

2010 Vermont Farmers' Market EBT/Debit Card Project

Request for Proposals

December 1, 2009

Dear Farmers' Market Coordinator,

Thank you for the interest in the 2010 Vermont Farmers' Market EBT/Debit Card Project. We are excited to extend this opportunity to you, made possible with funding from the *George D. Aiken Resource Conservation and Development Council, Northern Vermont Resource Conservation and Development Council, USDA Farmers' Market Promotion Program, Vermont Agency of Agriculture, and Vermont Department for Children and Families.*

Enclosed you will find an application for participation in the project, as well as a project description with more details. ***Please return your completed application no later than February 1, 2010 to:***

Jean Hamilton
NOFA-VT
PO Box 697
Richmond, VT 05477

NOTE: In the 2008 Farm Bill, the Food Stamp Program was renamed the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP). States were required to stop calling it the Food Stamp Program but were allowed to call it something other than SNAP. Vermont chose 3SquaresVT as its name for the program. However, federal documents regarding farmers' market authorization to accept these benefits will allude to it as SNAP.

Application Timeline:

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|-------------------|--|
| January 9, 2010 | Informative workshop on the Project at the NOFA-VT Direct Marketing Conference. For more information: www.nofavt.org/annual-events/direct-marketing-conference |
| January 31, 2010 | Market must have, or have applied for, an authorization number from the USDA Food & Nutrition Service (FNS) to accept SNAP benefits posted on EBT (electronic benefits transfer) cards. The federal approval process takes up to 8 weeks. <i>[Note: This deadline is driven by the fact that the Project cannot order the wireless terminal for the market until the market has an FNS number, and it takes up to four additional weeks for the equipment to arrive.]</i> Applications can be requested by phone: 1-877-823-4369 or by web: www.fns.usda.gov/snap/ebt/fm.htm |
| February 1, 2010 | Market's project application is due at NOFA. Please contact Jean Hamilton at 802-434-4122 (jean@nofavt.org) before that date if you cannot submit an application by February 1. |
| February 15, 2010 | Markets will be selected. All applicants will be notified if their market was or was not selected to join the Project in 2010. |

Description of project funding and timeline:

The EBT project funding will be spread over a three-season timeline to support the following infrastructure and resources as defined below. Please see the enclosed project description for more complete details of the Project.

Season 1:

- 1 Wireless EBT/Debit card reader
- \$1000 to support outreach, promotions and part-time staff person
- Project payment of the market's monthly service and transaction fees
- Tokens
- Promotional and Training Materials

Season 2:

- \$500 to support outreach and promotions, and part-time staff person
- Project payment of the market's monthly service and transaction fees

Season 3:

- \$250 to support outreach and promotions, and part-time staff person
- Project payment of the market's monthly service and transaction fees

Applications will be evaluated based on the following criteria:

- Current FNS approval to accept federal SNAP/3SquaresVT food benefits
- Accessibility and appeal of market to limited-income customers
- Availability of a wide variety of market products that can be purchased with SNAP/3SquaresVT benefits (all foods excluding hot, prepared items)
- Participation in other food access programs (*e.g.* Farm To Family)
- Demonstrated organizational stability of the market
- Availability of critical infrastructure (*e.g.* ability to receive Verizon wireless signals, commitment of an EBT coordinator, plans for EBT project outreach)

Requirements for the EBT Project Coordinator:

The coordinator can be anyone from the market community (*i.e.* manager, vendor, board member, community volunteer) who commits to overseeing the operations, outreach, promotions, and budgeting of the EBT project. This person should be available to meet with the project committee 3-4 times a year (usually phone conferences). This person may or may not be the staff operator of the wireless machine at the market. The market must have a reliable "staff" person continuously attending the table where customers swipe their EBT/debit cards in exchange for tokens to spend at the market.

If you have any questions about the application or need any assistance, please contact Jean Hamilton by email (jean@nofavt.org) or phone (802-434-4122).

Sincerely,
Jean Hamilton
EBT Project Co-Coordinator
NOFA-VT

2010 Electronic Benefit Transfer (EBT) at Farmers' Market Project Application

Name of Market: _____

Location of Market: _____

Time and Days of Market: _____

Project Contact Person: _____ Phone Number: _____

Address: _____

Email: _____

Please answer the following questions, on separate paper if necessary. If you have trouble completing and returning the application by February 1, 2010 contact Jean at 802-434-4122 or jean@nofavt.org.

Market Accessibility to Limited Income Populations:

- 1) Please describe the size and nature of the limited-income population in your market's area. This may include data such as the number of 3SquaresVT recipients or food pantry customers in the community, the presence of nearby low-income housing facilities, or other indicators that many 3SquaresVT recipients would take advantage of the opportunity to spend their benefits at your market.

- 2) Does your market conduct or participate in any other food access programs? Please describe:

- 3) Is your market accessible to people who cannot drive or do not own cars?

Market Information:

- 4) How long has your market been in operation?

- 5) Is your market financially stable and secure in your community?

- 6) How many total vendors are at your market on a "typical" market day? _____ vendors
- 7) How many of those vendors sell products that would qualify for SNAP/3SquaresVT EBT card purchases (vegetable starter plants + all food and nonalcoholic beverages for human consumption except for prepared foods served hot at the market)? _____ vendors
- 8) Describe the variety of foods that are available at your market:
- 9) Roughly how does the overall volume (not sales) of goods at the market split between food and non-food products?
 _____% Food products + _____ Non-food products = 100%
- 10) Can your market transmit and receive wireless signals with Verizon service? (You can test this with a Verizon cell phone.) _____Yes _____No
- 11) Has your market applied for the Vermont Farmers' Market EBT and Debit Cards Program before?
 _____ Yes _____ No. If yes, when? _____.

EBT Program Plans:

- 11) Has your market participated in the SNAP/3SquaresVT Program (formerly called food stamps) in the past?
- 12) Is your market currently authorized by the USDA to accept SNAP/3SquaresVT food benefits?
 _____Yes _____ No If so, please list your FNS number here:
- 13) Does your market have a volunteer, staff or board member who is regularly at the market and able to coordinate the EBT program (please see attached letter for the role that market contacts play)? If so, who is this person and what is his/her role in the market?
- 14) If not, what are your plans for finding/hiring an EBT coordinator?
- 15) Describe your market's plans for staffing the wireless card reader every market day?
- 16) How would your market promote the option for customers to use EBT cards there?

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Purpose: To enable farmers markets to accept bank and EBT (electronic benefits transfer) debit cards, thereby making local products more accessible to low income Vermonters, encouraging consumers to "buy local," allowing local producers to capture some of the \$115 million in federal program benefits Vermonters are spending annually on food, and increasing overall farmers market sales.

Project Partners:

- George D. Aiken Resource Conservation and Development Council (Aiken RC&D)
- Northeast Organic Farming Association of Vermont (NOFA-VT)
- Northern Vermont Resource Conservation and Development Council (Northern VT RC&D)
- Vermont Agency of Agriculture, Food and Markets (VAAFMM)
- Vermont Campaign to End Childhood Hunger (VTCECH)
- Vermont Department for Children and Families (DCF)

Summary of Process at Market: All vendors at the market agree to take part and are likely to benefit. Each market needs a specific booth staffed continuously by someone who controls the electronic debit card reader, asks customers the dollar amount of food or other purchases they want deducted from the card, lets them swipe the card, and gives them that amount in the form of \$5 or \$1 wooden tokens redeemable only at that market. The \$5 tokens may be purchased with a bank debit card. Vendors may give cash change for the \$5 tokens, which are redeemable for any product sold at the market. The \$1 tokens may only be purchased with SNAP/3SquaresVT benefits posted on an EBT debit card (see next section). The \$1 tokens may buy vegetable starts as well as any non-alcoholic beverage or food product intended for human consumption, except for hot prepared foods. Vendors accept the tokens in lieu of cash, and submit the tokens to the market for payment at the end of the market day. Electronic banking systems reimburse the market for those cash and EBT transactions within 24 hours.

First Step for Markets: The project is restricted to markets that are authorized to accept SNAP/3SquaresVT (formerly called the Food Stamp Program) benefits. Those food benefits are provided on EBT (electronic benefits transfer) cards, some of which may also carry cash benefits provided by other programs. Markets must apply to the USDA Food & Nutrition Service (FNS) for this authorization. Project activities are not initiated for a market until the market gets the FNS authorization number. The application is available at www.fns.usda.gov/snap/ebt/fm.htm or by calling the FNS office 1-877-823-4369.

Project Costs and Financial Aid: The electronic card readers cost up to \$1,500 each, and using them entails transaction fees plus a service fee for each month in which card transactions occur. Participation in the Vermont Farmers Market EBT and Debit Card Project entitles a market to receive from the Project Partners about \$4,000 worth of the following equipment and financial resources:

- *One wireless card reader*
- *First installment of market tokens.* The Project Partners will consult the market regarding the number of tokens the market should need. After the first installment, the market is responsible for purchasing additional or replacement tokens.
- *3 seasons' worth of transaction and service fees funded by the Project.* For this project, a "season" is defined as period of six consecutive months from May-October or November-April. Therefore, the Project Partners will cover fees for three consecutive years for a seasonal (summer or winter) market. Year-round markets may choose between having the Project cover fees for 18 consecutive months, or for three consecutive May-October seasons.

- *Staffing and promotion stipends for three seasons.* The stipends are available to markets for three seasons within a 3-year period, following on the same schedule as that used for Project coverage of the transaction fees (see previous section). Stipends are granted by NOFA-VT as reimbursements for funds spent by the market for staffing or promotional costs. The stipend availability, based on invoices provided by the markets, is as follows:
 - First season: up to \$1,000
 - Second season: up to \$500
 - Third season: up to \$250
- *Inclusion in statewide promotion plans.* This includes but may not be limited to: printed materials available statewide through community-based agencies and other venues, updates on the Vermont 211 database and on the www.vermontfoodhelp.com website, updates on farmers market websites and directories, press releases, and other media campaigns.
- *"We Accept EBT and Debit Cards" banner to display at the market.*
- *Technical and programmatic assistance.* DCF will help markets apply to FNS for the federal authorization to accept EBT benefits. The Project Partners are available to help troubleshoot problems, including but not limited to technical difficulties with the card reader, questions about the electronic banking contract, vendor/staff/customer training, and customer outreach.

Equipment Ownership: During and following a market's participation in the Project, the following equipment is supplied and owned by the Project Partners and loaned to the market at no charge as long as the market continues to accept both EBT and debit card transactions:

- Wireless card reader
- "We Accept EBT and Debit Cards" banner(s)
- Market tokens

A market that disbands or discontinues accepting EBT or debit card transactions must return the equipment to the appropriate Project Partner, as identified in the market's Project agreement.

Equipment Security: The market is responsible for the Project equipment and tokens, and is responsible for replacing a card reader or its batteries that are lost, stolen, or damaged beyond repair. Machine malfunctions can be addressed by contacting the machine service provider. The Project Partners can help coordinate machine repairs with the service provider.

Market Role in Project Promotion and Consumer Education: Participating markets will benefit from the statewide promotional efforts conducted by the Project Partners. The market will include the Project in its own promotional efforts. This entails including the EBT/Debit logo and/or "we accept EBT and debit cards" on all of the market's promotional materials, such as its website, advertisements, flyers, newsletters, and e-newsletters, as well as displaying the "We accept EBT/Debit cards" banner at market and appropriate signage at all vendors booths.

Market Participation: By enrolling in this project, it is expected that 100% of the market's vendors will agree to accept market tokens. All vendors who sell SNAP-eligible foods will accept both EBT and debit tokens. All other vendors will accept debit tokens. The Project coordinator at the market will ensure that all vendors understand the process and display the appropriation signage.

Vendor Training and SNAP Program Compliance: By participating in this Project, the market is agreeing to comply with the regulations of SNAP/3SquaresVT, formerly called the Food Stamp Program. The market's project coordinator is responsible for ensuring that all market vendors are informed of and comply with SNAP regulations. These regulations can be found on-line at: www.fns.usda.gov/fsp/rules/Regulations/pdfs/110106.pdf. Training materials can be found at: www.fns.usda.gov/FSP/retailers/store-training.htm. The Project Partners will provide training materials specifically written for Vermont farmers markets and vendors.

Service Fees: The Project will only provide a stipend and cover transaction and service fees for 18 total months (either consecutive or separated into 3 market seasons), after which the market must absorb these costs. Many markets charge customers a service fee on all cash debit card transactions – service fees may not be charged for EBT transactions – starting at the time they join the Project. Income generated by this fee will help offset card processing costs when Project participation ends. Typical service fees range from \$1.50-\$2.00 per transaction.

For more information about the Project, please contact:

Jean Hamilton, NOFA-Vermont
802-434-4122 or jean@nofavt.org

For the questions about the FNS application or wireless equipment, contact:

Ames Robb, EBT Project Director at DCF
802-241-2899 or ames.rob主@ahs.state.vt.us

For an application for FNS approval to accept SNAP/3squaresVT benefits:

Call: 1-877-823-4369
Visit: www.fns.usda.gov/snap/ebt/fm.htm