



Expanding Farm Fresh Double SNAP Benefits

Exploring the preliminary impacts of a
regional SNAP-incentive network
in Western North Carolina

ASAP Local Food Research Center
February 2025

For an online version of
this publication, visit
[https://asapconnections.org/
local-food-research-center/](https://asapconnections.org/local-food-research-center/)

Copyright © 2025
Appalachian Sustainable
Agriculture Project (ASAP).
Permission granted to
reproduce for personal or
educational use as long as
the document is not altered
and this copyright notice
is affixed.

This material is based upon work that is supported by the National Institute of Food and Agriculture, U.S. Department of Agriculture Gus Schumacher Nutrition Incentive Program, under award number 2023-70415-41207. Any opinions, findings, conclusions, or recommendations expressed in this publication are those of the author(s) and should not be construed to represent any official USDA or U.S. Government determination or policy. Support also provided by Dogwood Health Trust and project partners.

Contents

Contents	1
Executive Summary	2
Background & Program Description	3
Program Usage	4
Participant Feedback	5
Program Impact	5
Potential Impacts of Ending the Program	7
Survey Respondent Demographics	7
Conclusion	8

Executive Summary

This report presents a description of the formation of the Western North Carolina Farm Fresh Double SNAP Network and an assessment of the Network's impact on community members and the local food system. In 2023, the Network was formed by the nonprofit Appalachian Sustainable Agriculture Project with support from partners Blue Ridge Women in Agriculture, MountainWise, and a Network Advisory Council. The Network was created to provide centralized support for over two dozen unique SNAP-incentive programs in the region and to expand SNAP-incentive programs to the more rural communities of Western North Carolina. Of central importance, these programs provide incentives for *fresh, local fruits and vegetables*. The primary goals of this Network are to reduce barriers to local food access and support direct markets to be positive food environments that foster direct connections between farmers and consumers. By achieving those goals, research indicates program participants will consume more local fruits and vegetables, experience long-lasting positive behavior changes regarding healthy eating, and become more active participants in shaping the local food system. The latter supports a future with a more transparent, democratic, and responsive food system which increases community well-being and equity, builds resilient economies, and supports environmental sustainability

Data collected in the first year shows a robust and appreciated program that has had a meaningful impact on community members' local food consumption, food security, health, and connection to farmers and the local food community. The Network supported SNAP-incentives programs at 27 local food outlets including farmers markets, food hubs, a mobile market, and a grocery store. Over 13,700 transactions were made, resulting in approximately \$435,000 in SNAP and SNAP incentives spent on local food. This money supported more than 200 local farmers. Over 90 participants shared quantitative and qualitative feedback through surveys that demonstrated a profound impact not just on increased fruit and vegetable consumption, but on their emotional and mental well-being and the connections they had formed in their community through this program.

Guided by this preliminary feedback, the Network will continue to support SNAP-incentive programs at direct markets and evolve to be responsive to the needs of the community. Future research will continue to evaluate this Network as a potential model for other communities and statewide efforts interested in integrating local food into SNAP-incentives programs.

Background & Program Description

The region of Western North Carolina (WNC) is unique in its abundance of small, family-owned farms and robust network of direct-to-consumer market opportunities. Historically dependent on tobacco as a primary cash crop, farms in the region have remained viable by diversifying their production and market outlets. Today, over two-thirds of the approximately 600 WNC farmers in ASAP's Appalachian Grown network sell some or all of their products through one or more of the 60 farmers markets that operate in the region. These markets offer positive food environments that foster direct connections between farmers and consumers, increasing engagement in the local food system and contributing to healthier communities and stronger local economies.

In 2009, Asheville City Market became the first farmers market in WNC to accept SNAP/EBT as a payment method. Many markets followed suit, realizing its potential to reduce barriers to buying local food for hundreds of thousands of community members, build engagement in the local food system, and increase farmers' customer base and sales. Ten years later, Asheville City Market became the first of many WNC markets to offer a SNAP incentive program. Now the region hosts numerous SNAP incentive programs, which have evolved differently based on organizer capacity and community characteristics. In 2023, Appalachian Sustainable Agriculture Project (ASAP) and two partners, Blue Ridge Women in Agriculture (BRWIA) and MountainWise saw an opportunity to create a WNC Farm Fresh Double SNAP Network to support SNAP-incentive programs. With diversified funding from federal, non-federal, and in-kind support, this regional Network is now implementing, operating, and expanding SNAP incentive programs across WNC in order to improve food security and access by connecting people to local food and farm-centered environments.

In the first year, a range of entities, referred to as "firms," participated in the Network, including 23 farmers markets, two food hubs, one mobile market, and one brick-and-mortar store. These firms all operated SNAP-incentive programs prior to joining the network. Rather than replace these existing programs with a one-size-fits-all approach, the Network is embracing a "community adaptive model," with the shared goal of increasing access to local fresh fruits and vegetables. This approach centralizes technical assistance, outreach and promotion efforts, and data tracking and management but can be tailored to meet unique community assets and needs and allow for seamless continuation of existing programs. As a result, incentive programs across the region are referred to by different names (i.e., Double SNAP vs. Double Up Food Bucks), and there is significant variation in how they are operated. For example, the majority of participating firms are farmers markets, which run SNAP/EBT cards at a central market booth and provide customers with tokens that can be used for SNAP-eligible products. By participating in this program, most firms match customers' SNAP dollars up to \$20 in tokens that can be used to buy local fruits and vegetables. Some markets have additional sources of funding that allow them to provide a straight double of SNAP tokens, rather than limiting the doubled amount to tokens that can only be spent on fruits and vegetables. In the central mountains, most farmers markets are using the same Double SNAP for Fruit and Vegetable tokens, which allows customers to use their tokens interchangeably between markets if they don't spend them all in one day. In other subregions, customers were already familiar with a different token and market managers opted not to switch to a new one.

In contrast, the food hubs, mobile market, and brick and mortar store operate quite differently than farmers markets. The High Country Food Hub in Boone has integrated the incentive into their existing transaction tracking system. TRACTOR Food and Farms Food Hub in Spruce Pine and Wilkes Fresh, a mobile market in Wilkesboro, use their merchant services system to apply a discount to SNAP transactions involving the purchase of produce. Finally, Jarrett Brothers, an independent grocery store in Rosman, NC, participates in the program using paper coupons.

The program is primarily led by ASAP in partnership with BRWIA and Mountainwise, and guidance from an Advisory Council. ASAP is a nonprofit that has served as the backbone organization for food- and farm-centered activity in WNC since 2002. ASAP is located in Asheville, but serves 60 counties within a 100 mile radius. Its mission is to help local farms thrive, link farmers to markets and supporters, and build healthy communities through connections to local food. BRWIA is a nonprofit that helps build an equitable, sustainable High Country local food system by supporting producers and cultivating community connections that educate, inspire, and increase the demand for local food. MountainWise is a regional public health partnership of the eight westernmost WNC counties fiscally agented by Macon County Public Health. It focuses on the intersection of health and nutrition, with a mission to promote strong, resilient communities by supporting active lifestyles and healthy eating.

To support this partnership, a Network Advisory Council including broad representation from WNC communities, meets quarterly to guide decision-making and ensure the needs of historically underserved communities remain central to each project phase. Council members include community members who receive SNAP and actively participate in the program, farmers, and multiple organizations that represent and/or serve historically underserved populations. Members of this group are compensated for their time and unique expertise. Together they share the responsibility of expanding this regional network of SNAP-incentive programs and ensuring it works smoothly for all audiences, especially program participants.

Program Usage

A primary efficiency brought by the Network is a centralized system for data collection and analysis. ASAP created a system through the platform Smartsheet that allows each participating firm to submit weekly program usage reports. In January 2024, the partners began piloting the Smartsheet process with the few farmers markets that were open through the winter. After making adjustments and providing technical assistance, the team onboarded the remaining firms in the spring.

From January 1 to September 15, 2024, a total of 13,760 SNAP transactions were made across all 27 firms. As a result, nearly \$295,000 SNAP dollars were issued and matched with roughly \$140,000 for fruits and vegetables. **In total, community members received approximately \$435,000 to buy food from over 200 local farmers.**

There is great variability in program use across each firm—especially across farmers markets. Some are large, high-capacity markets located in high-density areas like Asheville, NC. They have been operating for decades and have market managers on staff to dedicate time to market management

as well as promotional campaigns and marketing. Other smaller, rural markets are operating with much lower capacity and draw from a smaller population base. For example, North Asheville Tailgate Market (NATM) runs year round and hosts an average of 16 fruit and vegetable vendors per market. In year one of this program (January–September 2024), NATM reported 1,716 SNAP card transactions, with over \$46,000 SNAP tokens distributed, \$30,000 of which were matched with Fruit and Vegetable Incentive tokens. In contrast, Ashe County Farmers Market (ACFM) in Jefferson, NC runs from April to October and hosts an average of nine fruit and vegetable vendors per market. In year one of this program, ACFM reported 20 SNAP card transactions, and \$370 of SNAP tokens distributed and \$340 were doubled. NATM welcomed approximately 50 program participants per week compared with only one participant per week at ACFM. Despite variation in program usage, program impacts were significant across the region.

Participant Feedback

In September, all participating firms began promoting a survey to participants of the WNC Farm Fresh Double SNAP program. These were shared in newsletters, social media, and with QR codes at markets and stores. Surveys could be taken electronically or on paper at the firms. Participants who completed the survey were offered a \$10 stipend for their time. Between September 6, 2024, and November 12, 2024, 93 surveys were completed, representing participants shopping at 17 of the 27 firms. It should be noted that data collection was disrupted by Hurricane Helene, which caused significant damage to this region in the midst of the evaluation period.

Program Impact

The majority of respondents (66 percent) have been receiving SNAP benefits for over a year, and nearly half (48 percent) have been using Double SNAP benefits for over a year. This demonstrates that firms have attracted participants committed to their program, many of which predate the formation of the Network. Simultaneously, the program continues to bring in new customers—over a quarter (27 percent) shared they had used the program fewer than three months. **Nearly 90 percent of participants rated their experience with the Double SNAP program as positive** and only two participants shared they had a negative experience with the program.

Several survey questions explored the impact of the Double SNAP program on participants' lives. **94 percent of respondents shared that participation in the program helped them to eat more local fruits and vegetables.** 87 percent reported that because of the program, they had greater knowledge about local fruits and vegetables, such as where their food is grown, where they can purchase local food, new fruits or vegetables, new recipes, or health benefits of fruits and vegetables. **The program also contributed to expanding participation in the local food community.** 74 percent reported talking to family, friends, or coworkers about local food and farms and 72 percent reported feeling more connected to local farmers and the local food community.

Several questions were designed to gauge participant food security, defined as access to enough food for an active, healthy life. 55 percent reported that it was sometimes or often true that the

food they bought didn't last, and they didn't have enough money to get more. 57 percent reported it was sometimes or often true that they couldn't afford to eat balanced meals. 44 percent reported that in the last 30 days they ate less than they felt they should because there wasn't enough money for food. Overall, **85 percent reported that participation in the Double SNAP program increased their food security.**

When asked to elaborate in their own words about how the Double SNAP program had affected them, several themes surfaced. **For some, the benefit of the program was straightforward—it stretched their food budgets, making it easier to buy more fresh, local fruits and vegetables. Many others elaborated on the additional benefits and compounding impacts of a program that extends beyond simply increasing food access.**

Roughly 40 percent highlighted the **higher quality of fresh, local food and its impact on their health.** One shared, *"This program allows me to purchase and eat the freshest and highest quality produce available. The health results are very subtle, but eating that kind of food sure feels great!"* Others mentioned how the health benefits extended beyond physical health to include mental health. *"Being part of the Double Snap Fruits & Veggies program has supported me tremendously in feeling food secure, ease in making healthy choices that support my local food economy, and healthier and more vibrant in my body. There was a period of time I didn't have it, and definitely felt more scarce, stressed out and shameful with having to go to food banks for support, overall negatively impacting my mental/overall health and well-being."*

Approximately one-third shared how the program helps them to **support local farmers and feel connected to the local food community.** Within this theme, many mentioned **learning more about local agriculture** and the **importance of connecting the next generation to local food.** One participant wrote, *"Being able to leverage my SNAP benefits specifically with fresh fruit and veggies, especially from local farmers, has given me and my daughter the opportunity to feel more deeply connected to our local food ecosystem and know we are both supporting our own health and at the same time keeping the economy in a closed loop system and supporting local ag."* Another echoed the sentiment, sharing, *"The program has allowed me to have more access to local fruits and veggies that has improved my overall well-being and quality of life, connect with other community members and farmers, and learn more about local agriculture and plants."*

Others shared simpler things, like the **ability to explore new seasonal products and be more adventurous** with what they purchased and cooked. For one participant and their household, this looked like more produce on the dinner table. *"[We] began eating more fruits and vegetables, and more variety of them, due to increased affordability and options. Planned more vegetable dishes in meals for my family."*

Finally, when compared to other options available to families with food insecurity, many noted that **this program provided them with a sense of dignity.** *"With the rising cost of groceries, utilities, and childcare (just to name a few) the Double SNAP program has allowed our family to stress less about money when it comes to buying healthy and local. The community of organizers are so kind and welcoming. I have never felt embarrassed to use my tokens either because of the positive attitude that*

surrounds the program. I feel so grateful that it benefits the farmers as well as the families that need it, like mine! Thank you for this gift!!”

One participant shared a description of their experience with the program that succinctly touched on all of the above themes: *“I think buying local meat/produce tends to feel like a luxury and **when you’re on food stamps, you really feel like you have to stretch your dollars. The double up bucks program makes buying local feel more accessible** because it makes the cost more comparable to chain grocery stores. Being able to buy our produce at the farmers market with our EBT funds has 1. Given us opportunities for **an outing with our kids** and **gets them excited about picking out healthy food** with us, 2. Has made us **feel more connected with our community** (especially seeing and connecting with people in person at the farmers market), and 3. Has **offered a sense of dignity** while shopping with food stamps—there’s not just no judgment, but encouragement to double up to use food stamps locally.”*

Potential Impacts of Ending the Program

Without the program, participants reported their local food shopping habits would change. 11 percent said they would no longer shop for local food. 49 percent would only do so occasionally, while 33 percent would continue shopping at least once a month, 7 percent didn’t know or preferred not to answer. A follow-up question allowed participants to describe why they would or wouldn’t keep shopping for local food without this program. **Some shared that the program introduced them to local food and created an opportunity to build new shopping habits that they plan to maintain at some level.** *“We would definitely purchase less local food but find a way to keep a few important staples in our diet,” one participant wrote. “It has changed the way we relate to our community for the better. Understanding the cycles of seasons where we live makes a difference.”*

For others, the program reinforced their connection to local food and helped them to live according to their values. One shared, *“This program makes healthy, local food more accessible. I will always strive to eat locally because it’s a strong value of mine, and, without this program, it would feel much more strained and stressful.”* Another participant faced a similar predicament, explaining, *“I love local food and want to support local farmers and small businesses as much as I can, but I am financially insecure and typically only can afford the good local food with this program.”*

While for some, limited incomes pose an insurmountable barrier to purchasing healthy local food without this program. *“I’ve been on a tight budget and had stopped shopping at farmers markets until I just recently received SNAP benefits,”* wrote one participant. Another simply stated: *“I do not have sufficient funds to eat this way without double-up points.”*

Survey Respondent Demographics

The program serves a wide audience in Western North Carolina. Survey respondents primarily identified as White (83 percent), non-Hispanic (91 percent), women (77 percent). Responses also included American Indian or Alaskan native (5 percent), Black or African American (1.5 percent) Other (1.5 percent) and 10 percent who preferred not to answer. This sample indicates women are more likely to be primary household shoppers and represents a group that is slightly more diverse

than the region as a whole. Survey respondents represented community members from age 23 to 86 and the following quotes illustrate how the program supports people in all stages of life.

“The DUFB program has been indispensable for our household. We are in college and do not have a high budget for food items, so being able to afford local goods is a huge benefit in our diet. Without the DUFB program, it would be impossible for us to incorporate local foods into our diet at the level that we are currently able to.”

“We have enjoyed fresh meals—especially serving all sorts of new produce to our small child. He has enjoyed the process of picking food up and helping us prepare meals. Picking up our food is a part of the week we look forward to, and we get to be more creative with our cooking and nutrition.”

“I am a senior living on Social Security. I get a small amount of food stamps. I am an organic gardener of over 40 years who can no longer garden due to physical limitations. I highly value local, in season, fruits and vegetables. Double Snap is a lifesaver for me as I can eat more healthy food. I really appreciate this program!”

Conclusion

The first year of the WNC Farm Fresh Double SNAP Network inspires significant hope for the future. Led by project partners and the Advisory Council, the formation of the Network established a centralized approach to implementing SNAP-incentive programs across the region and resulted in the significant progress towards achieving program goals. These include increasing access to and consumption of local fruits and vegetables for community members participating in SNAP, contributing to long-lasting positive behavior changes regarding healthy eating, and supporting positive food environments that foster direct connections between farmers and consumers, increasing engagement in the local food system.

The Network experienced a learning curve in year one as it onboarded the first 27 firms and created a standardized system for data collection and reporting across the region. In year two, the Network will build on this work and identify areas for improvement and expansion. Guided by a new Farmer Working Group, new firms will be evaluated and onboarded, with a focus on low-resourced rural markets and farm stands. Additionally, the Network will develop and implement a region-wide outreach and promotion plan to increase awareness and demand for the program, especially in rural communities. These new layers of development will occur alongside continued support for the existing firms that have proven so impactful, and evaluation systems that have successfully captured the quantitative and qualitative impacts of such a robust program. Ultimately, the data illustrates a universally appreciated program that has meaningfully influenced community members' local food consumption, food security, health, dignity, and connection to farmers and the local food community. Beyond the effects on individuals, the program is contributing to a more robust local food system, shaped by the values of its participants. This Network serves as a model that could be replicated by other communities and statewide efforts to highlight the importance of local food in SNAP-incentives programs in the future.