



## Double SNAP Impact on Shoppers and Farmers in Western North Carolina, 2021

In 2021, ASAP's Double SNAP program doubled the value of shoppers' SNAP benefits at farmers markets. This program allowed SNAP recipients to swipe their EBT card for any amount and receive double that value in tokens to spend on local foods at participating markets. This program has the dual benefit of improving farmers market accessibility for SNAP participants by expanding their local food budgets and strengthening the local food economy by diversifying and increasing local food producers' customer base and sales.

ASAP began piloting this program in 2019 at the Asheville City Market and has since expanded to eight farmers markets across three counties. The pandemic intensified the need for this program, as farmers lost significant income due to market disruptions like restaurant and other food service closures and as record numbers of households experienced food insecurity. From 2020 to 2021, demand for the Double SNAP program tripled. In 2021, the program matched over \$255,000 in SNAP, funneling over \$500,000 into the local economy. Over 200 family farmers and small food businesses and nearly 1,100 families benefited.

Local products that were available to buy through this program in 2021 included fruits, vegetables, breads, cereals, meats, fish, poultry, dairy products, and seeds and plants that produce edible foods. At the ASAP Farmers Market, thirty-two percent of SNAP dollars were spent with value-added vendors to buy products like fermented foods, bread, honey, and pasta. Another thirty percent were used to purchase fruits and vegetables. Meat, eggs, and dairy made up forty percent of all SNAP dollars spent at this market in 2021.

On September 27, 2021 a survey was shared with the Farmers Market Managers who participated in the Double SNAP program along with their vendor and customer networks. The purpose of this survey was to assess the impact of and gather feedback on ASAP's Double SNAP program. The survey was open for seven weeks and collected 163 responses. Twenty-eight percent of responses were from Double SNAP participants, twenty-three percent were other market consumers or community members, and forty-two percent of responses were from market vendors. Twelve people from farmers market management responded, representing all but one participating market.

ASAP's Local Food Research Center uses this survey data to identify trends and impacts of the Double SNAP program. Participants reported on how often they use this program and the overwhelmingly positive impact it has had on them and their families. Increased sales and diversified demographics of shoppers at the markets were noted by both market managers and vendors. Even community members who do not directly use the program noticed the benefits to those around them.

Over eighty-five percent of Double SNAP participants who responded to this survey said that they shopped at a market at least two or three times per month in 2021. Forty-two percent frequented a market every single week. Almost all participants described how this program changed their shopping habits, including prioritizing fruits, vegetables, and other healthy foods or shopping more frequently at a market. One person shared, "My family went from eating lots of processed boxed foods and only shopping sales to eating a whole foods diet with minimum processed foods."

Double SNAP participants appreciate that the program empowers them to support their local community through improved access to markets, all while enhancing their healthy eating habits. Referencing the impact of this program, one person said, “It has been life changing. [...] I couldn't afford to support local before and this makes me feel connected to the community and to the land. I'm also able to eat better, incorporating more fresh produce into my meals. I'm disabled with multiple health conditions and being able to have fresh food grown locally has also helped my health tremendously. [...] Thank you!!!!”

If the Double SNAP program ended, participants said that they would either buy less, visit markets less frequently, or stop going completely. “[Ending the Double SNAP program] would reduce the incentive to shop at the market. [...] Double SNAP is critical to stretching our budget.”

Customer consistency was recognized by market managers, who saw an increase in regular customers that participated in the Double SNAP program. All market managers responded that the program increased their customer base and market sales. One manager shared, “The Double SNAP program has brought a lot of new customers to our market, who have become regulars. These customers have also told their friends who have come and become regular customers at market. Some of our customers buy all their produce, meats, eggs, cheese and baked goods at market, and only shop at the grocery for staples not available at market. We have seen a huge uptick in sales for some vendors with the program, and it has given the market the ability to retain vendors and strengthen our market in numbers and visual presence.”

Market managers responded that funding is crucial to continuing the Double SNAP program at their market. Many markets do not have the capacity to seek their own funding or manage this program on their own, and thus rely on ASAP's capacity to leverage funds across the region. When asked about the biggest challenges to building and sustaining a Double SNAP program, one market manager replied, “Funding. That's it! We have operated as a small market thus far - growing significantly in the past two seasons. Funding related to SNAP has allowed me to work more hours, get more advertising, buy parking related signs and cones, and solicit help from an assistant. We frankly don't have enough money to do this program on our own.”

Farmers market vendors, including farmers and those selling value-added food products, also experienced positive impacts from the program. Eighty-one percent reported the program increased their sales, but beyond that, two thirds reported that it introduced more people to their business and products. Explaining how the Double SNAP program has impacted their business, one vendor said, “It has allowed more money to be spent at the market which has really made a difference on the income side. The difference between barely making it and feeling like the market is worth my time to sell, as a small business owner, is astounding...” Another farmer said, “I see new customers at market using SNAP and buying abundantly what they would not have been able to afford. It's exciting! Beyond fresh local veggies, they're able to buy fresh seafood, ferments, local cheeses, mushrooms, and other nutrient rich foods that many see as a luxury. My sales have definitely increased.”

Community members also saw the positive impact that this program had on those around them. Eighty percent of community members responded that continuing Double SNAP at the market is important. One person shared, “I see this [program] as a double win. Supporting local farmers by supporting those in need is a great concept. It brings attention to local produce and gives autonomy to SNAP participants by allowing them to purchase the highest quality produce. The prices at the market are very similar to grocery stores and not shipping produce cross country seriously reduces the carbon footprint of produce. I honestly can't think of a better way to spend these dollars. It's doing double duty.”