also review Wholesome Wave's "Fostering a Culture of Inclusivity at Your Market"

<https://extension.colostate.edu/docs/martha/Fostering-an-Inclusive-Market-Environment.pdf>

7. Do your board, city council and/or market administrator understand the benefit of accepting SNAP to the market and the community?

a. Is your board aware of your market's SNAP program?

- Yes
- No

b. Is your city/town council aware of your market's SNAP program?

- Yes
- No

c. Do they have quick talking points to explain the program and its benefits to many types of audiences, such as market shoppers, potential funders, etc.?

- Yes
- No

If no: Review [Wholesome Wave's "Outreach Idea Book"](#) for help with creating language on how to explain SNAP at your market to different audiences. Make time to share with your board. Develop a plan to make your local politicians aware of the successes of your market each year.

8. Have you set aside a budget for SNAP marketing tools?

- Yes

No

If no: There are free Virginia SNAP marketing templates in the [EBT Toolkit](#). Low cost SNAP incentive program marketing tools are available from the [Virginia Fresh Match network](#). For more information on the Virginia Fresh Match network contact Maureen Best at maureen@leapforlocalfood.org

Include a marketing budget in any future grant applications for your SNAP program for printing flyers, posters, etc.

9. Have you and your vendors been trained in “[Enhancing the Safety of Locally Grown Produce](#)”? This course is intended for fresh fruit and vegetable growers that are interested in learning more about safely growing and selling produce. It will provide an introduction to best practices for the cultivation, harvesting, and transport of fresh produce.

Yes

No

If no: Contact Dr. Renee Boyer at Virginia Tech to find the nearest VCE agent holding trainings near you at rraidn@vt.edu. There is now an online version available at tinyurl.com/VCEFarmersMarket1

Pre-Market Season Advertising:

10. Have you surveyed your community to understand how your market is regarded by both current shoppers **and** those who have never come to your market?

Yes

No

If no, create a survey to find out:

- a. How comfortable do current shoppers feel using their SNAP benefits at your market?
- b. Are their interactions with staff, volunteers and vendors friendly and positive?
- c. What suggestions do current shoppers have for creating a welcoming market?

Tips for conducting a farmers market survey are available from Washington state’s Farmers Market Association here: <https://cfaky.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/Survey-Tips-for-Your-Market-Feb-2016.pdf>

Tips for conducting a needs assessment with SNAP consumers is discussed in USDA’s Cultural Competency resource here: <https://fns-prod.azureedge.net/sites/default/files/snap/cultural-competency.pdf> Consider partnering with your local WIC office, Department of Social Services, Head Start, library or other agency that serves low income people to speak with potential shoppers who have never come to your market.

If Yes: Have you shared these responses with your vendors and staff?

11. Have you formed partnerships with community organizations and government agencies to help you get the word out about your SNAP program? (These partners can also help you reach new groups of people for the surveys mentioned in question 11.)

a. Have you tapped their know-how of how to reach the SNAP population and how to make your market more welcoming to SNAP shoppers?

- Yes
- No

If no: review USDA's webinar on partnering for SNAP outreach

<https://www.fns.usda.gov/snap/farmers-markets-building-partnerships>

12. Do you have a SNAP marketing plan or strategy?

- Yes
- No

If no: Review USDA's webinar <https://www.fns.usda.gov/snap/farmers-markets-advertising-marketing>.

13. Have you considered the "Market Champions" outreach mode, which uses local volunteers to talk about your program to their neighbors and around their communities?

- Yes
- No

If no: "Market Champions" are community members with strong roots in the community who use, understand and LOVE your market's SNAP program. They can be volunteers, or be paid to do outreach about your market. Read about D.C. Greens successful program here:

<https://www.dcgreens.org/market-champions>

14. Do you use simple illustrations on advertising materials to explain your SNAP program? This can help low literacy readers or those for whom English is their second language.

- Yes
- No

If no: There is a template for outreach materials using simple language in the EBT Toolkit [here](#).

15. Are your advertising materials translated into all of the languages in your community?

- Yes
- No

If no: There are Spanish language outreach tools in the EBT Toolkit (link above in question 9). You may be able to partner with a local volunteer, your local Department of Health or a local college for free or low cost translation into other languages.

16. Do you have a simple "Frequently Asked Questions" poster or a section of your website about your

SNAP program?

- Yes
- No

If no: Take time to review the websites of farmers markets in your region to see how they answer questions. You may also want to join the [Virginia Fresh Match network](#) to learn from other markets in the state.

17. Do you have funds or a plan for raising funds for a SNAP incentive program?

- Yes
- No

If no: Review [Wholesome Wave's "How to Run a Nutrition Incentive Program"](#) for ideas for fundraising and program management. [Virginia Fresh Match](#) is a great local partner to help you start your incentive program.

Market Season

Creating a welcoming environment:

1. Do you have seating available for customers to have a place to relax and/or socialize?

- Yes
- No

If no, having a few seats and tables helps families enjoy your market. It also gives your market a focal point for groups to meet. You could invite local churches, moms groups, or senior groups to tour your market and meet there.

2. Do you offer family-friendly, educational programming that fits the culture of your market, such as:

a. Nutrition or gardening classes offered through VCE?

- Yes
- No

b. Market tours?

- Yes
- No

c. New customer welcome/orientation?

- Yes
- No

d. Cooking demos, free samples, recipes reflective of your community?

- Yes
- No

e. Music/entertainment that reflects the culture(s) of your community?

- Yes
- No

If no: Contact your local VCE office for information on partnering to offer nutrition or gardening demonstrations at your market. VCE's Family Nutrition Program works with SNAP farmers markets to provide SNAP friendly cooking demos. Contact Meredith Ledlie Johnson for more information meredil@vt.edu. Seek out new musicians in your community by asking your vendors and shoppers for leads. Information on how to lead a farmers market tour can be found [here](#) in the EBT Toolkit.

3. Have you partnered with local organizations to provide outings for groups, such as day trips for seniors, moms from the local WIC program, Family Nutrition Program nutrition education groups, etc.?
- Yes
 - No

If no: The EBT Toolkit has a Farmers Market Orientation Lesson that can be used to help people learn what to expect at a market, a great tool to use with groups at partner agencies, schools, churches or libraries. Link:

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/0BxuPUnm8D19EdHNJdXNzTno3TWs/view?usp=sharing>

EBT Accessibility

4. Do you have well-trained staff or volunteers to run the EBT machine?
- Yes
 - No

If no: Create a staff/volunteer manual that can be kept next to the EBT machine, along with the machine's operation manual. (Example manual from Blacksburg Farmers Market [is available in the EBT Toolkit](#))

- a. Do you provide basic information to staff, volunteers and vendors on how SNAP benefits are given out?
- Yes
 - No

If no: Understanding how SNAP benefits are distributed can help market staff, volunteers, and vendors to understand how to better serve SNAP shoppers. A good basic overview can be found at <https://www.fns.usda.gov/snap/recipient/eligibility>

5. Are your volunteers or staff fluent in the languages spoken in your community?
- Yes
 - No

If no: Work with partner agencies that serve this population to brainstorm ideas; try to recruit market volunteers that are fluent in the languages you need, and ensure that you have image-heavy signage that is readable by speakers of other languages and low literacy populations.

- a. Do you offer your staff and volunteers cultural competency training to help them

communicate with a variety of customers?

- Yes
- No

If no: USDA's Food and Nutrition Service has a resource on cultural competency and outreach here: <https://fns-prod.azureedge.net/sites/default/files/snap/cultural-competency.pdf>

- b. Do the staff or volunteers running your EBT machine have quick talking points to explain your SNAP program and how to shop in the market with SNAP benefits?
 - Yes
 - No

If no: Providing written information for the staff/volunteers running the machine will help your market have a consistent message about how your SNAP program works, [see the Outreach Idea book](#) for ideas on creating simple language for different audiences.

- 6. Do the volunteers/staff running your EBT machine know how to process paper vouchers in case of machine malfunction?
 - Yes
 - No

If no: Contact your EBT service provider for paper vouchers and information on how to process them. Share this information with anyone running the machine, and keep the vouchers with the machine in case it breaks down on market day.

- 7. Do you have easily recognizable market staff/volunteers (example: wearing a bright colored or market- specific shirt)?
 - Yes
 - No

If no: Having staff and/or volunteers wear something recognizable helps all of your customers, and makes it easy to tell SNAP shoppers who to turn to for help in your SNAP marketing materials ("To use your EBT card, find the person in the neon yellow shirt!") There is a [downloadable T-shirt template in the EBT Toolkit](#) you can have printed on a shirt color of your choosing.

- 8. Are you aware of the public transportation routes to get to your market? Is this information on your website/advertising materials?
 - Yes
 - No

If no: If you live in an area with public transportation make sure your website and SNAP marketing materials have information on how to travel to your market via bus or train. If there is no public transportation in your area: some markets have partnered with their local Area Agency on Aging, church or public housing complex to arrange van rides to the market.

Market Season Advertising

EBT visibility:

1. Do you have clear signs at the market entrance and throughout the market saying you gladly accept SNAP?
 Yes
 No

If no: a simple language change in your advertising materials can make a big difference to SNAP shoppers to help them feel welcome. [See Wholesome Wave's Outreach Handbook for examples.](#)

2. Do all of your market vendors who sell SNAP approved foods have to accept SNAP?
 Yes
 No
 - a. If no, are vendors who do accept SNAP using clear signage?
 Yes
 No

If no, make sure all SNAP vendors have a sign showing they accept SNAP. [Templates are available in the EBT Toolkit.](#)

- b. Have you created a map or list of all vendors, what they sell, and who accepts SNAP?
 Yes
 No

If no: Having a list or map of vendors, what they sell, and if they accept SNAP near your EBT machine and at the entrance of your market helps all of your customers navigate the market.

3. Is the EBT machine clearly visible or do signs point customers to the EBT machine?
 Yes
 No

If no: The visibility of your EBT machine is critical. Make sure all vendors and staff can point the way to the machine, and that the tent with the machine stands out. Have the machine located in a similar spot each week for consistency.

4. Do you have a sign, newsletter, or social media message alerting SNAP customers to the foods available at the market each day so they can plan a shopping list or meals on a tight budget?
 Yes
 No

If no: Use a whiteboard at the entrance to your market or at the EBT table to alert customers to all the types of food being sold at the market that day; or send out a newsletter alerting customers to what vendors will have available at the market this week. Facebook and Instagram can also be used. A Facebook Live walk through of the market at the start of each market day takes just a few minutes, lands at the top of your followers Facebook feeds, and can be used to highlight a different vendor or seasonal food each week.

Post-Market Season

1. Have you compiled SNAP sales information?
 Yes
 No

If no: The EBT Toolkit has several sample accounting spreadsheets you can use, and the USDA EBT Handbook discusses basic SNAP record keeping
<https://www.ams.usda.gov/sites/default/files/media/SNAPat%20Farmers%20Markets%20Handbook.pdf>

2. Have you taken steps to improve your SNAP program based on ideas from shoppers, vendors, community partners, funders, etc.?
 Yes
 No

If no: Gather feedback from shoppers, staff, volunteers and vendors about your SNAP program on an ongoing basis through surveys or a suggestion box. Identify a team of people who shop at, sell at, or help run the market who can work with you to make some of the changes and suggestions a reality in your market. It is fine to start small and go from there!

Post-Market Season Marketing

3. Have you shared sales information and market success stories with your board, vendors, local politicians, and the media to celebrate what your SNAP program does for your community?
 Yes
 No

If no: Review [Wholesome Wave's Story Gathering Toolkit](#) for ideas of ways to get the story of your SNAP program out to all of the groups that are touched by it. This will help you with future fund raising and advertising.

Other Resources

Farmers Market Legal Toolkit <https://farmersmarketlegaltoolkit.org/snap/legal-topics/who-administers/>

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