



## How can I offer EBT at my market?

Many markets across the state are participating in the NYS Farmers Market Wireless EBT program that gives markets the technology and tools to accept SNAP benefits on behalf of their farmers. As a certified SNAP retailer, the market, or its program sponsor, uses wireless technology to “sell” EBT tokens to SNAP customers. In other words, SNAP benefits are exchanged through the wireless equipment for SNAP (EBT) scrip, in the form of wooden tokens, which can then be spent within the market to purchase SNAP eligible products.

The program allows low income consumers access to fresh, locally grown farm products with their SNAP benefits. This system allows us contact with consumers who can once again enjoy the bounty of New York farmers using their SNAP benefits. And happily, farmers can once again participate in the SNAP program, enhancing their farm income through this important federal nutrition program.

But is the NYS Farmers Market Wireless EBT program something that you and your market can participate in? What are the considerations and what is the process for participating?

### Considerations for entering the program

Hosting EBT in your market, as a benefit to your customers and farmers, requires a commitment of both human resources and financial resources. Each must be carefully considered before entering the program.

- 1) The program will provide you with peripheral equipment (card reader and printer) to process SNAP, debit and credit, however, it is a Bring Your Own Device program. That means you must have an iPhone or compatible Android phone. Or you can use an iPad. You must also have a dataplan allowing access to the internet. If your market has wifi that you can connect to, you will not need a dataplan.
- 2) The program requires the SNAP equipment to be manned throughout each market day. Any less than that is a form of discrimination. You must have someone, or shifts of people, to operate the terminal from opening to closing each market day. It need not be the manager, but can be market employees, volunteers, or an outside organization that has agreed to perform the onsite administration of the program. It also does not need to be the same person each market day, nor the same person all day. But, it cannot be a vendor in the market who is also selling SNAP eligible products. This is a conflict of interest, as it will give the appearance of giving this vendor an unfair advantage over other market vendors.
- 3) There is some paperwork involved in participating in the EBT program. Transaction logs must be kept that track both EBT sales and farmer redemptions of tokens. These reports are provided as an Excel spreadsheet by the Farmers Market Federation of NY, <http://www.nyfarmersmarket.com/images/EBT/EBTlogs.xls>. They are set up to be as simple as possible, and provide the data that is used for reporting purposes to both

USDA Food and Nutrition Service and the New York State Office for Temporary and Disability Assistance. The logs are mandatory and need to be emailed to the Federation office on a monthly basis. Again, this is a simple process that, once trained in the procedure any staff or volunteer will be able to follow.

- 4) The wireless equipment will accept SNAP benefits from the customers' benefits card and transfer them to the market's designated checking account. This is an automatic deposit, or ACH transaction. This means that the service provider, such as FIS Government Solutions, has access to your checking account for this purpose. Some organizations, and especially municipalities, do not allow ACH transactions into their account. You will need to open an account that can accept ACH transactions.
- 5) Farmers will redeem tokens accepted as payment for their products through the market or EBT manager. The benefits, transferred from benefit account to the market account, are available with 24 – 48 hours and ready for you to make payments to farmers. Farmer redemptions must be done on a regular basis. Many markets will provide checks to the farmers at the next market day following redemption. Some markets will also accept the EBT redemption funds to be used to pay stall fees for the farmers who participate. If this is done, there must be transparent recordkeeping to follow the redemption of tokens to a credit on the farmers fee schedule. Farmers should also be given receipts showing the amount of tokens received and the disbursement of the redemption.
- 6) The wireless system incurs fees. There processing fees, as well as an EBT transaction fee. These fees are automatically debited from your account each month. This means that you must be able to maintain adequate reserves in your checking account to accommodate these fees. If the money is not available when the ACH comes through, your account will be charged a bounced check fee by the service provider, as well as a similar fee by your bank.

*The processing fee and the EBT transaction fees will be reimbursed to you annually, typically in late February, for the previous year. You must be able to front the fees throughout your market season, in anticipation of their reimbursement.*

- 7) The most successful markets in terms of the volume of SNAP sales have done so by developing community partnerships for the program. Community partners can be beneficial in a number of ways. First, they will assist with outreach by making their clientele aware of the program within your market. They may also help to reach additional partners to help spread the word throughout the low income community. Finally, many community partners will be willing to assist in the administration and cost of the EBT program. Some will use their staff or volunteers to man the EBT booth during market hours. Others may agree to take the EBT program on as their own and administer the program on behalf of the market and its vendors.
- 8) How do your farmers feel about the program? The success of EBT in your market is also dependent on a critical number of farmers and vendors participating so that SNAP consumers have choices. Many markets report increased business and profitability through EBT participation.
- 9) The tokens that are provided to the market to use as EBT scrip are negotiable instruments. That means that if tokens are lost or stolen, they may be accepted by farmers as payment for their products without them having any means to tell that they were fraudulently acquired. The program requires that any tokens the farmers and

vendors present for payment, must be honored. TREAT THESE TOKENS LIKE CASH and make certain they are secure!

10) The Farmers Market Federation of NY provides training to market managers for the administration of the program. The training is provided either by a face to face meeting, if feasible, but also by webinar. Periodic training is offered to markets that are new to the program, as well as refreshers to past participants. The training is required for all new participants. It is important that the market participate in the trainings to understand their rights and responsibilities, as well as the administration of the program. A training webinar will be maintained on the Federation website for viewing at any time, <http://www.nyfarmersmarket.com/snap-for-nys-farmers-markets/>.

The service provider also provides a training whenever a terminal is issued. The training is conducted by conference call and you can schedule this at your convenience. It is best to schedule the call at a time when you and your EBT staff are available to participate. The training takes less than an hour to complete and gives a complete guide to operating the equipment.

### **Process for joining the EBT program**

Joining the New York State Farmers Market Wireless EBT program is a 3 step application process. Each step must be completed before equipment can be programmed and deployed to you. The process can take up to 8 weeks to complete, so allow yourself plenty of time before you plan to promote and implement your program.

#### **1) Farmers Market Participation Agreement:**

This is the first step in the process. This agreement spells out your rights and responsibilities for the program. It also provides the Federation with critical information about your market so that it can be properly promoted as a SNAP Capable market. Once the agreement is signed and returned to the Federation office, it will hold your place in the program, reserving a terminal for your use. It will also allow the Federation to order tokens and signage for your market.

The agreement can be found online at: <http://www.nyfarmersmarket.com/snap-for-nys-farmers-markets/>.

#### **2) Snap Retailer Certification with USDA:**

To participate in the SNAP program, each market (or its EBT sponsor) must become certified as a SNAP retailer. The application is available online. But it can be done easiest over the phone with the Farmers Market Federation of NY. The application will require someone to take responsibility for the program and put their social security number (SSN) on the application. The SSN is used by the Food and Nutrition Service to review your past history with the SNAP program. They will determine if you have been in the program in the past and what the circumstances of your participation were, in other words, were you disqualified in the past for any reason. This is the only use of the SSN. It is not shared with other federal or state agencies.

Along with the application, documentation must also be sent to the USDA Food and Nutrition Service. Typically they will ask for a copy of a social security card and drivers

license or other form of identification from the application signatory.

The application for SNAP Retailer Certification can be completed simultaneously with the Farmers Market Participation Agreement. SNAP certification can take up to 4 weeks for final approval.

3) Service Provider Application:

This is the final application in the process. Once you have SNAP certification approval, this application can be completed. This application will allow equipment to be programmed for you and deployed. The programming links your SNAP certification number to your checking account, allowing the equipment to accept SNAP transactions. With the application, you will need to include a voided check from the account you are authorizing SNAP transactions to occur. Once the application is in the hands of the service provider, it will be 2 – 3 weeks before equipment will be shipped to you.

Once you have the terminal and have received the training from the service provider, you are ready to begin accepting SNAP transactions.