

Information Item

Date: November 13, 2017

To: The City Manager

From: Ben Rowe, Assistant City Manager

Subject:

Report on SNAP/EBT Usage at the Fairgrounds Farmers Market

Strategic Focus Area: Livable Neighborhoods

Strategic Objective: Expand Access to Healthy Food Options

Strategic Plan Action Item: Yes

Key Work Item: Yes



In the City's 2017-2021 Strategic Plan, the Mayor and City Council established an objective in the Livable Neighborhoods strategic focus area to "expand access to healthy food options" (Objective 7). To further this objective, staff from the Winston-Salem Fairgrounds, Marketing and Communications, Information Systems, and Finance departments developed an implementation plan in the spring to accept Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program payments through Electronic Benefits Transfer (SNAP/EBT) at the Fairgrounds Farmers Market. The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) issued a permit in February 2017 authorizing the Fairgrounds Farmers Market to accept SNAP benefits. At the same time, staff submitted an application to the Farmers Market Coalition, and the City was approved to receive free equipment to process SNAP payments.

Under the City's program, Farmers Market staff issues tokens in one dollar increments to SNAP recipients when they withdraw benefits via the processing equipment. As part of the vendors' agreement with the Fairgrounds Farmers Market, they must accept the tokens. At the end of the market day, vendors submit their tokens, and the City's Finance Department issues a check the following week. SNAP recipients who do not use all of their tokens can return them to the Farmers Market staff and have their unused benefits reapplied to their account.

The Fairgrounds Farmers Market implemented the SNAP/EBT program in May 2017. To date, the Farmers Market issued \$113 in tokens to six people. The Finance Department paid out \$94 in reimbursements to vendors. There were two Saturdays when the equipment was down due to a network issue with the bank, impacting one person.

The Marketing and Communications Department conducted a print and digital outreach campaign leading up to the start of the SNAP/EBT Program. In addition, in early July, the department partnered with HOPE (Help Our People Eat) to spread the word, particularly in neighborhoods within close proximity to the Fairgrounds Farmers Market. HOPE volunteers provided fresh produce and information about the program in bags that they handed out during their events. Overall, the campaign reached 150 people.

For 2018, the Marketing and Communications Department will conduct grassroots campaigns in May and August, partnering with HOPE and other organizations, such as the Forsyth County Health Department, to educate residents about healthy food options. The campaign will include social media to reach the estimated 18,000 Facebook accounts in neighborhoods surrounding the Fairgrounds Farmers Market. The Marketing and Communications Department also will employ print and digital advertising to promote the Liberty Street Vendors Market as another source of healthy food options, even though the market currently does not accept SNAP/EBT payments.

Earlier in March, City staff submitted a grant application through the USDA's Farmers Market and Local Food Promotion Program to request funding for a targeted marketing program to reach growers, as well as individuals who live neighborhoods surrounding the Fairgrounds Farmers Market, many of which are located in food deserts. The City received notification in September that it had not been selected as a grant recipient. The City will continue to seek creative ways to market the SNAP/EBT Program and to educate residents on the benefits of healthy foods.