



**Increasing Access to Healthy Foods:
Electronic Benefit Transfer and Market Bucks at
Minneapolis Farmers Markets**

2012 Summary Report

Introduction

From 2010 - 2012, the Minneapolis Health Department (MHD, formerly the Minneapolis Department of Health and Family Support) assisted Minneapolis farmers markets in establishing Electronic Benefit Transfer (EBT) systems and a Market Bucks incentive program. This initiative allowed Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) recipients to use their food assistance dollars to purchase fresh fruits and vegetables at local farmers markets. Offering EBT at farmers markets is a strategy that has shown promise in expanding access to healthy, locally grown foods for low-income individuals and increasing their consumption of fruits and vegetables, which can lead to improved health outcomes such as lower rates of obesity and chronic disease.

In collaboration with Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Minnesota (Blue Cross), the MHD established EBT systems at 13 Minneapolis farmers markets, including five “mini-markets” (a sub-category of farmers markets allowing no more than five vendors). In addition, both entities funded a Market Bucks incentive program to increase the buying power of EBT customers and supported a coordinated citywide promotional campaign to increase awareness among target populations.

The purpose of this document is to provide an overview of the 2012 Minneapolis EBT and Market Bucks initiative, including details related to operations, outcomes, lessons learned, and future plans.

2012 Minneapolis EBT and Market Bucks Initiative

Participating Markets

In 2012, MHD partnered with the following farmers markets and mini-markets:

- Minneapolis Municipal Farmers Market
- Midtown Farmers Market
- Northeast Farmers Market
 - Audubon mini market* (oversight provided by Northeast Farmers Market)
- West Broadway Farmers Market
 - Camden mini market* (oversight provided by West Broadway Farmers Market)
 - Heritage Commons mini market* (oversight provided by West Broadway Farmers Market)
 - St Olaf mini market* (oversight provided by West Broadway Farmers Market)
- West Bank Farmers Markets at Brian Coyle Center and Augsburg College
- Kingfield Farmers Market*
 - Fulton Farmers Market* (oversight provided by Kingfield Farmers Market)
 - Stevens Square mini market* (oversight provided by Kingfield Farmers Market)

**indicates a market that started EBT/Market Bucks in 2012*

Funding

The 2012 Minneapolis EBT and Market Bucks initiative was supported by MHD through its Statewide Health Improvement Program (SHIP), funded by the Minnesota Department of Health. Additional funding and technical assistance were provided by Blue Cross. A comprehensive promotional campaign, similar to the ones conducted in 2010 and 2011, was coordinated by the West Broadway Farmers Market with funding from Blue Cross. For summary reports of the 2010 and 2011 season, please visit the Minneapolis Health Department's [Healthy Living website](#).

Program Components and Operations

EBT and Market Bucks were offered at all participating market locations throughout the 2012 season (approximately May – October 2012) using the same basic operating and administrative procedures as were used in 2010 and 2011. EBT services were provided through a market-based system (as opposed to a vendor-based system), with a central EBT processing machine to serve all vendors and wooden tokens in \$1 and \$5 denominations. Similar to previous years, EBT tokens were distributed by each market and were only accepted at the market where they were issued. The Market Bucks incentive used paper coupons in \$1 denominations, which were issued to EBT users as a match of up to \$5, once per market day. Based on feedback from previous years, Market Bucks coupons were accepted at all participating Minneapolis farmers markets, not only the market at which they were issued.

As in previous years, all markets participated in a coordinated promotional campaign effort, which included a joint press release, paid media advertisements on bus shelters, direct outreach and promotions to SNAP recipients, and the creation and distribution of printed materials for use at each market and within the surrounding community.

EBT and Market Bucks Outcomes

Key results from the 2012 EBT and Market Bucks initiative are summarized in Table 1 on the following page and compared to previous seasons.

Table 1: EBT and Market Bucks Statistics, All Minneapolis Markets: 2010 – 2012

	2010 Season	2011 Season	2012 Season
# of participating markets	3	5	13
# of EBT transactions (total, not unique)	1,607	3,870	5,403
EBT sales (tokens redeemed)	\$20,754	\$49,823	\$66,267
Market Bucks (issued)	\$7,127	\$17,462	\$26,214
Market Bucks (redeemed)	\$7,078	\$17,251	\$24,256
Total revenue (EBT sales + Market Bucks redeemed)	\$27,832	\$67,074	\$90,523
Unique customers served	736	1,674	2,251

For detailed statistics by market, please refer to *Appendix 1: Minneapolis EBT and Market Bucks Statistics by Market, 2010 – 2012*.

Additional outcomes from the 2012 season included

- Across all markets, an average of **76%** of EBT tokens were redeemed with produce vendors versus “other” vendors (those selling other SNAP-eligible items such as meat, cheese, dairy, etc).
- Across all markets, an average of **87%** of Market Bucks coupons were redeemed with produce vendors versus “other” vendors.
- At 10 of the markets, **100%** of eligible vendors accepted EBT. At the remaining 3 markets, **91%, 96% and 67%** of the eligible vendors accepted EBT. The percent of eligible vendors accepting EBT was the lowest at the Minneapolis Farmers Market, which is the largest market in the city. Even though the percent was lower at this market, the actual number of vendors accepting EBT was still the highest at this market than any other market in the city. For example, 50-60 vendors still accept EBT at this market on weekends during the peak market season, which is nearly double the number of vendors at the next largest market.

Challenges with data collection and analysis

A number of challenges existed with data collection, analysis, and reporting for the 2012 EBT and Market Bucks initiative, and these challenges should be taken into consideration when comparing 2012 results to previous years. Key challenges are explained below:

- All markets were provided with a monthly form to track data including EBT tokens issued and redeemed, Market Bucks coupons issued and redeemed, number of unique customers served, and amount of EBT and Market Bucks redeemed with produce vs. other vendors. One medium-sized market did not track monthly totals for EBT tokens redeemed, but did report a season total amount of EBT tokens redeemed. This total was used in calculating overall EBT revenue generated across all markets, although monthly totals were used instead of a season total for all other markets.
- One mini market did not report monthly totals or a season-total for EBT tokens redeemed. MHD staff estimated the total amount of EBT tokens redeemed using 2011

redemption rates (98%) and the amount of EBT tokens *issued* (which was reported by the market).

- For one large market, the season total for Market Bucks coupons redeemed did not match the combined monthly report totals. MHD staff used the combined monthly report totals in calculating overall Market Bucks redemption across all markets, since this information was also available for all other markets and allowed for as much consistency in calculations as possible. This same issue occurred with the season total for EBT tokens redeemed. MHD again used the combined monthly report totals in calculating overall EBT token redemption across all markets.
- All markets were asked to report monthly on the amount of EBT tokens and Market Bucks coupons redeemed at produce vs. other vendors. Some markets did not track this information so it was impossible to provide an exact redemption amount for EBT and Market Bucks at each type of vendor. MHD staff estimated the amount of EBT tokens and Market Bucks coupons redeemed at both produce and other vendors and reported the results as an approximate percent of EBT and Market Bucks redeemed.
- Based on the information provided by the markets, MHD staff could not easily calculate the unique number of EBT vendors at each market over the course of the season. It was only possible to report on the percent of vendors that were EBT-eligible on average across all markets. Reporting the percent of EBT eligible vendors at all markets provides a better indication of vendor interest in participating in the EBT system and also provides a better indication of EBT customers' access to EBT-eligible vendors on a given market day.

Future Plans

In 2013, one additional Minneapolis farmers market plans to add an EBT system and participate in the Market Bucks incentive program (Mill City Farmers Market). With the addition of Mill City Farmers Market, all medium and large-scale farmers markets (i.e. not mini-markets)

in Minneapolis now accept EBT. It is estimated that over 50 farmers markets across Minnesota will have the capacity to accept EBT and Market Bucks in 2013.

In order to better support the expanding number of markets accepting EBT across the state, the Minnesota Department of Human Services (DHS), with financial support from Blue Cross will serve as a central coordinating entity for EBT and Market Bucks starting in 2013. All markets wishing to receive assistance in implementing and maintaining their EBT systems will submit an application to DHS for direct oversight and assistance and will no longer need to work through local or regional organizations (such as the Minneapolis Health Department). Blue Cross funding will continue to support the Market Bucks incentive program at all interested markets across Minnesota.

Recommendations

The popularity of the EBT and Market Bucks initiative continued to grow during the 2012 season, and increased sales are expected in future years as customers and vendors become more familiar with the program. Despite interest from new markets and higher utilization by customers, the EBT and Market Bucks initiative still faces long-term sustainability challenges. Administrative costs to run the program remain a burden for most markets. A central coordinating entity and technology improvements (outlined in detail in the 2010 and 2011 summary reports) may help to alleviate some of these issues. To support the ongoing expansion of the EBT and Market Bucks initiative both in Minneapolis and across the state, MHD strongly recommends the following:

- Continued partnership between state and local government and non-profits to refine the central coordinating entity concept as it is piloted in 2013. It is likely that this switch from local to state administration and oversight will create some temporary confusion and additional work for markets as they learn to adhere to new processes and requirements. All agencies involved should work together to support a smooth transition.
- Additional research for technology improvements to make EBT transactions more efficient for markets and vendors. As innovative technology solutions are identified,

agencies should work together to secure suitable funding for the implementation of pilot projects.

- Ongoing funding for coordinated promotions campaigns to promote EBT and Market Bucks, including paid and earned media, direct community outreach, and printed promotional materials. Given the Minneapolis markets' lack of staffing and financial capacity to coordinate market-specific campaigns, external funding for a comprehensive campaign that covers all markets is essential for continued program growth. In addition, state-wide promotions should be strongly considered in future years as more markets across Minnesota begin to accept EBT.

Acknowledgments

The Minneapolis Health Department would like to thank Blue Cross Blue Shield of Minnesota for their financial support and assistance with EBT and Market Bucks at Minneapolis farmers markets in 2012 and for their work to promote the expansion of EBT statewide. MHD would also like to thank all of the Minneapolis farmers markets for their participation in and commitment to the Minneapolis EBT at Farmers Markets initiative.

Additional Resources

Additional information and materials related to the Minneapolis EBT and Market Bucks program can be found on the Minneapolis Health Department's Healthy Living [website](#).

Appendix 1: Minneapolis EBT and Market Bucks Statistics by Market, 2010-2012

Market Name	EBT transactions			EBT sales			Market Bucks issued			Market Bucks redeemed			Unique customers		
	2010	2011	2012	2010	2011	2012	2010	2011	2012	2010	2011	2012	2010	2011	2012
Mpls Municipal	892	2,454	2,896	\$13,556	\$36,493	\$39,123	\$3,996	\$10,902	\$13,096	<i>missing</i>	\$11,638	\$12,333	472	1,027	1,273
Midtown	663	1,172	1,612	\$6,756	\$11,770	\$18,572	\$2,882	\$5,575	\$9,037	\$2,442	\$5,001	\$8,539	235	518	569
Northeast	52	107	268	\$442	\$759	\$2,907	\$249	\$434	\$1,177	\$224	\$346	\$1,011	29	42	118
Audubon*	n/a	n/a	16	n/a	n/a	\$85	n/a	n/a	\$72	n/a	n/a	\$53	n/a	n/a	10
West Broadway	n/a	70	71	n/a	\$463	\$748	n/a	\$346	\$320	n/a	\$214	\$205	n/a	54	63
Camden*	n/a	n/a	17	n/a	n/a	\$131	n/a	n/a	\$78	n/a	n/a	\$75	n/a	n/a	13
Heritage Commons*	n/a	n/a	7	n/a	n/a	\$43	n/a	n/a	\$34	n/a	n/a	\$12	n/a	n/a	5
St Olaf*	n/a	n/a	1	n/a	n/a	\$5	n/a	n/a	\$4	n/a	n/a	\$4	n/a	n/a	1
West Bank (2 sites)	n/a	67	106	n/a	\$338	\$566	n/a	\$205	\$477	n/a	\$52	\$279	n/a	33	47
Kingfield	n/a	n/a	338	n/a	n/a	\$3,369	n/a	n/a	\$1,590	n/a	n/a	\$1,481	n/a	n/a	107
Fulton	n/a	n/a	30	n/a	n/a	\$384	n/a	n/a	\$144	n/a	n/a	\$150	n/a	n/a	17
Stevens Square*	n/a	n/a	41	n/a	n/a	\$334	n/a	n/a	\$185	n/a	n/a	\$114	n/a	n/a	28
TOTAL	1,607	3,870	5,403	\$20,754	\$49,823	\$66,267	\$7,127	\$17,462	\$26,214	\$7,078**	\$17,251	\$24,256	736	1,674	2,251

*denotes mini market

**total does not include total Market Bucks redeemed for Minneapolis Municipal Market (missing data)

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