

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY: 2011 MARKET BUCKS PROGRAM



Electronic Benefit Transfer (EBT) Use Growing Among Minnesota Farmers Markets

The Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Minnesota (Blue Cross) Market Bucks Program provides a dollar-for-dollar match, up to \$5 per day, to Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) customers for each dollar they spend using EBT cards at participating farmers markets. Designed in collaboration with community partners to increase the number of customers using their EBT cards to buy fruits, vegetables and other healthy food at participating farmers markets, the Market Bucks Program was launched in 2010. In addition to expanding customers' purchasing power and increasing healthy eating, the program benefits local farmers and the local economy.

In 2010, Blue Cross funded a successful pilot at Minneapolis-based Midtown Farmers Market and the City of Minneapolis funded a pilot at two other farmers markets. In conjunction with key community agencies, Blue Cross expanded the program in 2011 to encompass 16 farmers market locations in the following urban and rural Minnesota communities: Albert Lea, Alexandria, Austin (2 markets), Bemidji, Bloomington, Duluth, Minneapolis (6), Richfield (2) and St. Paul. Preliminary highlights of the 2011 Market Bucks Program are shown below.

- \$67,016 in total EBT sales occurred at the 16 participating farmers market locations in 2011.
 - Total EBT sales increased 137%, from \$20,659 in 2010 to \$49,022 in 2011, among the three markets that accepted EBT both years.
 - The Minneapolis Farmers Market had the highest EBT sales in 2011 (\$36,493) and the greatest increase from 2010 (169%) among markets that accepted EBT both years.
 - Total EBT sales at markets that began accepting EBT in 2011 were \$17,994.
- 2,319 individual customers used EBT at the 16 participating farmers market locations in 2011— a 215% increase over the number using EBT at the three participating market locations in 2010.
- \$23,091 in Market Bucks were distributed in 2011— a 224% increase over the \$7,127 in Market Bucks distributed in 2010.
- A full 97% of all SNAP customers surveyed in 2011 reported they would shop at the farmers market in the future even if the Market Bucks incentive were no longer available.
- Among SNAP customers surveyed who had used EBT at least twice at participating farmers markets in 2011:
 - 65% thought the prices for fruits and vegetables were better at the markets than at grocery stores
 - 86% thought the quality of fruits and vegetables was better at the markets than at grocery stores
 - 95% said they shop at the farmers market more often because they can use EBT there
 - 88% said they eat more fruits and vegetables because they can use EBT at the markets

Based on these positive results, Blue Cross plans to expand the Market Bucks Program to additional markets in 2012 and pursue policy, administration and technology changes to make EBT easier for farmers markets to adopt statewide.

A full 2011 Market Bucks Evaluation Report will be available in May 2012. Visit bluecrossmn.com/preventionminnesota to download a PDF of that report, which will include a list of collaborating community agencies. For more information on the Market Bucks Program, e-mail centerinfo@bluecrossmn.com.