



## Double SNAP Impact on Shoppers, Farmers, and Farmers Markets in Western North Carolina, 2022

In 2022, ASAP's Double SNAP for Fruits and Vegetables program doubled the value of shoppers' SNAP benefits at farmers markets. This program offers a match on SNAP dollars spent at participating farmers markets with tokens that can be used to buy produce. This program has the dual benefit of improving farmers market accessibility for community members using SNAP benefits 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 seven more farmers markets: East Asheville Tailgate Market, Enka-Candler Tailgate Market, North Asheville Tailgate Market, River Arts District Farmers Market, Southside Community Farmers Market, Weaverville Tailgate Market, and West Asheville Tailgate Market. Having this program available across eight markets, six days a week, and various times of the day gives customers many opportunities to purchase local foods.

Program usage expanded immensely in 2020 as a response to food insecurity brought on by the initial shock of the COVID-19 pandemic, and subsequent job loss and food system disruptions. Originally, all SNAP-eligible food products, including dairy, meats, eggs, breads, and fresh produce, could be bought using the program's doubled SNAP dollars. While this model had a significant impact on both consumers and local producers, funding limitations made it unsustainable. In 2022, the program shifted, matching SNAP dollars with Farm Fresh Bucks that can be spent on local fruits and vegetables. The goal of this program remains the same - to build connections to local food and farms by reducing barriers, and increasing local food purchasing, positively and simultaneously impacting community health, resiliency, and the economic viability of local farms. In 2022, the program doubled \$124,325 SNAP dollars, directly supporting 80 family farms and small food businesses and nearly 1,000 families.

On October 13, 2022 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 34 responses. Fifty-six percent of responses were from people who used Double SNAP benefits, twenty-one percent of responses were from market vendors and twenty-nine percent were market managers who participated in the program this year. Along with the survey, we had follow-up conversations with program participants and market managers.

ASAP's Local Food Research Center uses this survey data and follow-up conversations 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.

Over sixty 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 2022. Thirty-one percent frequented a market every single week. Almost all participants described how this program changed their shopping habits, including prioritizing fruits and vegetables or shopping more frequently at a market. One person shared, "I love fresh vegetables. Having more money to shop increases my choices and ability to have fresh food each week."

In conversation with one participant, they shared that they found out about the Double SNAP program while volunteering at a farmers market. Since this discovery, they have brought their five year old son to farmers markets, taught their son about where fruits and vegetables come from, and purchased interesting local products like mushrooms and sauerkraut that you can't find in stores. "It feels really good to be able to support folks who make their own products. In 2023, I'm looking forward to the continued availability of microgreens, fresh fruits and vegetables, and continuing to see what vendors bring to markets."

Double SNAP participants appreciate that the program empowers them to shop their values, while enhancing their healthy eating habits. Referencing the impact of this program, one person said, "Double SNAP is just great *and* it helps the local farmers. It's just incredibly important, as far as the quality of food that is available and the climate effects of shipping and the security of food with future supply and transportation problems. There are many reasons it is important to have the local farm community thriving. This program is a super win-win: getting people what they need to live *and* live well *and* helping farms." Another participant described, "going to the market, just expecting to get a few things and finding out about [the Double SNAP program] there. With this program, I can go more often and get more stuff. This program has changed the way I eat big time. I can get stuff that I couldn't afford before."

If the Double SNAP program ended, ninety-two percent of participants said that they would either buy less, visit markets less frequently, or stop going completely. If this program ended, one participant said they would continue to shop at markets, "but not nearly as often and certainly not be able to buy as much." Customer consistency was recognized by market managers, who have seen an increase in regular customers participating in the Double SNAP program. Eighty-eight percent of market managers responded that the program increased their customer base and the diversity of market customers. One manager shared, "I really believe that the Double SNAP program has brought so many new folks to the market. Most of the people that use the Double SNAP program are repeat customers and I can tell that they truly consider this their community market. Double SNAP really incentivizes people to use their food stamps to shop locally and people appreciate the community that this brings as well."

Market managers appreciate how this program improves accessibility for low-income people, and work to make their farmers markets a welcoming and comfortable place for everyone to buy local foods. "Regular Double SNAP participants express gratitude when receiving their tokens at market. We try to make it a dignified process, where participants don't have to jump through hoops to get access to the Double SNAP program. We make sure everyone feels welcome, walk around with participants and introduce them to farmers, and make it feel like they *want* to come buy their foods here."

Farmers that sell at these farmers markets also experienced positive impacts from the program. All vendors who responded to the survey reported the program increased their sales and that it introduced more people to their business and products. One farmer described that the Double SNAP program, "has boosted sales at market and has brought folks to shop that buy in bulk," and another said that, "people who normally don't shop at farmers markets are now able to shop with us."

Farmers market managers, vendors, and Double SNAP participants all see the value that incentivizing fresh, local fruits and vegetables has on healthy eating and reducing food insecurity. One market manager shared, "We constantly receive feedback from SNAP customers that the Double SNAP program greatly contributes to food access and food security for themselves and their families." Another said, "It has brought families with children to buy quality vegetables at market and also increased elderly customers living on a budget." Explaining how the Double SNAP program has impacted the health of their community, a vendor said, "It is a huge help to people looking to buy fresh produce. People are able to buy more healthy food to eat."