

From the Ground Up: Making Healthy Local Foods Accessible for All

Challenge

When the Vermillion Area Farmers Market first considered the possibility of accepting SNAP benefits, there was not a model for them to follow. At the time, there were no other markets in the Dakotas accepting SNAP benefits. This project was truly about paving a new road. It took patience and persistence to find the right people and agencies to go through the process with the farmers market and to develop policies and procedures. The process required working collaboratively with multiple state agencies. Once approved to accept SNAP benefits, it took years of trial and error to develop forms, trainings, and procedures.

Solution

The Vermillion Area Farmers Market created a system to accept SNAP that is easy for customers, vendors, and the market manager. There has been a steady increase in the use of SNAP at the market, and they are seeking ways to further expand the program and forge new partnerships. Volunteers devised an annual fundraiser to help cover fees associated with the SNAP program, so this can be absorbed by the market rather than the vendors. A new token program was created which allows low-income customers to increase their spending power at the market, using tokens to double their dollars.

Key Components

The farmers market board president was integral to the success. She spent over a year making numerous calls throughout the state to various agencies and other markets to locate policies and organizations that could help. Throughout the process, the board president worked closely with SD Department of Health, SD Department of Agriculture, and SDSU Extension. After the initial start-up, the entire board and volunteers continued revising market procedures and seeking funding to advertise, assist other markets, and expand the program.

Timeline

2007

- Started the process

2009

- Approved to accept SNAP
- Purchased equipment with a Market Grower grant from the SD Department of Agriculture

2017

- Upgraded equipment with a grant from the Farmers Market Coalition to add the ability to accept credit cards

Summary

It took five years to complete the process to accept SNAP, develop and revise procedures, and find ways to make it sustainable. Now, it is just business as usual. The market has a common language, a common understanding, and all of the board members and vendors do their parts to make it work. More SNAP recipients are taking advantage of the market, and healthy, local foods have become increasingly accessible to everyone.

Results

More families now have access to fresh, local foods. Further, farmers markets across the Dakotas were able to follow this model to pursue accepting SNAP benefits at their markets. Currently, 22 farmers markets in North and South Dakota accept SNAP. The Vermillion market has expanded its role in the community beyond making local foods accessible to SNAP recipients. Accepting EBT has changed the attitudes of the vendors and market board, and the farmers market is now more than just a place to buy and sell goods. The market is improving lives!



“ We experienced an expanded role in the community, a further sense of giving back and making a difference. It's worth it to watch more and more people able to stock their kitchens and provide their families with healthy, fresh, local foods. ”

Amy Schweinle
Vermillion Area Farmers Market

Next Steps

In the near future, the goal is to expand farmers market offerings, such as cooking and food preservation classes. This will help further expand access to fresh, local foods. Finding grants to make local foods even more affordable and accessible is another priority. The long-term goal is to partner with community organizations like the grocery store, hospital, county health, and social services to develop a community-wide wellness program.

The Vermillion Area Farmers Market is working on a USDA grant that will help fund the cellular and transaction fees for accepting SNAP, provide incentives to use SNAP benefits at the market, and help people with transportation to and from the market. If any other market is considering accepting SNAP benefits, it is completely worth it.

Contact

Vermillion Area Farmers Market

605.857.3213

vermillionfarmersmarket.org

facebook.com/groups/VAFarmersMarket

Get Involved:

If you operate a farmers market, it is very worthwhile to accept SNAP for the benefit of community members and vendors alike. For individuals utilizing SNAP benefits, take advantage of what farmers markets have to offer. Prices are comparable to grocery stores, you get fresh foods and the opportunity to talk with the people who grow, raise, and make your foods. Vendors enjoy talking about their products and it is fun to learn more about the food you provide to your family. The Vermillion Area Farmers Market is always looking for volunteers to help with fundraisers, the token program, and the market in general.