

2013 Fresh Bucks Evaluation

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Prepared for:

City of Seattle Office of Sustainability and the Environment and
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Fresh Bucks is a price incentive program for low-income consumers at Seattle farmers markets. It allows participants in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) (formerly called food stamps) to receive up to \$10 additional dollars in matching Fresh Bucks currency to spend on fruits and vegetables when they redeem their benefits at a Seattle farmers market. Fresh Bucks was piloted in 2012 at seven farmers markets in Seattle in partnership with the Neighborhood Farmers Market Alliance. In 2013, Fresh Bucks expanded to all 15 Seattle farmers markets and two P-Patch Market Gardens. The program ran from July 8th to December 31st, was coordinated by the Washington State Farmers Market Association, and received funding from the City of Seattle's Office of Sustainability and the Environment, JPMorgan Chase, the Seattle Foundation, and participating markets. The program has the potential for multiple benefits: 1) promoting the health of low-income consumers, 2) bringing new shoppers to farmers market communities, 3) supporting financial sustainability for farmers, and 4) contributing to strong local economies.

This evaluation assesses intended 2013 Fresh Bucks outcomes and program processes. Outcomes examined relate to each of the four potential benefit areas. Program processes include stakeholder satisfaction and program promotion, operations, and administration. Data were collected via tracking Fresh Bucks distribution (July-October only);^a in-person and telephone surveys with Fresh Bucks shoppers, market vendors, market staff, and SNAP participants elsewhere in the community; and farmers market environmental scans.

Key Findings:

[Use of Fresh Bucks](#)¹

- Between July and October 2013, 2,613 participants used Fresh Bucks, redeeming an average of \$33.36 in EBT benefits and receiving an average of \$23.85 in Fresh Bucks. Fifty-six percent of participants received Fresh Bucks once, and an additional 35% received Fresh Bucks between two and five times. In total, participants redeemed \$87,209 in EBT benefits and received \$62,345 in Fresh Bucks.

[Health of Low-Income Consumers](#)

¹ The Fresh Bucks program was originally scheduled to run July-October. Due to funding availability, the program was extended through December. Tracking data referenced in this report pertain to the originally planned 4-month period.

- Price was the predominant concern reported by respondents regarding the purchase of fruits and vegetables. Fresh Bucks shoppers feel the program increases their ability to afford fruits and vegetables.
- A large majority of Fresh Bucks shoppers (90%) reported purchasing more fruits and vegetables because of the Fresh Bucks program.
- On the day surveyed at the market, 87% of Fresh Bucks shoppers had purchased vegetables and 74% had purchased fruit. Sixty-two percent purchased both fruit and vegetables.
- The Fresh Bucks incentive, in combination with the farmers market environment, may support shoppers in buying some fruits and vegetables that they do not otherwise typically purchase.
- Nearly all Fresh Bucks shoppers (95%) reported that the program makes a difference in their family's diet.
- Fresh Bucks shoppers used most of the produce they purchased with the benefit, and many used their produce in a new way that they liked.

Financial Sustainability for Farmers

- A large majority of vendors (84%) reported that Fresh Bucks shoppers purchased more fruits and vegetables from them because of Fresh Bucks.
- More than half of vendors (55%) reported that EBT customers purchased more non-produce items (e.g., meat, cheese, bread). (Some vendors felt Fresh Bucks might have allowed participants to purchase non-produce items with EBT benefits they would have otherwise used to buy produce.)
- Market staff and vendors reported various perceived changes in the customer base, especially increases in the number of EBT customers, regular EBT shoppers, and shoppers who spoke a language other than English. Respondents noted that more seniors and youth, racially and ethnically diverse customers, families with children, or “people who wouldn’t otherwise shop here” shopped at the market because of Fresh Bucks. Market staff were more confident that these changes occurred than were vendors.
- Forty-one percent of vendors made a change in pricing or promotion based on customer demand for produce easily sold in \$2 increments.

Bringing New Shoppers to Farmers Market Communities

- Forty-four percent of Fresh Bucks shoppers used EBT at a market for the first time when they first used the program.

- Quite a few shoppers said they would shop at farmers markets without Fresh Bucks, but the reported likelihood of shoppers doing so was considerably higher if they could use Fresh Bucks.
- Twenty-three percent of Fresh Bucks customers shopped at a farmers for the first time during this period.
- Fresh Bucks shoppers described price as the biggest potential barrier to farmers market accessibility, and said that price incentives, like Fresh Bucks, are the best way to help them have access to the markets.

Strength of Local Economies

- Fresh Bucks generated an estimated \$111,598 in stimulus to the local economy based on the USDA’s Food Assistance National Input-Output Multiplier (FANIOM) model.

Project Process: Stakeholder Satisfaction, Promotion, Operations, and Administration

- Fresh Bucks customers, market staff and vendors all reported high levels of satisfaction with the program .
- A considerable proportion of Fresh Bucks shoppers (42%) first learned of the program at the market information booth. Other frequently noted ways of hearing about the program included word-of-mouth, promotional efforts (e.g., signs, fliers, websites), and service agency outreach, or media coverage.
- Vendors and staff generally felt that they had the necessary information and support, and a large majority of vendors (80%) felt it was “very easy” to participate in the program.
- Market group managers felt that administrative responsibilities were reasonable, though reporting was somewhat burdensome and additional planning time would be helpful.
- There is a lot of interest among market managers in extending the Fresh Bucks season, but a split in opinion over whether it would be worth lowering the benefit match in order to meet that goal.

Discussion and Conclusion

Evaluation findings indicate that Fresh Bucks is supporting many of its intended outcomes, including increased affordability, purchases and consumption of fruits and vegetables among low-income populations, increased revenue for farmers, a broader base of customers for farmers and markets, market accessibility, and stimulus to the local economy. At the time 2013 evaluation data were compiled, six of the seven of markets that had participated in the prior year were on a trajectory to

meet or exceed the amount of Fresh Bucks distributed in the 2012 pilot. Data also indicate a pattern of continued growth in new EBT users: 905 new EBT users in 2012 and an additional 1,161 through October 31st in 2013. Evaluation findings have a number of implications for program and policy development.

General areas of focus and recommendations to consider include:

- Encourage return Fresh Bucks shoppers through additional community outreach and promotion.
- Continue to build awareness throughout the season through a citywide campaign, additional materials in multiple languages, and use of consistent terminology.
- Consider lengthening the Fresh Bucks season.
- Seek a consistent and reliable funding source to enable maximum time for program planning and minimum disruption.
- Consider options for addressing currency confusions, such as an information sheet for vendors, allowing currency to be distributed as change, providing additional denominations of currency, or supporting vendors in accepting SNAP directly.
- Explore options for streamlined data collection to reduce burden associated with information gathering and reporting. One option may be to work with the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) Food and Nutrition Service to identify methodology that captures and reports SNAP transactions electronically.

It is clear from shopper data that affordability is the biggest barrier to accessing fruits and vegetables and shopping at farmers markets among low-income individuals and families. Respondents feel that Fresh Bucks helps to address some of those barriers. Vendors reported a more diverse customer base and a perception that the program was responsible for an increase in produce sales. Market staff also feel the program has supported greater market shopper diversity and that Fresh Bucks provides a way for markets to better serve their communities. Although stakeholders have highlighted some challenges and suggestions for improvement, shoppers, market staff and vendors feel consistently positive about the program and strongly support its continuation and growth. As with most evaluations, there are limitations to consider based on the evaluation design. It may be worth considering options for a more rigorous design in the future that would allow for examination of additional questions.