

FARMERS MARKET INCENTIVE PROGRAMS

Vehicles for Increasing Local Food Access among Nutrition Assistance Beneficiaries

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS FOR AUSTIN, TEXAS



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Executive Summary

This report examines farmers market incentive programs (FMIPs) as mechanisms for increasing access to healthy food for low-income consumers while also channeling dollars into the local food economy. The report investigates 10 FMIPs in cities across the United States – including Austin, Texas – in order to evaluate their scope and growth, delineate best practices, and explore how current programming in Austin could best be “scaled up” by the City to reach more people.

Chapter 1 begins with a brief overview of terms and background, and introduces concepts such as food security, food access, local food, and their relationship to one another.

Chapter 2 provides an overview of the food security and food access landscape in Austin, with special attention paid to the spatial distribution of local food retailers. A geospatial analysis of food access and food retail distribution reveals:

- Significant portions of east Austin and east Travis County are designated as “food deserts” by the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA).
- Convenience stores are disproportionately located in communities with low or very low social opportunity.
- Local food retailers are disproportionately located in communities with high social opportunity.
- Patterns of socioeconomic stratification overlap with spatial patterns in social opportunity and food access.

Chapter 3 discusses nutrition assistance in Austin and Travis County, including Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) enrollment and eligibility. Findings indicate:

- SNAP participation in Travis County nearly doubled from 2006 – 2011.
- Only 62% of SNAP-eligible individuals in Travis County were enrolled in 2010.
- A variety of barriers prevent eligible individuals from enrolling.
- Household participation in SNAP is concentrated in east Austin and east Travis County, where many census tracts lack adequate access to grocery stores.
- Three farmers markets and farm stands that are not equipped with Electronic Benefit Transfer (EBT) are located in areas where 25-40% of households receive SNAP benefits.

Chapter 4 provides an overview of Austin’s existing FMIP, the Double Dollar Incentive Program (DDIP), administered by the Austin-based Sustainable Food Center (SFC). SFC operates four farmers markets in Austin, two of which offer DDIP. Analysis of SFC’s DDIP program reveals:

- Since the launch of DDIP in 2012, SFC has distributed \$20,000 in incentives to WIC and SNAP clients, and has served more than 1,300 unique customers.
- DDIP has helped to increase local participation in WIC FMNP (Women, Infants, and Children Farmers’ Market Nutrition Program).

- It is imperative that farmers markets be sited in areas easily accessible by public transportation, and that a robust outreach campaign accompanies program implementation.
- Logistical issues surrounding EBT capacity and funding continuity act as barriers to expansion.

Chapter 5 provides an overview of nine additional FMIPs from across the United States: Los Angeles Market Match, New York City Health Bucks, DC Columbia Heights Festibucks, Chicago LINK Up, Boston Bounty Bucks, Michigan Double Up Food Bucks, Portland Fresh Exchange, Seattle Fresh Bucks, and East Palo Alto Fresh Checks. The chapter presents survey findings regarding common challenges and best practices for FMIPs, including:

- FMIPs help increase the frequency with which low-income customers shop at farmers markets.
- FMIPs enhance economic stability for markets and vendors that accept the incentive.
- Critical components of programmatic success often include continuity in funding, strategic evaluation practices, tailored and robust outreach efforts, and the availability of ample administrative and technical support through a central umbrella organization.

Chapter 6 details policy recommendations for Austin, Texas:

1. Increase EBT availability at local food retail locations, especially at farmers markets and farm stands. Consider making EBT mandatory for all farmers markets and farm stands.
2. Expand farmers market incentive programming to *all* Austin farmers markets and farm stands within the next two years.
3. Administer Austin's FMIP through a single nonprofit umbrella organization.
4. Establish a single point of contact at the City of Austin or Travis County to provide SNAP assistance to farmers markets.
5. Provide funding for Austin's FMIP on a multi-year basis from diverse sources, including the City of Austin.
6. Provide funding for both FMIP administrative costs as well as the cost of the financial incentive to be provided to nutrition assistance customers.
7. Provide EBT training and technical support to farmers markets.
8. Advertise FMIP through other public and private programs that reach SNAP participants.

Chapter 7 outlines several examples of alternative venues for incentive programs benefiting nutrition assistance recipients which are not discussed in detail in this report, including brick-and-mortar retail venues, mobile farm stands, and farm-to-community programs.

The report concludes with a summary of findings, and by posing several additional questions and topics for future research on farmers market incentive programming.

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Introduction

Food, nutrition, and agricultural policy have risen to the forefront of local, regional, and national discourse in recent years. Such discourse has been prompted by the rapid growth of the “food movement,” a diverse social movement encompassing a variety of perspectives on the way that food is produced, processed, distributed, and consumed in our society.¹ Contemporary food policy initiatives must rise to the challenges posed by an increasingly diverse group of food system stakeholders and, where possible, integrate divergent perspectives to form more comprehensive policy solutions. This report explores farmers market incentive programs (FMIPs) as one food policy innovation that lies at the nexus between two powerful sub-currents of the broader food movement: food security and local food.

The Food Security and Local Food Movements: Diverse Perspectives

The primary mission of food security advocates is to ensure that all people have their basic caloric and nutritional needs met. Advocates emphasize social equity and food access, with federal nutrition assistance programs being the primary policy lever to advance these priorities.² By contrast, the primary mission of the local food movement is to expand local agricultural production and distribution channels in order to reduce environmental externalities associated with centralized production, and to invigorate local economies. Its main priorities have traditionally been ecological and economic sustainability.³

Tension between the two movements can surface when the local food movement is viewed as overlooking social equity – local food and its distribution channels being seen as cost-prohibitive and inaccessible to food insecure populations⁴ – or when food security advocates are perceived as neglecting to recognize the benefits of local food production for environmental preservation or the quality and types of food available to consumers from across the income spectrum. Diverse actors

¹ For a broad overview of the food movement, actors within the movement, and a selection of recommended readings, see Michael Pollan’s “The Food Movement, Rising” in the *New York Review of Books*.

² For a review of the primary tenets of the traditional anti-hunger and food security movement, see Chapter 2 of Patricia Allen’s *Together at the Table*, “Perspectives of Alternative Agrifood Movements: Issues and Concepts.” Additionally, Feeding America is one of the nation’s leading hunger-relief charities, and its mission and programming efforts may serve as an example of some of the types of hunger-relief work being done in the United States. See website for details.

³ The local food movement is closely related to, and often considered synonymous with, terms such as “locavore,” “Slow Food,” or “farm-to-table.” Michael Pollan is one well-known food journalist who advocates for a local diet. See his take on the benefits of local food in the PBS documentary and educational initiative *Nourish*. Additionally, Local Harvest is an online directory of local food producers that outlines several of the perceived benefits of local food on its web page, “Why Buy Local.”

⁴ See the following sources for critiques of the accessibility of local food: Audrey White, “Nutrition Benefits a Mixed Bag for Farmers Markets;” Alison Hope Alkon, *Black, White, and Green: Farmers Markets, Race, and the Green Economy*; Julie Guthman, “The Unbearable Whiteness of Alternative Food;” and Janani Balasubramanian, “Sustainable Food and Privilege: Why is Green Always White? (and Male and Upper Class).”

within the food system may find themselves competing for scarce funding as well as limited political capital available for food policy initiatives.

Opportunities exist, however, to bridge the gap and advance the priorities of each constituency. FMIPs present themselves as one venue for policymakers and community leaders to meet diverse goals while advancing more comprehensively just and sustainable community food systems.

Bridging the Gap: Farmers Market Incentive Programs

Nutrition assistance incentive programs, broadly, provide federal nutrition assistance beneficiaries with a discount when they use their benefit dollars to purchase specified products through select venues. This report focuses on programs that provide an incentive for the purchase of fresh produce through farmers markets – farmers market incentive programs [FMIPs]. The disproportionate incidence of preventable, diet-related disease in low-income and food insecure populations has been attributed to inadequate access to healthy food.⁵ FMIPs that effectively increase access and food security can act as a powerful public health intervention, as well as a strategy for local community and economic development.⁶ Such programs increase consumer purchasing power at farmers markets, enabling nutrition assistance beneficiaries to buy greater quantities of fresh produce with their federal dollars while also supporting local producers.

Report Objectives: Policy Recommendations for Austin, Texas

The primary objective of this report is to explore FMIPs as mechanisms for increasing access to healthy food for low-income consumers while also channeling dollars into the local food economy. The report examines FMIPs in cities across the United States, evaluates their scope and growth, delineates best practices, and explores how current programming in Austin, Texas, could best be “scaled up” by the City of Austin to reach more people.

The report also includes an analysis of food insecurity, access, and nutrition assistance enrollment in Austin in order to provide local context for the proposed policy recommendations and to illustrate the unique food system challenges that Austin faces going forward. The report is intended for use by local policymakers and practitioners who wish to expand existing initiatives in Austin.

⁵ John Hopkins Center for a Livable Future, “Improving Diets of Low-Income Americans through SNAP Pricing Incentives,” 2012.

⁶ Ibid. For additional existing literature on the impacts of FMIPs, and issues surrounding their operation, see USDA, *Nutrition Assistance in Farmers Markets: Understanding Current Operations*; Fair Food Network, *Double Up Food Bucks – 2012 Evaluation Report*; and the New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene, *New York City Health Department Farmers’ Market Programs*.

Chapter 1: Terminology and Background

1.1 What is Food Security?

The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) defines food security as “access by all people at all times to enough food for an active, healthy life.”⁷ Indicators of food insecurity include worrying that food will run out, cutting or skipping a meal in the last three or more months, being hungry but not eating, or not being able to afford a balanced meal, for example.⁸ In 2011, an estimated 14.9% of U.S. households (17.9 million) experienced food insecurity at some point during the year and 5.7% experienced *very low* food security, meaning that food intake was reduced or eating patterns were disrupted due to insufficient resources to purchase food.⁹

Food insecure adults and children are more likely to suffer from preventable, diet-related disease than those who are food secure. Food insecure adults consume fewer servings of fruits, vegetables, dairy, and complex micronutrients, and are more likely to experience risk factors for cardiovascular disease, such as hypertension.¹⁰ Moreover, food insecurity has been linked to higher rates of obesity in children and women, with especially heightened risk for non-white populations.¹¹

In 2010, the Center for American Progress estimated that hunger cost the United States \$167.5 billion due to lost economic productivity, rising education costs to compensate for poor educational outcomes, rising health care costs to treat preventable disease, and the cost of charitable food relief.¹² Food policy is thus an important lever with which to address the many direct and indirect costs associated with food insecurity, including loss of quality of life.

Defining Access

Food access is a defining component of food security, and is often considered to be a function of a variety of nuanced factors, including the nutritional adequacy, affordability, and cultural appropriateness of available food resources, as well as spatial proximity to those food resources.¹³

Achieving adequate access along these lines is a challenge for many communities. The real price of fruits and vegetables rose 17% between 1997 and 2003, while the real price of a two-liter bottle of Coca-Cola, by comparison, fell almost 35% percent, suggesting that affordability barriers to healthy

⁷ USDA, “Food Security in the U.S.”

⁸ USDA, “Definitions of Food Security.”

⁹ USDA, *Household Food Security in the United States in 2011*, 2012.

¹⁰ Cited in Hilary K. Seligman, et al., “Food Insecurity is Associated with Chronic Disease among Low-Income NHANES Participants,” 2010.

¹¹ *Ibid.*; Elizabeth J. Adams, et al., “Food Security is Associated with Increased Risk of Obesity in California Women,” 2003.

¹² This price tag does not include the cost of federal nutrition assistance programs. See Donald S. Shephard et al., *Hunger in America*, 2011.

¹³ Kimberley Hodgson, *Planning for Food Access and Community-Based Food Systems*, 2012.

food are increasing.¹⁴ Moreover, in 2012, a farmers market survey in Austin revealed that over half of market customers considered farmers market produce to be more expensive than produce purchased at their local grocery store.¹⁵ The perceived and actual affordability of fresh fruits and vegetables, especially locally produced items from farmers markets, presents itself as a real barrier to access for many households.¹⁶

Inadequate spatial proximity to healthy food resources may increase food insecurity by raising indirect costs associated with traveling to a food retailer, including the cost of fuel, time spent in transit, or the physical or mental exertion associated with walking, cycling, or navigating public transit.¹⁷ Research indicates that individuals living in areas with low spatial proximity to healthy food resources experience worse health outcomes in the form of increased prevalence of diet-related disease. This effect is especially pronounced for communities of color.¹⁸

The USDA's Food Access Research Atlas¹⁹ is one commonly accepted method for evaluating food access in the United States, and is one measure of access used later in this report. The atlas identifies census tracts that have low spatial proximity to supermarkets²⁰ and in which a significant number of people are low-income²¹ – these tracts are USDA-designated “food deserts.” The atlas also uses vehicle availability as another indicator of access, since the majority of grocery shopping is done by car.²²

Farmers market incentive programs (FMIPs) address both the affordability component of access, by enabling low-income consumers to stretch the value of their food dollar, as well as the nutritional adequacy component, by applying this incentive to fresh fruits and vegetables, specifically. FMIPs do not in and of themselves address the spatial barriers to food access (especially if programs are located in areas that are physically inaccessible to program beneficiaries), nor do they ensure that farmers markets will be culturally appropriate venues for all customers.²³

¹⁴ Cited in John Cawley, “The Economics of Childhood Obesity,” 2010.

¹⁵ Lisa Morse, et al., *Farmers’ Market Survey & Price Comparison Study*, 2012.

¹⁶ Tara Parker-Pope, “A High Price for Healthy Food,” 2007.

¹⁷ Donald Rose, “Access to Health Food: A Key Focus for Research on Domestic Food Insecurity,” 2010; Alessandro Bonnano and Jing Li, “Food Insecurity and Access,” 2012.

¹⁸ Sarah Treuhaft and Allison Karpyn, *The Grocery Gap: Who Has Access to Healthy Food and Why it Matters*, 2010.

¹⁹ Updated in February 2013, the Food Access Research Atlas was previously called the Food Desert Locator.

²⁰ Supermarkets are defined as retailers that report at least \$2 million in annual sales and sell a wide variety of foods, including fresh fruits and vegetables, dairy, and meat. Low spatial proximity is defined as residing more than half of one mile away from a supermarket.

²¹ A low-income census tract is one in which the poverty rate is greater than 20%; the tract’s median family income is less than or equal to 80% of the state-wide median family income; or the tract is in a metropolitan area and has a median family income less than or equal to 80% of the state-wide median family income.

²² David Bornstein, “Time to Revisit Food Deserts,” 2012.

²³ The cultural appropriateness of a food retailer refers to the degree to which the retailer effectively caters to the unique needs of consumers from a specific cultural background, and the degree to which those consumers feel comfortable frequenting that space. Cultural appropriateness may be a function of many factors including the stocking of culturally preferred heritage food items, the presence of staff members who are fluent in the consumer’s primary language, or the presence of other consumers from similar cultural backgrounds. See Filip

Food Access and Social Opportunity

This report assesses food access within the broader and more nuanced context of social opportunity and community resources. The City of Austin’s new comprehensive plan – *Imagine Austin* – strives to create “complete communities” in which all residents have access to a variety of essential services and resources within their community. The plan advances a holistic view of Austin’s food landscape and cites food access as one of a variety of vital amenities and services to which all residents should have access.²⁴ Austin is currently working to create and implement strategies for integrating food resources (including food retail) into the fabric of individual communities, and this report seeks to deepen and enhance Austin’s understanding of food access as an integral part of its landscape of social opportunity.

This report uses the “Opportunity Communities” model, pioneered by the Kirwan Institute for Race and Ethnicity at Ohio State University, as one measure of access to vital community resources. The institute’s groundbreaking model uses census tract-level data on health indicators, community development, education, employment, civic engagement, criminal justice, and housing in order to identify areas of social “opportunity.”²⁵

By depicting opportunity as a function of a larger set of interconnected indicators, this report provides a richer depiction of Austin’s social fabric and illuminates areas in the city that are both socially and economically disadvantaged. Moreover, this conceptualization of social opportunity echoes the underpinnings of the *Imagine Austin* plan. The indicators of “opportunity” have substantial overlap with the infrastructure required for a “complete community” – including access to healthy food. This framework is utilized throughout the remaining chapters of the report.

1.2 What is Nutrition Assistance?

The federal government administers several programs designed to alleviate food insecurity for low-income populations. This report examines three federal programs: SNAP, WIC, and FMNP.

Hadrer and Melissa Benner, *Growing International: Exploring the Demand for Culturally Appropriate Foods*, 2010; ASAP Local Foods Research Center, *Farmers Markets for All: Exploring Barriers and Opportunities for Increasing Fresh Food Access by Connecting Low-Income Communities with Farmers Markets*, 2012; Nikki Henderson, “Perspectives: Food Justice; Alison Hope Alkon, *Black, White, and Green*, 2012; and Sarah Treuhaft, et al., *Healthy Food For All: Building Equitable and Sustainable Food Systems in Detroit and Oakland*, 2009.

²⁴City of Austin, *Imagine Austin Comprehensive Plan*, 2012, pg. 88.

²⁵ The Kirwan Institute recently completed an Opportunity Mapping study for the City of Austin in partnership with Green Doors, a local permanent supportive housing provider. This report uses data derived from that mapping study. Opportunity is defined as environmental conditions or resources that are conducive to healthier, vibrant communities and that are more likely to enable residents in a community to succeed. Indicators can either be impediments to opportunity or conduits to opportunity, depending on the nature of the resource or environmental condition in question. See Appendix 1 for a complete list of indicators included.

Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)

SNAP is the largest and most well-funded of U.S. nutrition assistance programs. In fiscal year 2012, the federal government spent \$81 billion on SNAP to help feed 47 million low-income Americans.²⁶ The program provides monthly benefits to low-income individuals and households to purchase food. The federal government funds 100% of SNAP benefits and splits administrative costs evenly with the states.²⁷

SNAP is a means-tested entitlement program, meaning that eligibility is primarily based on income (or “means”), and that all individuals and households who meet eligibility criteria are entitled to receive the benefit. Applicants must have a monthly gross income at or below 130% of the federal poverty line (FPL) (\$25,000 annually for a household of three), a net income at or less than 100% FPL (\$19,500 annually for a household of three), and hold no more than \$2,000 in countable assets in order to be eligible.²⁸ In most states, including Texas, unemployed childless adults are limited to three months of SNAP benefits, and undocumented immigrants are ineligible to receive benefits.²⁹

Benefits are redeemed by recipients through an Electronic Benefit Transfer (EBT) card, which recipients can use at USDA-authorized SNAP retailers. A three-person household receives approximately \$400 in SNAP benefits on average per month.³⁰ In Texas, SNAP is administered by the Texas Health and Human Services Commission (HHSC) and recipients redeem benefits through their “Lone Star Card.”

SNAP has been an effective tool for alleviating food insecurity and increasing food access for low-income populations, especially for those who enter the program with *very low* food security.³¹ The program does so by addressing the “affordability” component of access. A 2010 study from the Urban Institute found that receiving SNAP reduced an individual’s risk of food insecurity by 30%.³²

Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC)

WIC is designed to meet the unique nutritional needs of pregnant women, infants, and young children.³³ WIC offers supplemental foods, nutrition education, and health care service referrals free of charge to participants. Supplemental foods must be purchased from state-authorized WIC vendors through the use of a program-specific voucher.

Only pregnant, breastfeeding, or post-partum women, infants under one year of age, and children under five years of age are eligible for the program. To receive WIC, individuals or households must

²⁶ Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, “Policy Basics: Introduction to the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP),” 2013.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Some exceptions to these criteria are made for households with disabled or elderly residents. Ibid; Stephanie Mercier, “Review of U.S. Nutrition Assistance Policy: Programs and Issues,” 2012.

²⁹ Texas Health and Human Services Commission, “SNAP Food Benefits”; Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, “Policy Basics: Introduction to the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP),” 2013.

³⁰ Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, “A Quick Guide to SNAP Eligibility and Benefits.”

³¹ USDA, *Does SNAP Decrease Food Insecurity? Untangling Self-Selection Effect*, 2009.

³² Caroline Ratcliffe and Signe-Mary McKernan, *How Much Does SNAP Reduce Food Insecurity?* 2010.

³³ Stephanie Mercier, *Review of U.S. Nutrition Assistance Policy: Programs and Issues*, 2012.

have a monthly gross income at or less than 185% FPL – \$36,000 annually for a household of three – and must be considered at “nutritional risk” without program assistance.³⁴

WIC is a federal grant program with a specific amount of funding set aside for it and distributed to the states each year. Applicants must reside within the state to which they have submitted their application. In fiscal year 2012, the federal government spent \$6.8 billion on WIC to assist 8.9 million women, infants, and children.³⁵ In Texas, WIC is administered by the Department of State Health Services (DSHS), and the average WIC beneficiary in Texas received \$29 in 2012.³⁶

WIC Farmers’ Market Nutrition Program (FMNP)

WIC FMNP seeks to provide fresh, locally produced fruits and vegetables to pregnant mothers and young children participating in the WIC program. All WIC participants, as well as those on a waiting list for WIC certification, are eligible to participate, and are provided with FMNP coupons to be redeemed at authorized markets. In Texas, WIC FMNP is administered by the Texas Department of Agriculture (TDA), and vouchers are distributed through food banks as well as other community organizations, such as SFC.³⁷ Texas’ WIC FMNP program is only available in four metropolitan areas of the state from April to September due to limited funding. In fiscal year 2012, Texas WIC FMNP served approximately 9,600 recipients at an average of \$14 per recipient.³⁸

Senior Farmers’ Market Nutrition Program (FMNP)

SFMNP seeks to increase food security for low-income seniors by providing them with vouchers that can be used to purchase fresh produce at participating farmers markets, farm stands, or community supported agriculture programs (CSAs). Eligibility is generally limited to seniors who are over 60 years old and who have household incomes of at or less than 185% FPL. In Texas, as with WIC FMNP, SFMNP is limited to select areas of the state and times of year and is administered by TDA. In fiscal year 2012, TDA distributed approximately \$55,000 in SFMNP benefits.³⁹

1.3 Why Local Food?

The United States has seen a surge in demand for locally produced food in recent years. As seen in Figure 1, the number of farmers markets in the U.S. increased from less than 2,000 in 1994 to over 7,500 in 2012.⁴⁰ While local foods are available at an increasingly wide variety of retail establishments, farmers markets are a key indicator of the growth of the local food market. The appeal of local food is multi-faceted, and the consumption of locally produced agricultural products can confer a variety of benefits to regions, cities, and communities.

³⁴ Stephanie Mercier, *Review of U.S. Nutrition Assistance Policy: Programs and Issues*, 2012.

³⁵ USDA, “WIC Program Participation and Costs.”

³⁶ USDA, “WIC Program Average Monthly Benefit Per Person.”

³⁷ Texas Department of Agriculture, *Farmer’s Market Nutrition Program Annual Report*, 2012

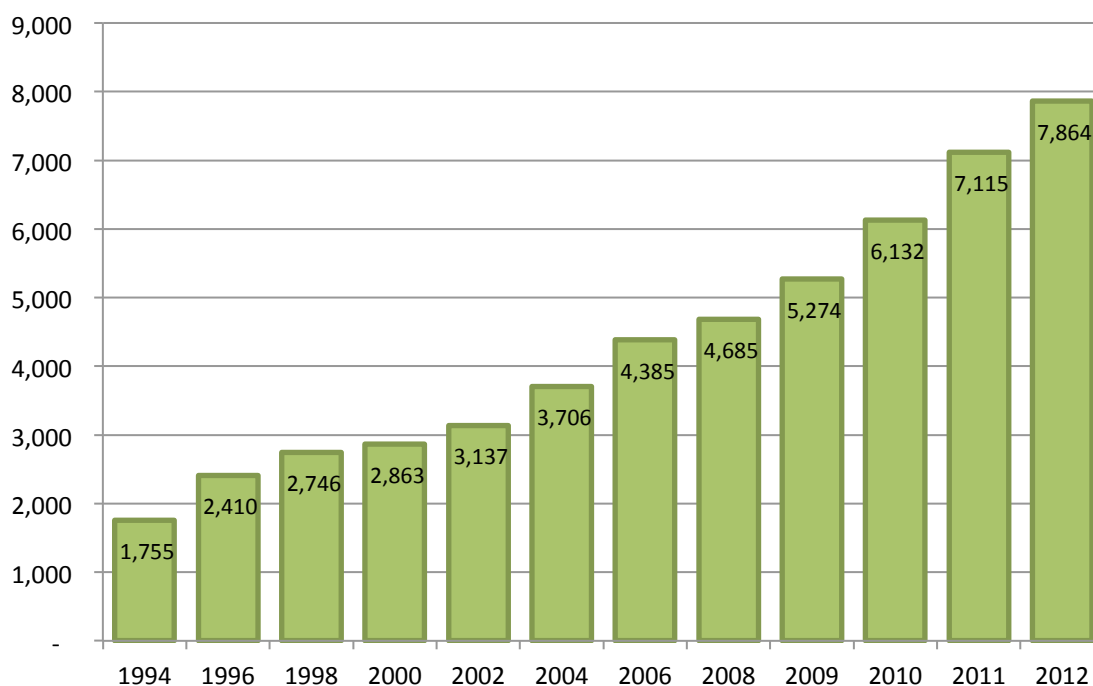
³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Texas Department of Agriculture, “Program Statistics.”

⁴⁰ USDA, “Farmers Markets and Local Food Marketing.”

Figure 1: Number of Farmers Markets in the United States

Source – USDA, Marketing Services Division



Environmental Benefits

A number of reports indicate that food produced within a smaller geographic radius travels fewer miles from farm to table than food imported from more centralized, remote agricultural operations, and thus consumes less energy and is more ecologically sustainable.⁴¹ While more recent food system sustainability analyses have critiqued “food miles” as an oversimplified indicator of sustainability,⁴² energy expended to support conventional food distribution is still significant (especially with automobile and air transport) and “food miles” remain one of many valid indicators to assess food system sustainability.⁴³

Moreover, supporting local agricultural producers has been identified as one way to preserve farmland.⁴⁴ Prime agricultural land possesses special soil, moisture, and growing season properties that make it uniquely suitable for the cultivation of food.⁴⁵ Soil can take thousands of years to

⁴¹ A. Jones, “An Environmental Assessment of Food Supply Chains: A Case Study on Dessert Apples,” 2002; M.M. Blanke and B. Burdick, “Food (Miles) for Thought,” 2005; Rich Pirog, “Food, Fuel, and Freeways: An Iowa Perspective on How Far Food Travels, Fuel Usage, and Greenhouse Gas Emissions,” 2001.

⁴² Christopher L. Weber and H. Scott Matthews, “Food Miles and the Relative Climate Impacts of Food Choices in the United States,” 2008.

⁴³ USDA, *Local Food Systems: Concepts, Impacts, and Issues*, 2010; Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, “The Validity of Food Miles as an Indicator of Sustainable Development,” 2005.

⁴⁴ J. Ikerd, “Eating Local: A Matter of Integrity,” 2005.

⁴⁵ USDA, *National Soil Survey Handbook*.

regenerate once damaged or depleted, effectively making it a finite and non-renewable ecological resource.⁴⁶ In 1999, over 50% of the U.S. food supply came from metropolitan and metropolitan-adjacent counties, the same regions that have experienced the most rapid population growth and development pressure in recent years.⁴⁷ Supporting local agricultural producers through consumption choices may help incentivize farmland preservation.

Economic Benefits

Purchasing locally produced goods, including food, generates additional income for local employees and businesses, and increases local consumption above and beyond the initial purchase. The rise in income and wave of subsequent spending generated by an initial act of consumption is called the economic “multiplier effect.” A recently released economic impact analysis of the local food sector in Austin estimated Austin’s local food multiplier effect to be 1.86 – meaning that every dollar spent within the local food sector in the Austin area generates 86 cents of additional economic activity.⁴⁸ The analysis, moreover, asserts that local foods have a larger multiplier effect than foods imported from outside the region, since purchasing local foods keeps dollars in the local economy longer. Research has confirmed that expanding local food systems can result in increased employment and income for the community.⁴⁹

Social Benefits

The local food movement is also a social movement that seeks to rekindle the relationship between producers and consumers in the food marketplace, to create spaces for community development, and to inspire a more healthful lifestyle and diet by increasing consumers’ emotional connection to their food source.⁵⁰ Empirical evidence demonstrates, for example, that young adults with positive attitudes towards local foods tend to have healthier eating habits, and that farmers markets can be gathering places for communities to form cohesive identities around issues ranging from ecological sustainability to social justice.⁵¹

What is local?

This report defines Austin’s “local food” radius as the five-county Austin-Round Rock-San Marcos Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA), which includes Bastrop, Caldwell, Hays, Travis, and Williamson counties. Both the 2013 economic impact analysis of Austin’s local food sector, as well as the 2011 Central Texas Foodshed Assessment, produced for the Sustainable Food Center (SFC), use the boundaries of the five-county MSA to conduct their analyses of the local and regional food sector.⁵²

⁴⁶ American Farmland Trust, *Fact Sheet: Why Save Farmland?* 2003.

⁴⁷ American Planning Association, *Policy Guide on Agricultural Land Preservation*, 1999.

⁴⁸ TXP, Inc. for the City of Austin, *The Economic Impact of Austin’s Food Sector*, 2013.

⁴⁹ USDA, *Local Food Systems: Concepts, Impacts, and Issues*, 2010.

⁵⁰ Laura B. Delind, “Of Bodies, Place, and Culture: Re-situating Local Food,” 2006; Amory Starr, “Local Food: A Social Movement?” 2010.

⁵¹ Jennifer E. Pelletier et al., “Positive Attitudes toward Organic, Local, Sustainable Foods Are Associated with Higher Dietary Quality among Young Adults,” 2013; Alison Hope Alkon, “Paradise or Pavement: The Social Constructions of the Environment in Two Urban Farmers’ Markets and Their Implications for Environmental Justice and Sustainability,” 2008.

⁵² TXP, Inc. for the City of Austin, *The Economic Impact of Austin’s Food Sector*, 2013; Karen Banks, *Central Texas Foodshed Assessment*, 2011.

The MSA encompasses a significant number of agricultural producers who commute into Austin to sell their produce at Austin farmers markets. Moreover, the boundaries of the MSA, a U.S. Census Bureau unit of analysis, have been defined according to the high degree of social and economic integration between the urban core – the City of Austin— and the five surrounding counties.⁵³ For this reason, the MSA is a common unit for local and regional economic analysis and is also an appropriate unit by which to define “local” when analyzing the local food economy.

1.4 Food Assistance and the Local Food Economy

Food assistance programs have had a fluctuating relationship with local food economies throughout the last several decades, in large part due to major reforms to the SNAP program in the 1990s and their impacts on SNAP spending at farmers markets.

Specifically, the transition from paper benefits to EBT in the early 1990s, while resulting in important improvements for the SNAP program and its recipients overall, has had a large detrimental effect on SNAP spending at farmers markets.⁵⁴ Between 1994 and 2007, SNAP redemption at markets fell by 71%. In 2009, only 0.008% of total SNAP transactions occurred at farmers markets, whereas the American public as a whole spent 0.2% of its food dollars at markets.⁵⁵ The decline in SNAP expenditures at farmers markets is largely attributable to the difficulty and expense of equipping farmers markets with EBT terminals.⁵⁶ Food insecure and low-income citizens may experience reduced access to local food since they are unable to use food benefits at farmers markets, which often are the primary retail source of local food for a community.

Moreover, research shows that SNAP recipients are often unaware of opportunities to use their benefits at markets, and may perceive markets to be culturally inaccessible, inconvenient to access, or more expensive than conventional retailers.⁵⁷ Despite these barriers, however, SNAP redemption at markets has increased in recent years with the advent of public and private grant funding to equip markets with EBT terminals.⁵⁸

⁵³ U.S. Census Bureau, “Metropolitan and Micropolitan Statistical Areas Main.”

⁵⁴ Stephanie Mercier, *Review of U.S. Nutrition Assistance Policy: Programs and Issues*, 2012.

⁵⁵ Suzanne Briggs, et al. *Real Food, Real Choice: Connecting SNAP Recipients with Farmers Markets*, 2010.

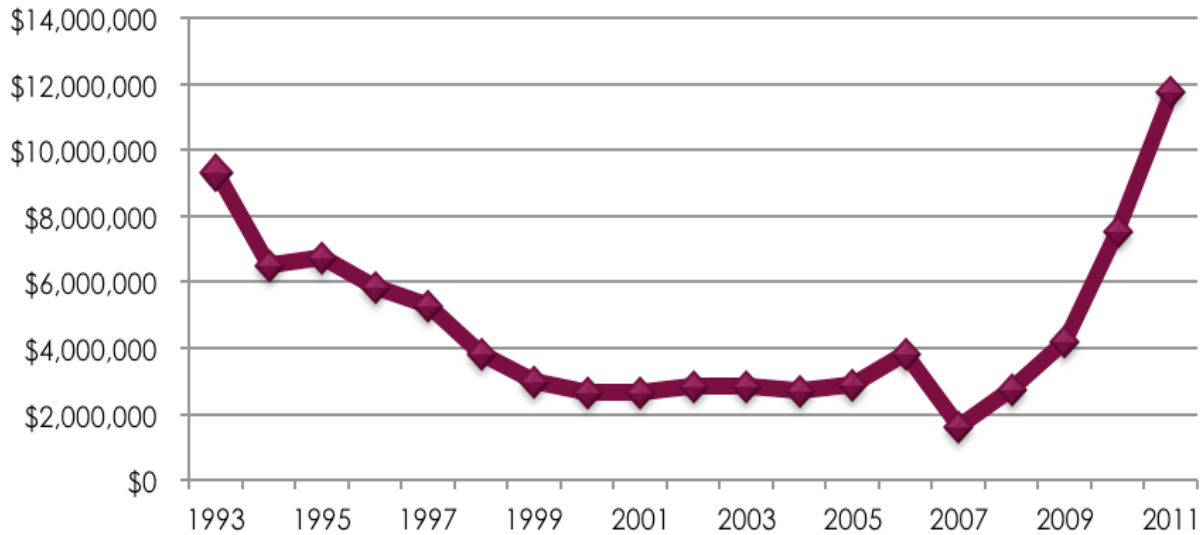
⁵⁶ Stephanie Mercier, *Review of U.S. Nutrition Assistance Policy: Programs and Issues*, 2012.

⁵⁷ Suzanne Briggs, et al. *Real Food, Real Choice: Connecting SNAP Recipients with Farmers Markets*, 2010.

⁵⁸ Stephanie Mercier, *Review of U.S. Nutrition Assistance Policy: Programs and Issues*, 2012.

Figure 2: SNAP Redemption at Farmers Markets and Farm Stands

Source – Farmers Market Coalition⁵⁹



There are many potential benefits associated with increasing access to local foods for food insecure populations, including enhanced food security as well as a heightened sense of ownership and engagement in a more community-based food system (sometimes called “community food sovereignty”).⁶⁰ Moreover, the local food economy may benefit from the influx of federal SNAP dollars. SNAP has its own multiplier effect of 1.79, meaning that every SNAP dollar spent generates an additional 79 cents in economic activity.⁶¹ Considered in the context of the higher multiplier effect for locally produced food items, the redemption of SNAP dollars at farmers markets and other local food retailers could have a powerful impact on the local economy.

⁵⁹ Farmers Market Coalition, “SNAP Redemptions at Farmers Markets Exceed \$11 Million in 2011.”

⁶⁰ WhyHunger, “Introduction: Food Sovereignty.”

⁶¹ USDA, *The Food Assistance National Input-Output Multiplier (FANOIM) Model and Stimulus Effects of SNAP*, 2012.

Chapter 2: Food Insecurity, Access, and the Local Food Market in Austin

This chapter provides an overview of the food access landscape in Austin, with specific attention paid to the spatial distribution of different types of food retailers – including retailers that offer local food – throughout the city. Food access is discussed in terms of spatial proximity and within the context of prevailing spatial patterns of social opportunity in Austin. Many people in Austin face significant food security challenges, and many communities experience inadequate spatial access to healthy food resources. Policymakers and practitioners should familiarize themselves with Austin’s current food access and social opportunity landscape in order to formulate appropriately tailored policy solutions in collaboration with constituent communities.

Key Findings

- The rate of food insecurity in Travis County is higher than the national average.
- Significant portions of Austin and Travis County are USDA-designated “food deserts.”
- On average, Austinites live closer to a convenience store than to a grocery store.
- Northwest Austin has a higher concentration of grocery stores, on average, than do other parts of the city, whereas east-central Austin has a higher concentration of convenience stores.
- Convenience stores are disproportionately located in communities with low or very low social opportunity.
- Local food retailers are disproportionately located in communities with high social opportunity.
- Patterns of racial and socioeconomic stratification overlap significantly with spatial patterns of social opportunity and food access in Austin.
- Data on the availability of local food retail establishments are difficult to obtain, making it challenging to track increases or decreases in the market for local food.

2.1 Austin and Travis County in Context

The City of Austin and Travis County perform better than many other areas of Texas on a variety of social well-being indicators. Median per capita income is 22% higher in Austin than in Texas as a whole, and median home values for Travis County are over \$200,000 on average, compared to \$126,000 in Texas.⁶² The unemployment rate for Travis County is consistently lower than both the state and national average⁶³ and more than 44% of people in Travis County have bachelor’s

⁶² U.S. Census Bureau, “Census 2010.”

⁶³ Texas Workforce Commission, “Austin-Round Rock MSA Economic Profile,” 2013.

degrees, compared to 26% statewide.⁶⁴ Austin is ranked on countless “best of” lists for its cost of living, quality of life, jobs, food, entertainment, dating and weather.⁶⁵

At the same time, however, Austin’s rapid population growth – over 25% between 2000 and 2010⁶⁶ – puts increasing pressure on environmental resources, social services, and the housing market. As the city has grown, Austin has become increasingly divided in terms of personal wealth, race and ethnicity, cultural attributes, linguistic characteristics, and political persuasions.⁶⁷ While the city is more diverse than it has ever been – Austin became a “majority minority” city in around 2005,⁶⁸ in large part due to a growing Hispanic and Latino population – rising home prices and development pressures have priced out many long-time residents, especially in Austin’s communities of color.⁶⁹ Non-white populations in Austin have moved disproportionately out of the central city and into suburban and rural areas as traditionally affordable areas have become gentrified.⁷⁰

Accordingly, Austin’s economic and racial landscapes are correspondingly stratified, as seen in Figure 3.

⁶⁴ U.S. Census Bureau, “State and County Quickfacts: Travis County, Texas.”

⁶⁵ Lauren Modery, “Austin Tops “Best City for ‘Best City’” Lists,” 2011.

⁶⁶ City of Austin, “Demographics.”

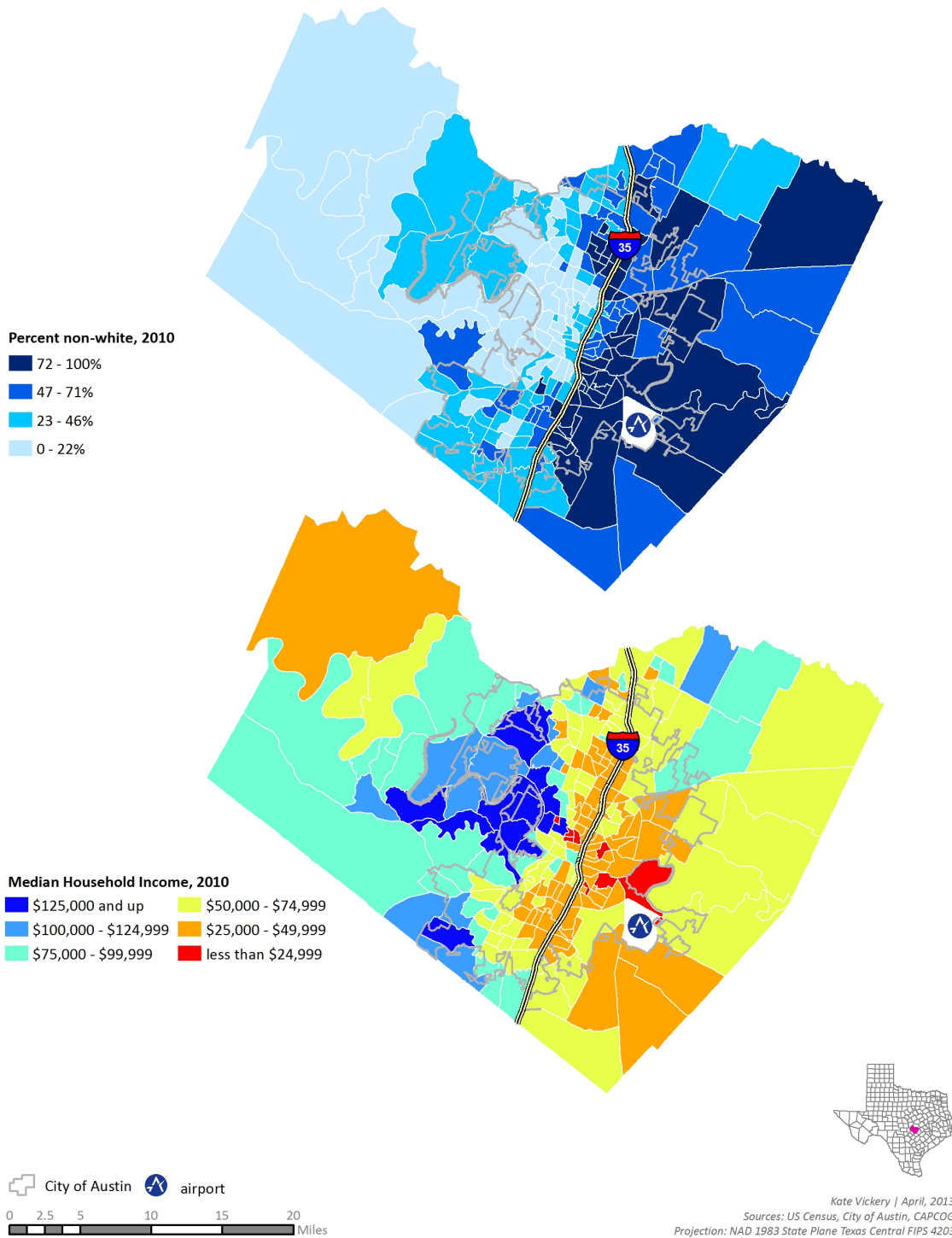
⁶⁷ City of Austin, “Top 10 Demographic Trends in Austin.”

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Economic & Planning Systems, Inc., *A Review of Best Practices for Mitigating Gentrification throughout the Country*, 2004.

⁷⁰ City of Austin, “Top 10 Demographic Trends in Austin.”

Figure 3: Racial and Economic Stratification in Travis County



As illustrated in the following sections, this racial and economic pattern of segregation corresponds with many of the city’s spatial patterns in food access, retail food distribution, and social opportunity. This overlap suggests that the food access landscape in Austin is inextricably

intertwined with Austin’s socioeconomic and cultural makeup and that, beyond creating opportunities for increased spatial access, policy should seek to enhance both the affordability and cultural appropriateness of available and proposed food resources.

2.2 Food Insecurity and Access in Austin

Texas is one of seven states with a significantly higher food insecurity rate than the U.S. national average.⁷¹ A significant percentage of people in Travis County have inadequate access to healthy food, and many are food insecure. In Travis County, the proportion of food insecure households increased 4.6% from 2006 to 2011.⁷² Currently, 18% of households are food insecure – compared to 14.9% nationally – and 12.6% of Travis County’s children struggle with food insecurity.⁷³

Table 1: Travis County Food Insecurity by the Numbers⁷⁴

<i>Percent of people who are low-income and have low access to a grocery store (2010)</i>	25%
<i>Percent of people who are low-income, have low access to grocery stores, and do not have a vehicle (2010)</i>	1.6%
<i>Percent of children (0-17) who are low-income and have low access to a grocery store (2010)</i>	20%
<i>Household food insecurity (2009-2011)</i>	18.5%
<i>Child food insecurity (2003-2011)</i>	12.6%

As discussed in Chapter 1, food insecurity is inextricably linked to food access. The map below shows Travis County census tracts that are USDA-designated “food deserts,” or areas that have inadequate access to healthy food resources. Hash-marks depict census tracts that are low-income⁷⁵ and in which 30% of the population resides further than ½ mile (for urban tracts) or 10 miles (for rural tracts) from a grocery store.⁷⁶ The map also displays highlighted census tracts in which more than 100 households report having no vehicle available and are more than ½ mile from the nearest supermarket; these are labeled *low vehicle access* tracts.⁷⁷

⁷¹ Feeding America, “Hunger and Poverty Statistics.”

⁷² USDA, “Food Environment Atlas: Travis County.”

⁷³ Ibid.

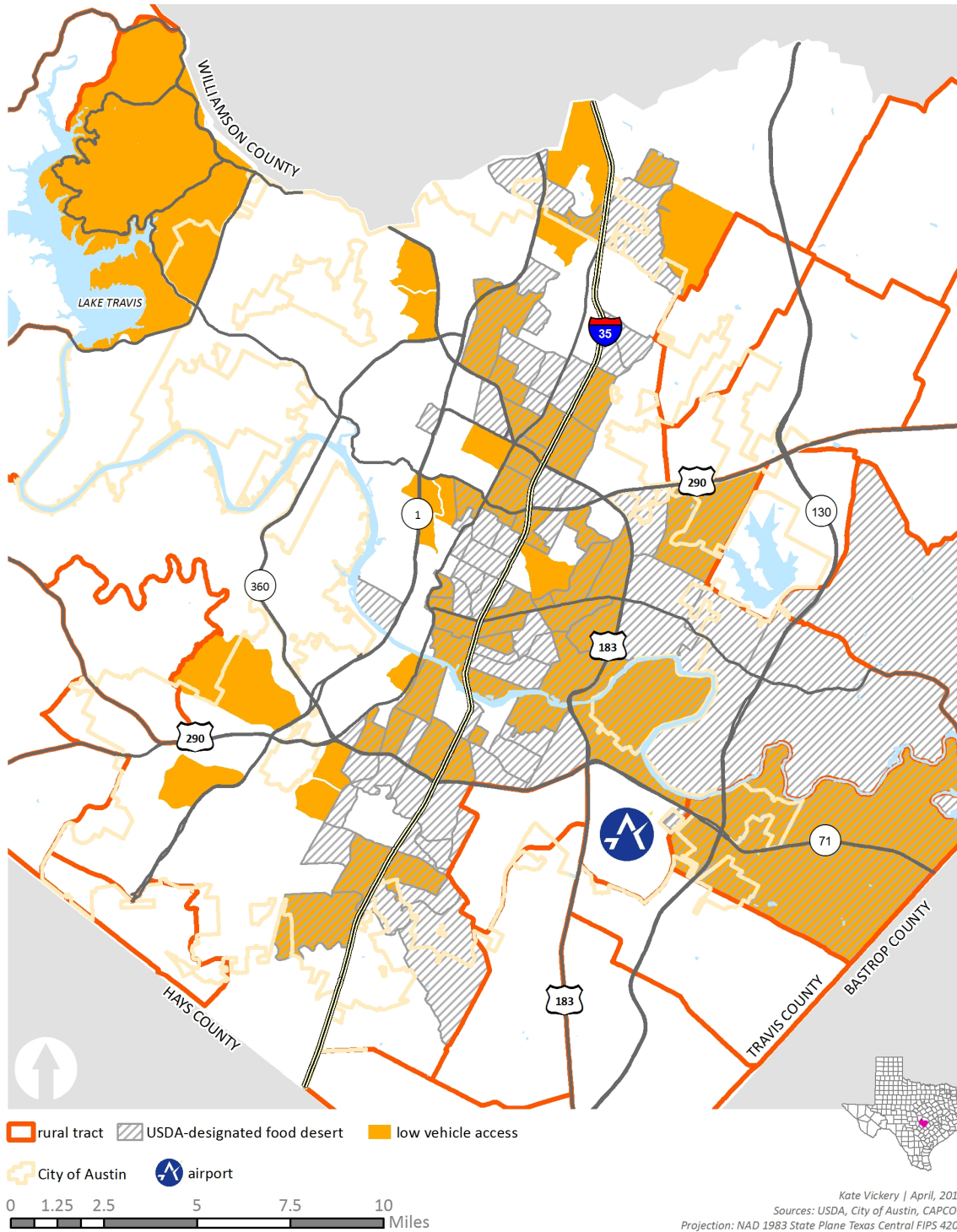
⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ USDA defines “low-income” census tracts as tracts in which the poverty rate is greater than 20%; the median family income is less than or equal to 80% of the state-wide median family income; or the tract is in a metropolitan area and has a median family income less than or equal to 80% of the state-wide median family income.

⁷⁶ A tract is considered rural if the population-weighted centroid of that tract is located in an area with a population of less than 2,500; all other tracts are considered urban tracts. Grocery stores must have annual sales of at least \$2 million and offer all the major food departments found in a traditional supermarket, including fresh produce, fresh meat and poultry, dairy, dry and packaged foods, and frozen foods.

⁷⁷ USDA, “Food Access Research Atlas.”

Figure 4: USDA-Designated "Food Deserts" in Austin, Texas



As the map illustrates, significant portions of east Austin and east Travis County, as well as areas of central and north Austin, and southeast Travis County, are food deserts. Additionally, a significant number of Austin communities experience inadequate vehicle access. The impact of lacking

personal transportation, and being further than ½ mile away from the nearest grocery store, may be exacerbated in areas where public transportation options are inadequate.

Given that USDA-designated food deserts are defined in terms of income and spatial distance to grocery stores, affordability and physical proximity are the primary identifiable barriers to healthy food access for these communities. Initiatives that increase the availability and affordability of healthy foods within these neighborhoods have the potential to alleviate these barriers. It is important to note, however, that the USDA atlas methodology does not provide a comprehensive delineation of all food retailers in these areas, and excludes non-traditional food access points such as farmers markets and supermarkets with under \$2 million in annual sales. In order to glean additional insight into Austin’s food landscape, and the availability of healthy food across the city, this report examines more detailed information on the distribution of grocery stores, convenience stores, and farmers markets.⁷⁸

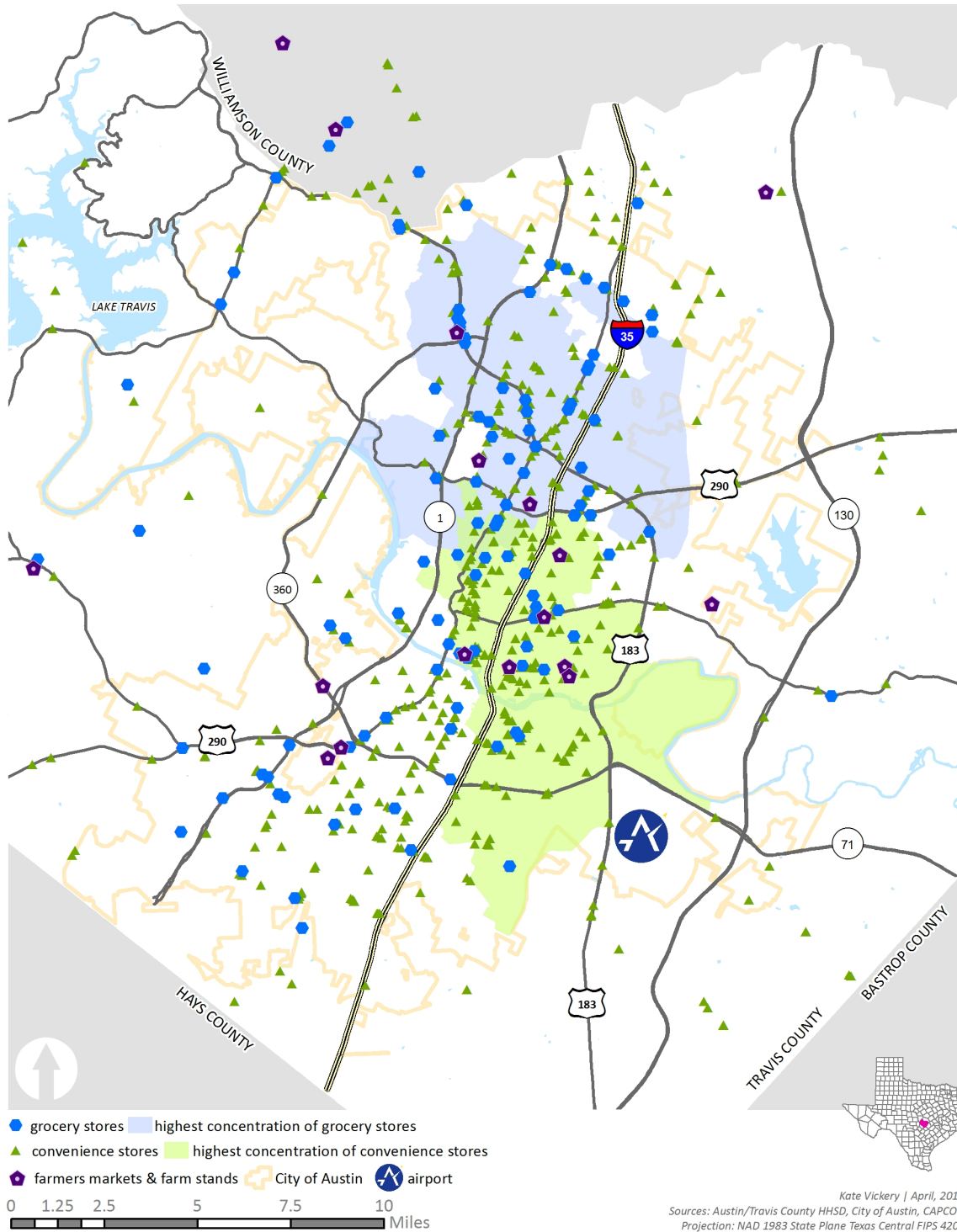
This report includes an analysis of three primary food retail establishments: grocery stores, convenience stores, and farmers markets/farm stands. This report defines grocery stores as food retailers at which a wide variety of foods can be purchased, including fresh fruits and vegetables, meats, and dairy. By using a more expansive definition than the USDA methodology, this analysis does not limit itself to grocery stores of a particular size or with a specific threshold of annual sales, and so includes small-scale independent grocers and ethnic food retailers that fit the above description. Convenience stores, by contrast, are often attached to gas stations or are small, stand-alone establishments that sell a variety of non-food and food products, including alcohol, cigarettes, pre-packaged foods, and a large selection of single-serving beverages. Fresh fruits, vegetables, meats and dairy are typically not available at convenience stores. In general, a healthier variety of food options is available at grocery stores.

The Austin/Travis County Health and Human Services Department (HHSD) currently permits 596 convenience stores and 130 grocery stores to sell food, approximately five convenience stores for every one grocery store.⁷⁹ The most common grocery store chains are HEB with 25 retail locations, Randall’s with 10 locations, and Walmart Supercenters with eight locations. Thirty percent of convenience stores are either 7-Eleven, Circle K, CVS, Dollar General, Speedy Store, Valero, or Walgreens. The map below displays the locations of permitted grocery and convenience stores, as well as farmers markets.

⁷⁸ Data were obtained from the Austin/Travis County Health and Human Services Department (list of permitted food retailers) and the City of Austin Parks and Recreation Department (GIS data on farmers markets and farm stands).

⁷⁹ Note: Some of these HHSD-permitted retailers are located in Williamson County, which is outside the formal “study area” for this report.

Figure 5: Food Retail Distribution in Austin, Texas



There is a large concentration of grocery stores in north Austin (as indicated by the light blue shaded region in Figure 5), while a concentration of convenience stores can be found in and around the UT Austin campus area and in areas east of Interstate Highway 35 (I-35), as indicated by the

light green shaded region.⁸⁰ This initial analysis indicates that convenience stores make up a disproportionate number of retail food resources in Austin and, moreover, that these and healthier grocery store resources are unevenly distributed throughout the city. While grocery stores typically have a much larger service area than convenience stores – and, due to size and other factors, can potentially serve more customers than a typical convenience store – residents in Austin, on average, live closer to a convenience store than to a supermarket. This is even truer for those neighborhoods, identified above, that have a disproportionate share of convenience stores located in their area. Because grocery stores generally offer a wider variety of healthy foods, including locally produced fruits and vegetables, this spatial distribution has important implications for the health and well-being of many Austin communities.

Figure 5 also displays the distribution of farmers markets and farm stands – retail locations that specialize, often exclusively, in the vending of locally produced food, especially fresh fruits and vegetables – in the Austin area. There are currently 17 farmers markets and three farm stands in regular operation in the Austin area, some of which are located in low food access and low social opportunity neighborhoods, which will be discussed in the following section.

2.3 Food Access and the Geography of Opportunity

The Kirwan Institute’s Opportunity Index⁸¹ provides a more complete depiction of the spatial distribution of social opportunity in Austin by illuminating areas that face low and very low social opportunity, as demonstrated in Figure 6. Forty-three percent of Austin’s population lives in an area with low or very low opportunity.⁸² Patterns of race and income stratification overlap with patterns in social opportunity: 55% of people who live in low-opportunity areas are non-white and 50% of Austin’s low-income households are located in low-opportunity areas (compared to only 30% of high-income households).⁸³

Figure 6 also shows significant overlap between the USDA’s “food desert” designation and the social opportunity data; indeed, the majority of “food deserts” are located in low-opportunity areas. Approaching social opportunity from a multi-faceted perspective encourages the framing of food access as a vital and interrelated component of communities’ broader social and economic infrastructure. When considering interventions to improve access to healthy, affordable, and local food, practitioners should take a holistic approach, taking into consideration how proposed interventions could more comprehensively enhance social opportunity for neighborhoods, in keeping with the City of Austin’s goal to create “complete communities.”

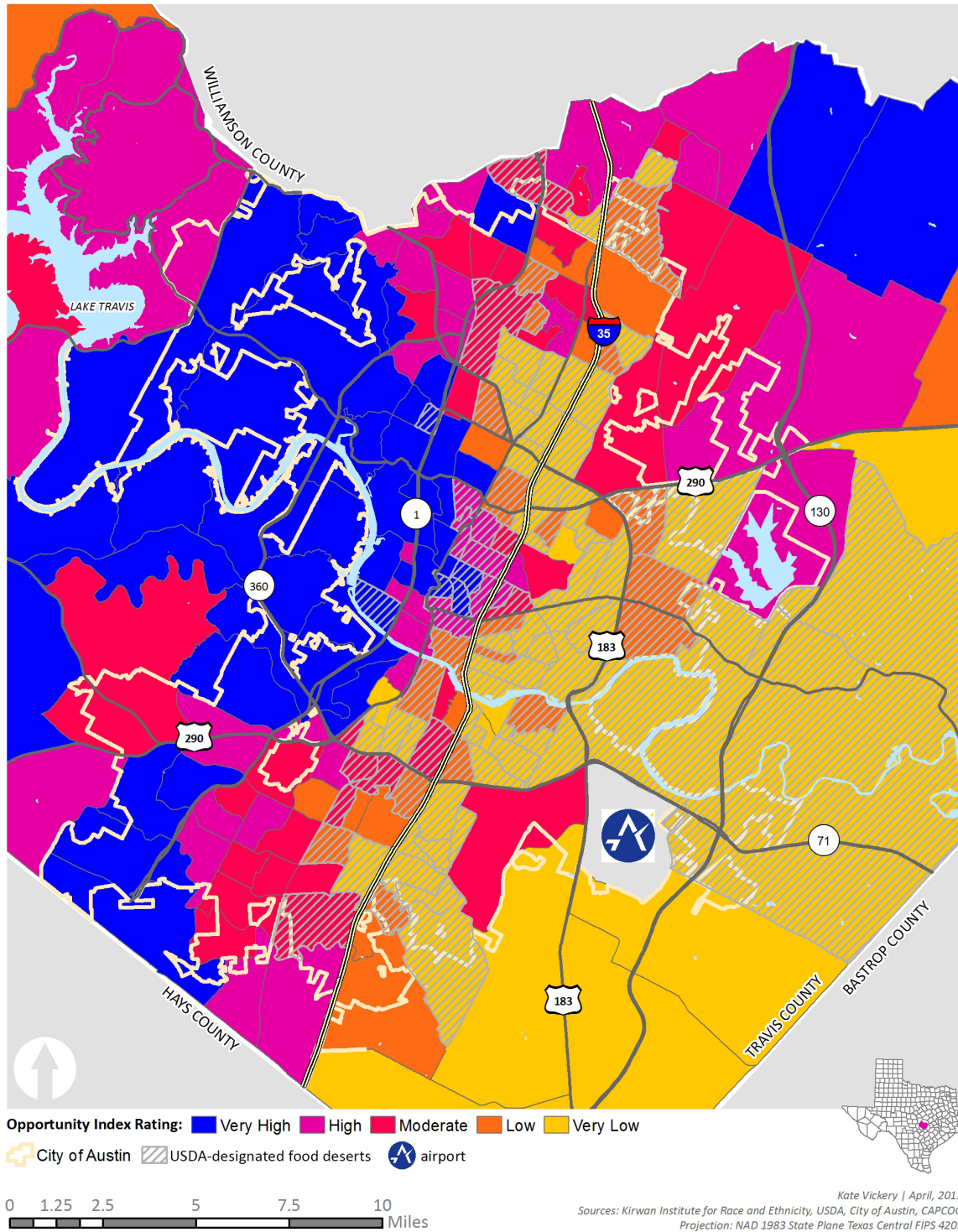
⁸⁰ The shaded portions of the map indicate high concentrations of grocery and convenience stores. They were produced using hotspot analysis in the ArcGIS program.

⁸¹ See Chapter 1.1 for detailed background information on this model.

⁸² Kirwan Institute for Race and Ethnicity, *The Geography of Opportunity in Austin and How It Is Changing*, 2013, pg. 11.

⁸³ Ibid.

Figure 6: The Geography of Social Opportunity in Austin, Texas



Viewing the Austin area in this context provides a deeper understanding of the underlying conditions that are interrelated with community food access. In order to glean more nuanced

insights about the spatial distribution of Austin’s current retail food choices, it is helpful to view the previously discussed retail establishments in relationship to the Opportunity Communities index.

Figure 7: Social Opportunity and Food Choices in Austin, Texas

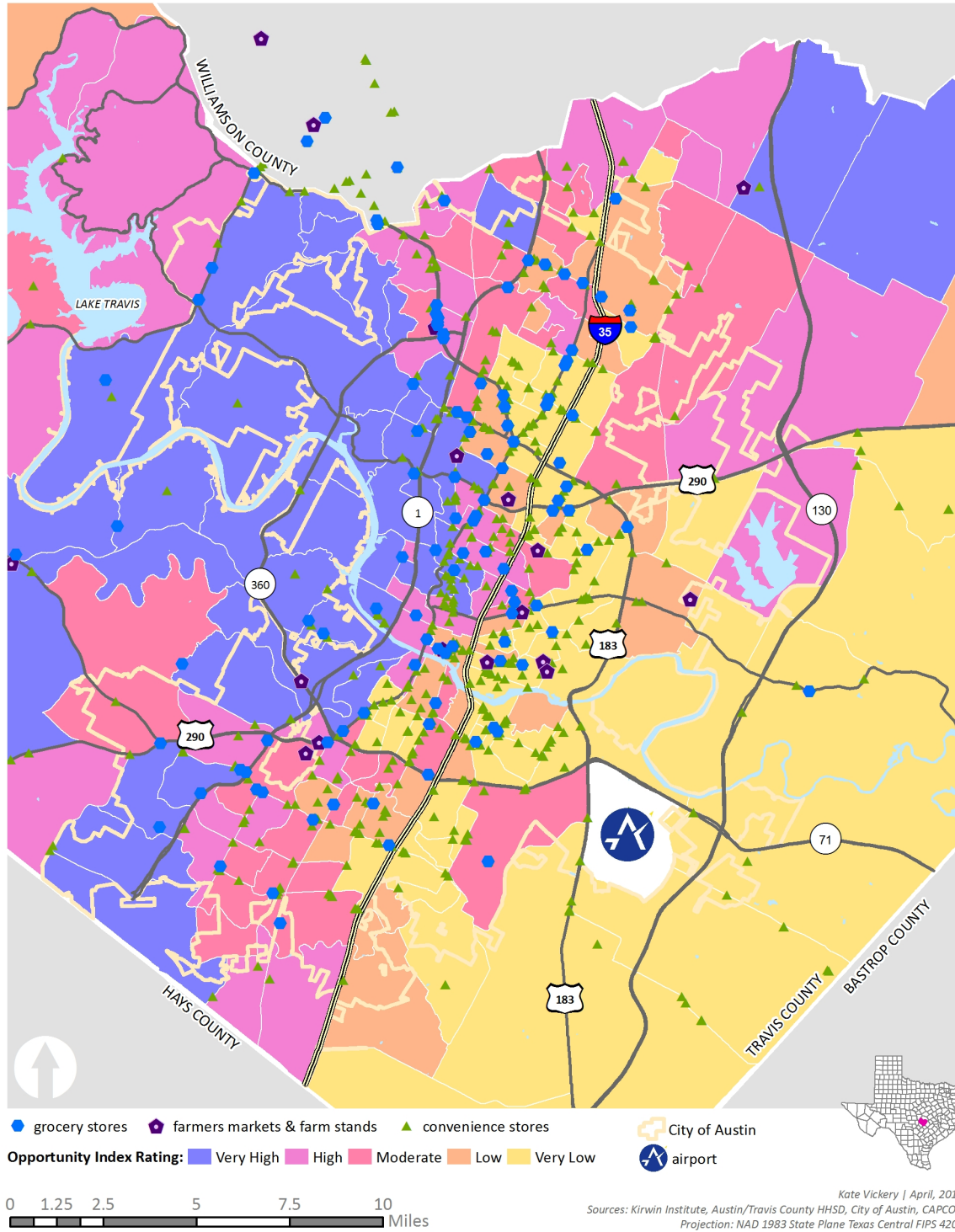


Figure 7 depicts the stratified retail food landscape in Austin. Of the 603 convenience stores, over half are located in areas with low or very low opportunity; over a third are located in areas with the very lowest opportunity; and only 15% are located in areas with very high opportunity. Grocery stores are far more evenly distributed; approximately 20% of all of grocery stores are located in each of the five regions of opportunity.⁸⁴

Previous research has demonstrated that residing in closer proximity to unhealthy than to healthy food resources has negative impacts on human health.⁸⁵ For this reason, the concentration of convenience stores relative to healthy food options in areas with low social opportunity is concerning. Increasing the number and affordability of healthy food retail options in low-opportunity communities will be important for enhancing the health and well-being of those communities.

2.4 Local Food Retail System

It is important for policymakers to bear in mind the larger food retail landscape of Austin as they begin to explore the more niche *local food* retail landscape and its relationship to food access. As discussed previously, this report defines “local food” as being produced within the five-county Austin-Round Rock-San Marcos Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA). The MSA encompasses a significant number of agricultural producers who commute in to Austin to sell their produce at Austin farmers markets and at a handful of brick-and-mortar retail establishments. This report attempts to identify the retail establishments in Austin that on a regular basis sell fruits and vegetables produced within the MSA. Those retailers are listed in Table 2.⁸⁶

Each of the retailers in Table 2 offers a selection of locally grown produce, and many also sell local meats and dairy. These retail establishments represent only 18 out of a total of 130 brick-and-mortar grocery stores, which are not well distributed throughout the city, as discussed in the previous section. It is important to note that there is no reliable source of data on the availability of local food in retail outlets in Austin. Such data, generated reliably and with consistency, would be useful for policymakers interested in growing the local food economy and increasing equity in local food distribution.

⁸⁴ It is important to note that retailers that fall on the boundary of two census tracts are not included in this count.

⁸⁵ Mari Gallagher, *Examining the Impact of Food Deserts on Public Health in Chicago*, 2006; Mari Gallagher, *Examining the Impacts of Food Deserts and Food Imbalance on Public Health in Birmingham, Alabama*, 2010.

⁸⁶ This local food retail establishment list was culled from the personal and anecdotal knowledge and experience of research team members, and was vetted through local food movement actors and project advisers. It is not necessarily exhaustive. Additionally, some large-scale stores that sell Texas-sourced food, such as HEB, were excluded from the list because this report narrowly defines local food as being from within the 5-county MSA and local food retailers as those that offer at least one fruit or vegetable product from within the MSA region at all times of the year.

Table 2: Austin Grocery Stores That Carry Local Produce

Name	Location
<i>Farm To Market</i>	1718 S Congress Avenue
<i>Fresh Plus</i>	1221 West Lynn Street
<i>Fresh Plus</i>	408 E 43rd Street
<i>Fresh Plus</i>	2917 W Anderson Lane
<i>Central Market</i>	4001 N Lamar Boulevard
<i>Central Market</i>	4477 S Lamar Boulevard
<i>In.gredients</i>	2610 Manor Road
<i>Natural Grocers</i>	3901 Guadalupe Street
<i>Rosewood Community Market</i>	1819 Rosewood Avenue
<i>Royal Blue Grocery</i>	247 W 3rd Street
<i>Royal Blue Grocery</i>	360 Nueces Street
<i>Royal Blue Grocery</i>	609 Congress Avenue
<i>Thom's Market</i>	1418 Barton Springs Road
<i>Wheatsville Food Co-op</i>	3101 Guadalupe Street
<i>The Wet Whistle</i>	1900 E Martin Luther King Jr. Boulevard
<i>Whole Foods Market</i>	9607 Research Boulevard
<i>Whole Foods Market</i>	4301 W William Cannon Drive
<i>Whole Foods Market</i>	525 N Lamar Boulevard

Below is a summary of the current farmers markets (typically 10 - 40 vendors) and farm stands (single vendor operations) in the Austin area, which provide residents with another 17 retail choices for purchasing local foods. Note that four of these markets are located outside of Austin, but are included in the report because they draw customers from Travis County.

Table 3: Austin Area Farmers Markets and Farm Stands

Name	Location	City	Day/Hours
<i>Barton Creek Farmers Market</i>	6001 Airport Boulevard	Austin	Sun/10-2pm
<i>Barton Creek Farmers Market</i>	2901 S Capitol of Texas Highway	Austin	Sat/9am-1pm
<i>Boggy Creek Farm</i>	3413 Lyons Road	Austin	Wed/Sat 9am-1pm
<i>Burnet Road Market</i>	6701 Burnet Road	Austin	Thurs/4pm-8pm Sat/9am-1pm
<i>Cedar Park Farmer's Market</i>	11200 Lakeline Mall Drive	Cedar Park	Sat/9-1pm
<i>Cedar Park Market Square</i>	200 S Bell Boulevard	Cedar Park	Sat/9-2pm
<i>Great Hills Open Air Market</i>	10000 Research Boulevard.	Austin	Sun/10-2pm
<i>Green Gate Farm Stand</i>	8310 Canoga Avenue	Austin	Tues/3-6pm; Fri/10-2pm; Sat/10-2pm
<i>HOPE Farmers Market</i>	412 Comal Street	Austin	Sun/11am-3pm
<i>Lone Star Farmers Market</i>	12611 Shops Parkway	Bee Caves	Sun/10-2pm
<i>Mueller Farmers Market</i>	4550 Mueller Road	Austin	Sun/10-2pm
<i>Pflugerville Pfarmers Market</i>	901 Old Austin-Hutto Road	Pflugerville	Tues/3-7pm
<i>SFC Downtown</i>	400 W Guadalupe Street	Austin	Sat/9am-1pm
<i>SFC East</i>	2835 E MLK Jr. Boulevard	Austin	Tues/3-7pm
<i>SFC Sunset Valley</i>	3200 Jones Road	Austin	Sat/9am-1pm
<i>SFC The Triangle</i>	4600 Lamar Boulevard	Austin	Wed/4pm-8pm
<i>Springdale Farm Stand</i>	755 Springdale Road	Austin	Wed & Sat/9am-1pm

2.5 Local Food Access and Social Opportunity

The local food retail landscape is also skewed in its spatial distribution. As can be seen in Figure 8, local food retailers are heavily concentrated in central and west Austin and, as can be observed from Table 4, a disproportionate number of local food retailers are located in areas of Austin with high and very high opportunity, while a disproportionate number of convenience stores are located in areas with low and very low opportunity. Grocery stores are more evenly distributed but, as mentioned previously, a greater concentration of grocery stores are located in north Austin than in other regions.

Table 4: Local Food Retail Distribution by Level of Social Opportunity

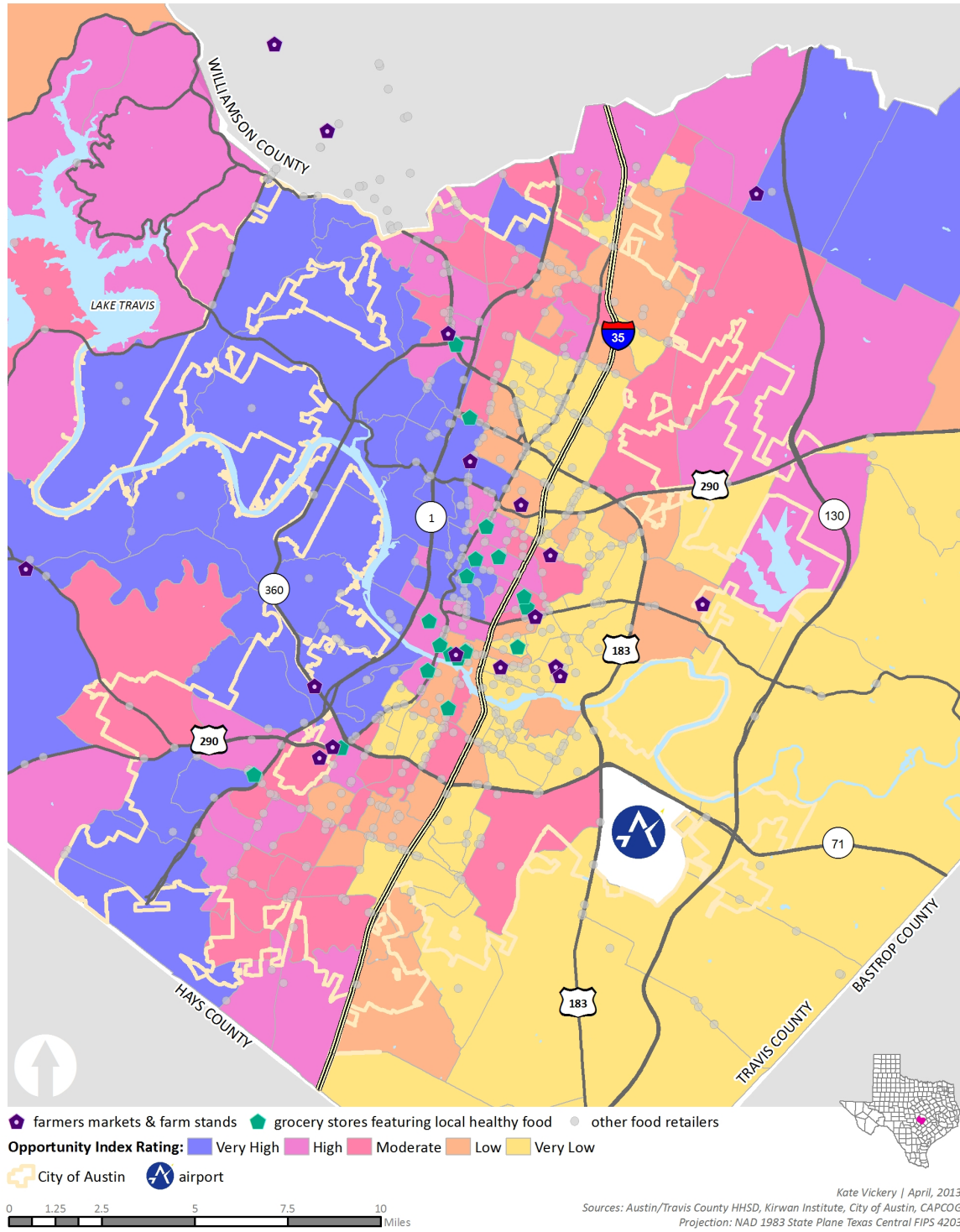
	Opportunity Index Rating				
	<i>Very low</i>	<i>Low</i>	<i>Moderate</i>	<i>High</i>	<i>Very high</i>
<i># Grocery stores selling local, healthy food (%)</i>	1 (6%)	3 (17%)	3 (17%)	9 (50%)	2 (11%)
<i># Farmers markets & stands (%)</i>	3 (20%)	4 (27%)	3 (20%)	1 (7%)	4 (27%)
<i>All "local" retail options, incl. grocery + markets (%)</i>	4 (12%)	7 (21%)	6 (18%)	10 (30%)	6 (18%)
<i># Convenience Stores (%)</i>	209 (36%)	107 (18%)	98 (17%)	81 (14%)	86 (15%)
<i># Grocery Stores (%)</i>	23 (20%)	27 (22%)	20 (16%)	25 (21%)	25 (21%)

Interestingly, farmers markets fairly evenly distributed throughout different areas of high and low opportunity, but taken together - grocery stores featuring local products and farmers markets – it is clear that there is a strong clustering of these food choices in central and west Austin. Further, as will be discussed in Chapter 3, not all local food retailers are equipped to serve the most socially vulnerable people in Austin – those needing nutrition assistance through the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP).

While a growing number of farmers markets are locating in low-opportunity areas, there are concerns as to whether farmers markets are able to meet the needs of area consumers in terms of affordability or cultural appropriateness. The local food landscape may thus be largely inaccessible to a significant portion of Austin’s population. Growing the local food economy in a more just and equitable way will entail addressing not only gaps in spatial access, but in affordability and cultural appropriateness. Farmers market incentive programs (FMIPs) offer one way to improve the affordability of local, nutritionally adequate food for low-income consumers but do not, in and of themselves, bridge spatial or cultural barriers to access. FMIPs, as discussed in the following chapters, must be considered as part of an interrelated set of policy tools addressing the many nuanced components of access.

The following chapter will address the current state of nutrition assistance enrollment and programming in Austin and its relationship to FMIPs.

Figure 8: Local Food Retailers and Social Opportunity in Austin, Texas



Chapter 3: Nutrition Assistance Programs in Austin and Travis County

This chapter discusses current levels of eligibility and enrollment in nutrition assistance programs in Austin and Travis County, directing specific attention to SNAP. Policymakers desiring to implement policies affecting food insecure or SNAP-enrolled populations should become familiar with the current spatial distribution of SNAP enrollment in the city as well as with potential opportunities to increase enrollment within under-enrolled populations, potentially as a preliminary or concurrent step to launching a farmers market incentive program (FMIP). As discussed in future chapters, outreach and awareness are critical elements of any successful FMIP, and raising awareness of the current level of benefits available to SNAP-eligible populations may be a first step towards improving food access more broadly.

Key Findings

- SNAP benefits improve food security and provide an economic stimulus to local communities – every \$1 in SNAP purchases yields 79 cents in additional economic activity.
- Between 2006 and 2011, SNAP participation in Travis County nearly doubled.
- Despite growth in SNAP participation, only 62% of SNAP-eligible individuals in Travis County were enrolled in the program in 2010.
- There are a variety of potential barriers to enrolling in nutrition assistance programs. Actors at the state, county, and city levels are working to increase enrollment capacity and outreach.
- Household participation in SNAP is concentrated in east Austin and east Travis County where many census tracts lack adequate access to grocery stores.
- Three of the farmers markets and farm stands that are not equipped with Electronic Benefit Transfer (EBT) are located in areas where 25-40% of households receive SNAP benefits.

3.1 Nutrition Assistance Programs in Austin and Travis County

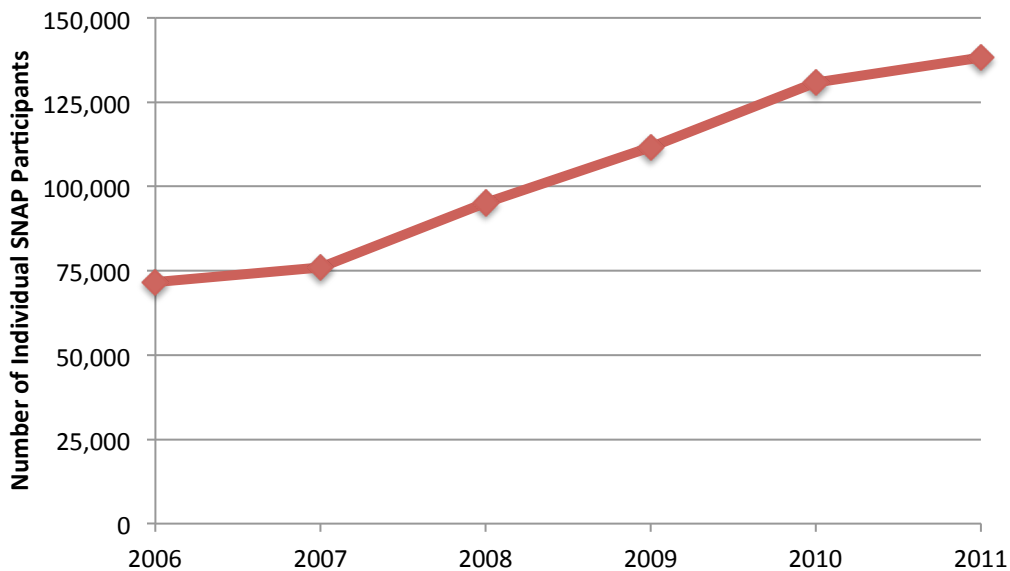
Nutrition assistance programs are tools for increasing the food purchasing power of eligible low-income individuals, and for addressing the affordability barrier to access. As described in Chapter 1, the federal government offers two main nutrition assistance programs to U.S. citizens: the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) and the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC). In recent years, the USDA has introduced nutrition assistance programming designed specifically to increase access to and consumption of fresh produce: the WIC Farmers' Market Nutrition Program (FMNP) and the Senior Farmers' Market Nutrition Program (SFMNP).

After declining substantially during the late 1990s, national SNAP enrollment rebounded during the early 2000s and has grown significantly since. Last year, national enrollment reached the highest level in history, with more than 47 million individuals enrolled in the program in December 2012.⁸⁷ The rate of increase in enrollment has slowed since 2012, with roughly 20,000 fewer people participating in the program in January 2013 than in December 2012.⁸⁸

Similar to the national trend, SNAP participation in Texas has increased considerably over the last several years. In May 2013, there were 3.57 million SNAP recipients in the state—over one million more than in May 2006, when 2.49 million Texans were receiving SNAP benefits.⁸⁹ Enrollment in Travis County has also increased considerably over the last decade. In 2000, approximately 4% of the county population (26,488 individuals) was enrolled in SNAP. Ten years later, in 2010, 13% of the population (130,790 individuals) received SNAP benefits.⁹⁰ The graph below depicts the steady growth in SNAP participation in the county since 2006. Enrollment nearly doubled over this six-year period.

Figure 9: Annual SNAP Participation (Individuals) in Travis County, 2006-2011

Source - USDA SNAP Data System, Accessed April 28, 2013



In addition to the sheer number of people receiving nutrition assistance benefits, it is important to consider what proportion of eligible households actually participates in the program. The national SNAP participation rate was 75% in 2010. In other words, roughly three-quarters of people who were eligible for SNAP actually participated in the program.⁹¹ Compared to the national rate,

⁸⁷ Food Research and Action Center, “Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program: Number of Persons Participating – One Month Change,” 2013.

⁸⁸ USDA, “Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program,” 2013.

⁸⁹ Texas Health and Human Services Commission, “Monthly SNAP Cases and Recipients Statewide.”

⁹⁰ USDA, “Food Environment Atlas: Travis County.”

⁹¹ USDA, *Reaching Those in Need: State Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Participation Rates in 2010, 2012.*

participation in the state of Texas was considerably lower at 65%, up from 57% in 2009. Despite this dramatic increase, Texas ranked 47th for SNAP participation in 2010. In Travis County, the 2010 SNAP participation rate was 62%, considerably higher than in years past but slightly lower than the overall state participation rate of 65%.

WIC beneficiaries represent a much smaller proportion of the total population in Travis County, with fewer than 4% of individuals participating in 2011. This is not surprising given that, unlike SNAP, WIC is not an entitlement program, and it targets a very specific sub-set of the low-income population: pregnant and postpartum women and infants and children up to age five who are found to be at nutritional risk. In Fiscal Year 2012, there were 969,893 WIC beneficiaries in Texas.⁹² The most recent estimate of WIC coverage rates is based on enrollment data collected in 2009, when an estimated 63% of eligible women, infants, and children in Texas participated in WIC.⁹³

3.2 Why Enrollment Matters

Bolstering SNAP enrollment has proven to be an effective strategy for reducing the number of households that experience very low food security.⁹⁴ SNAP participation also has the potential to generate savings for the state of Texas in terms of lower health care costs,⁹⁵ especially if SNAP benefits are spent on healthy food options such as fresh fruits and vegetables.

In addition to increasing recipients' food purchasing power, SNAP redemptions generate economic activity. SNAP benefits are one of the fastest, most effective forms of stimulus because they inject money into the economy quickly.⁹⁶ According to the USDA, an increase of \$1 billion in SNAP expenditures would increase the United States' Gross Domestic Product (GDP) by an estimated \$1.79 billion.⁹⁷ At the local level, this means that every \$1 in SNAP purchases yields \$1.79 in community economic activity.⁹⁸ This is known as the "multiplier effect." The potential to realize these economic benefits is one reason policymakers and practitioners should be concerned about under-enrollment.

Understanding enrollment patterns is also essential to the success of FMIPs and other programs that are designed to leverage nutrition assistance benefits to improve food quality and access. Eligible individuals who are not enrolled to receive benefits will not be able to take advantage of these programs. Implementers of such programs will need to take steps to increase enrollment before or concurrently with program implementation.

⁹² USDA, "WIC Program: Total Participation," 2013.

⁹³ Urban Institute, *WIC Participants and Their Growing Need for Coverage*, 2012.

⁹⁴ USDA, *Does SNAP Decrease Food Insecurity? Untangling the Self-Selection Effect*, 2009.

⁹⁵ Baylor University School of Social Work, Texas Hunger Initiative, "SNAP Outreach."

⁹⁶ Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, "Policy Basics: Introduction to the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)," 2013.

⁹⁷ USDA, *The Food Assistance National Input-Output Multiplier (FANIOM) Model and Stimulus Effects of SNAP*, 2010.

⁹⁸ USDA, *The Benefits of Increasing the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) Participation in Your State*, 2011.

EBT-authorized Food Retailers and the Geography of SNAP Enrollment

Under-enrollment in nutrition assistance programs is only part of the challenge of addressing food insecurity. Spatial proximity to retailers that accept SNAP or WIC benefits is an important factor as well. As of April 18, 2013, there were 563 SNAP-authorized retailers in Travis County and 64 WIC-authorized retailers in Travis County in 2011, up from 53 in 2008.⁹⁹ These are Austin/Travis County-permitted food retailers that accept SNAP and/or WIC through EBT. In addition, there were seven farmers markets and farm stands that accepted WIC benefits, six of which also accepted SNAP benefits. Between 2008 and 2011, 36% of purchases made at SNAP-authorized retailers in Travis County were SNAP redemptions.¹⁰⁰ The number of SNAP-authorized stores increased by 58% during this time period.

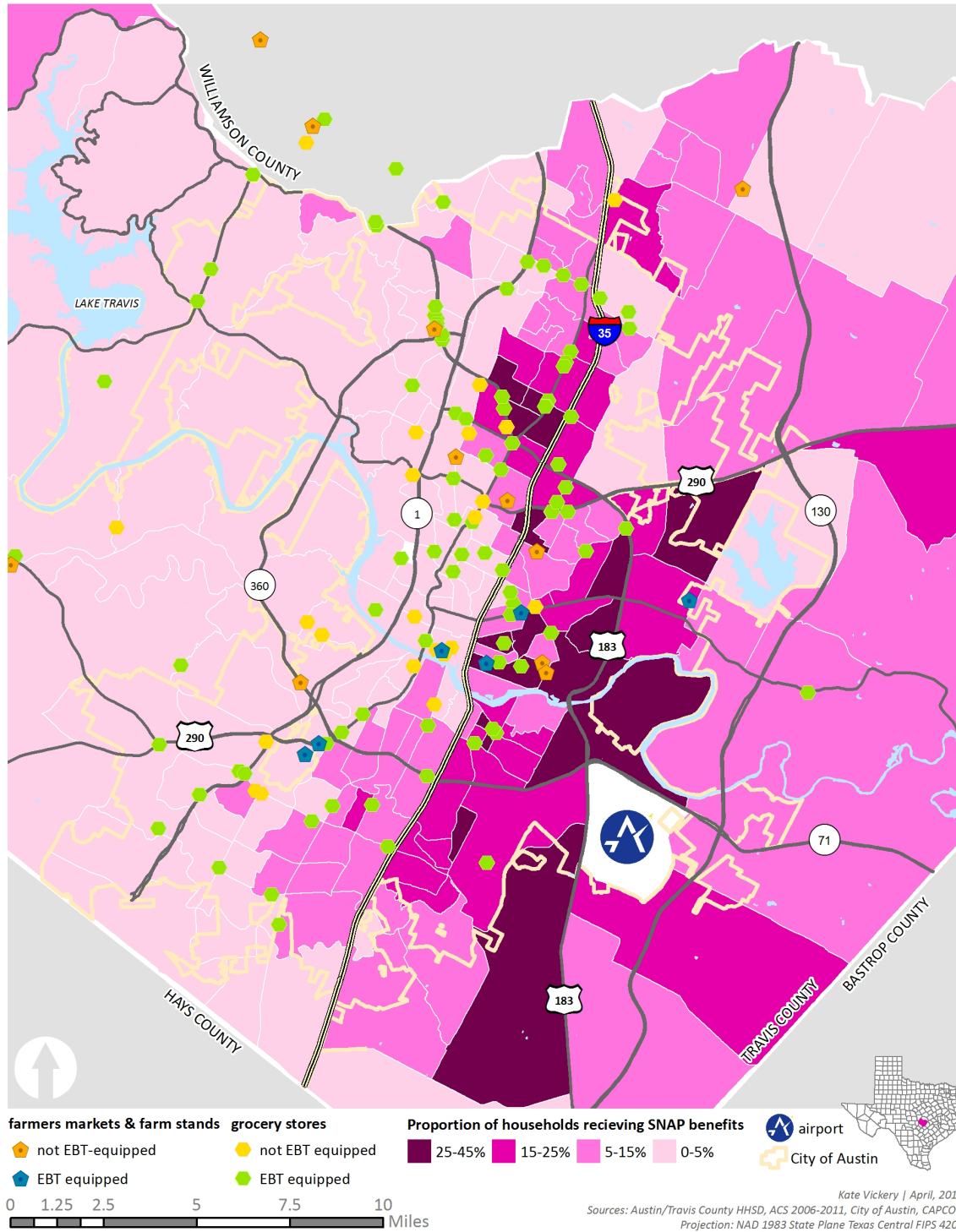
The map below depicts the location of EBT-equipped food retailers in Travis County and the percentage of households within each census tract that are enrolled in SNAP. Household participation in SNAP is concentrated in the eastern half of the county, where many of the tracts—including those with 25-40% SNAP enrollment—have no grocery stores. Also worth noting is that three of the seven EBT-equipped farmers markets or farm stands are located in areas where 5% of households or fewer are enrolled in SNAP. Three of the markets or stands that are not EBT-equipped are located in or near areas where 25-40% of households receive SNAP benefits.

Understanding where EBT-equipped grocery stores and farmers markets are located relative to nutrition assistance recipients should be a priority to policymakers working to increase access to healthy foods in low-opportunity communities. However, maps such as that in Figure 10 are not sufficient by themselves to inform decisions about where to open a new EBT-accessible grocery store, farmers market, or farm stand. As argued previously in this report, consumer demand and cultural appropriateness are also of critical importance.

⁹⁹ USDA, “Food Environment Atlas: Travis County.”

¹⁰⁰ USDA, “Food Environment Atlas: Travis County.”

Figure 10: SNAP Enrollment and EBT Availability in Austin, Texas



3.3 Options for Enrolling in SNAP in Austin or Travis County

Residents of Austin or Travis County have a growing number of options for determining their eligibility for SNAP and applying to participate in the program. The traditional method has been to complete and submit a paper-based application in person at one of the Texas Health and Human Service Commission's (HHSC's) four physical offices in Travis County.¹⁰¹ Staff in these offices is ultimately responsible for processing SNAP applications, whether submitted in person or online.

Individuals also have the option to apply online through HHSC's enrollment website, YourTexasBenefits.com. At YourTexasBenefits.com, prospective applicants can complete an online form to find out whether or not they are eligible for SNAP and other public assistance benefits administered through the state.

Since 2012, prospective SNAP clients have also had the option to apply for SNAP benefits through The Benefit Bank of Texas. Developed by a private company based in Philadelphia, The Benefit Bank (TBB) is a web-based service that "simplifies and centralizes the process of applying for many state and federal benefits for low- and moderate-income individuals and families."¹⁰² Like YourTexasBenefits.com, TBB is a free service to benefit applicants. Texas is one of 10 states that offer TBB. The designated Texas TBB "affiliate" is Texas Health Institute.¹⁰³ As the TBB affiliate for the state, Texas Health Institute is responsible for recruiting community-based organizations to offer TBB's eligibility screening and benefit enrollment services and help potential public assistance beneficiaries with the application process.¹⁰⁴ The TBB portal connects directly to HHSC's application portal. Although the web-based interface is different, HHSC is still the state agency that ultimately receives and processes applications.

As of April 2013, there were five community-based organizations in Travis County that provided access to TBB: Helping the Aging, Needy and Disabled (H.A.N.D.), Con Mi Madre, Breast Cancer Resource Centers of Texas, River City Youth Foundation, Front Steps, and Family Keys Center.¹⁰⁵ Any organization that can provide a counselor, computer, printer, internet access, and phone "in a setting that is respectful and private" can offer TBB. The cost of membership with the Texas Health Institute is \$1,000, which covers training that the institute provides to organizations that host TBB.

3.4 Barriers to SNAP Enrollment

Despite the increase in SNAP enrollment options for Texans, there are multiple barriers to SNAP participation. Legal immigrants may be deterred by language barriers, while the working poor face

¹⁰¹ The offices are located at the following addresses: 5451 North IH 35, Suite D, Austin, TX 78723; 1601 Rutherford Lane, Austin, TX 78754; 724 Eberhart Lane, Austin, TX 78745; 4000 IH 35 South, Austin, TX 78704. Texas Health and Human Services Commission, YourTexasBenefits.com.

¹⁰² The Benefit Bank.

¹⁰³ The Texas Health Institute a 501(c)(3) organization that provides leadership in development of health care solutions to shape the Texas health care landscape.

¹⁰⁴ The Benefit Bank, "The Benefit Bank Network of States."

¹⁰⁵ The Benefit Bank, "Find a Benefit Bank Site Near You."

time and transportation obstacles.¹⁰⁶ Studies have shown that eligible seniors often are reticent to apply because they believe they will only receive the minimum benefit of \$16 per month; whereas, in fact, the average monthly benefit for elderly individuals in Fiscal Year 2009 was \$102 per month.¹⁰⁷ They also may be reluctant because they believe the application will be confusing and overwhelming.¹⁰⁸ According to the USDA, the most common reason eligible people do not enroll in SNAP is that they do not realize they may be eligible to participate.¹⁰⁹ Stigma also remains an issue, despite programmatic changes designed specifically to reduce feelings of stigma among prospective and actual SNAP clients, such as changing the name of the federal program from Food Stamps to Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program in 2008.

These national trends are reflected locally in Travis County. In 2012, the Austin/Travis County Sustainable Food Policy Board's (SFPB's) SNAP Working Group produced a report identifying the following barriers to SNAP access in Travis County:

- **Distrust of government programs by the immigrant population.** Only U.S. citizens or legal immigrants are eligible for SNAP benefits; however, individuals who did not immigrate to the U.S. legally have the option to enroll their children. Many adults in this population are not familiar with this policy or fear that they might be deported or otherwise penalized by the government.
- **Texas prohibits individuals with felony drug convictions from enrolling in SNAP.** States have the option to opt out of this provision of the 1996 Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act, but Texas has chosen not to do so.
- **Many working poor mistakenly believe that their employment status precludes them from receiving benefits.**
- **The application process is time-consuming and challenging for some applicants if they do not have assistance.** The online application may speed the process for some applicants, but not for those without access to a computer and a printer.
- **Many SNAP recipients are transient,** which can cause communication delays and potential interruptions in benefit coverage if they do not receive important mailings (e.g., notices, paperwork) from HHSC.
- **Although many seniors are eligible for SNAP, many of them choose not to apply because their participation in Social Security limits the amount of SNAP benefits they can receive, and/or they are resistant to asking for assistance.** Seniors on Social Security receive \$16 in SNAP benefits per month, on average.¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁶ USDA, *The Benefits of Increasing the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) Participation in Your State*, 2011.

¹⁰⁷ Food Research and Action Center, "Seniors and SNAP/Food Stamps."

¹⁰⁸ USDA, *The Benefits of Increasing the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) Participation in Your State*, 2011.

¹⁰⁹ USDA, "State/Local SNAP Agencies Outreach Toolkit," 2011.

¹¹⁰ Austin/Travis County Sustainable Food Policy Board SNAP Working Group, *Discussion and List of Recommendations*, 2012.

To address these challenges, the SFPB SNAP Working Group recommended to the Austin City Council that the city increase outreach to the Hispanic population; expand recruitment of Health and Human Services social service agencies to partner with HHSC in providing application assistance via the enhanced self-service portal; create a city network or coalition of public health workers (*promotoras*); provide comprehensive training for nonprofit organization staff on SNAP requirements, the enrollment process, and other policy and logistical issues; and communicate with legislators at the state and federal levels about the importance of SNAP to Austin/Travis County and strategies for overcoming barriers to SNAP access.

3.5 Enrollment Outreach Efforts

A host of nonprofit organizations and public agencies in Austin/Travis County provide outreach and support to prospective public assistance beneficiaries. At the state-level, HHSC contracts with the Texas Hunger Initiative, a capacity-building project based at Baylor University, to mobilize community-based organizations to spur SNAP enrollment across the state. The goal of this partner network is to develop capacity at the regional and local levels to increase SNAP awareness and participation. In addition to these efforts, HHSC contracts with the Texas Food Bank Network (TFBN) to conduct SNAP outreach on behalf of the state.¹¹¹ Under the Commission's FY 2013 SNAP Outreach Plan, TFBN is committed to providing training and/or resources to support SNAP outreach, messaging, and application assistance by local food banks throughout Texas. In turn, these local food banks partner with local community-based organizations to support their promotion of SNAP, dissemination of information, and application assistance.

Austin-based Capital Area Food Bank (CAFB) is among the food banks that TFBN subcontracts with to fulfill the goals of HHSC's SNAP outreach plan. Food banks are key partners in addressing the SNAP enrollment gap because only 31% of Texas emergency food assistance clients report receiving SNAP benefits.¹¹² CAFB staffs three Social Service Outreach Coordinators who are trained by HHSC in SNAP policy, requirements, and the application process.¹¹³ These SSO Coordinators are trained on HHSC's YourTexasBenefits.com.

At the county and municipal level, the Austin/Travis County Health and Human Services Department (HHSD) led a collaborative effort to conduct a Community Health Assessment (CHA),¹¹⁴ completed in early 2013, and is in the midst of finalizing a Community Health Improvement Plan (CHIP) that is responsive to the needs identified in the CHA.¹¹⁵ One of the CHA's four priority goals is that "all in our community have reasonable access to affordable quality nutritious food" by April 2016. One of the objectives identified to help reach this goal is to increase access to and participation of eligible people in food assistance programs like SNAP and WIC. The CHIP,

¹¹¹ Texas Health and Human Services Commission, "FY2013 Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program Outreach Plan."

¹¹² Mathematica Policy Research, Inc., *Hunger In America 2010: Texas (9944) State Report*, 2010.

¹¹³ Texas Health and Human Services Commission, "FY2013 Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program Outreach Plan."

¹¹⁴ Austin/Travis County Health and Human Services Department, *Community Health Assessment Austin/Travis County Texas*, 2012.

¹¹⁵ Austin/Travis County Health and Human Services Department, *Community Health Improvement Plan*, 2012.

scheduled for completion in June 2013, will detail which actors in the community have signed on to work toward this goal and how they plan to achieve it.¹¹⁶

In Austin, HHSD plans to pilot TBB at two neighborhood centers, St. John and South Austin, during the summer of 2013. The City hopes to scale up this effort to all six of its neighborhood centers by October 2014. These efforts are in response to a recommendation from the SFPB that the City invest in increasing SNAP enrollment and expanding access to FMIPs (see Appendix 2 for recommendations). HHSD also plans to distribute a bilingual flier advertising farmers markets that accept SNAP benefits and, in some cases, double their value when spent on fruits and vegetables.

Meanwhile, the Community Services Division within HHSD is working with the state's Community Partner Program and the Texas Hunger Initiative to encourage community-based organizations to become physical enrollment locations for YourTexasBenefits.com.¹¹⁷ HHSC offers two options for Community Partners: Level 1 Partners provide a self-service kiosk at their agency where clients can apply online using YourTexasBenefits.com. Level 2 Partners provide staff at their agency to assist clients with this process. CAFB, Austin Free-Net, and Catholic Charities of Central Texas have Level 2 Partnerships with HHSC.¹¹⁸

Current data on nutrition assistance program enrollment and outreach efforts suggest that participation has grown in recent years but there is room for considerable improvement. More than one-third of SNAP-eligible individuals in Travis County are not enrolled in the program. Increases in enrollment and the availability of EBT-equipped retailers alone do not guarantee adequate, nutritious meals on the tables of households in need. The following chapter describes current efforts in Austin to increase the accessibility and affordability of local fruits and vegetables for SNAP and WIC clients through an FMIP.

¹¹⁶ Austin/Travis County Health and Human Services Department, *Community Health Assessment Austin/Travis County Texas*, 2012.

¹¹⁷ Texas Health and Human Services Commission, "Community Partners: Helping Serve Texans in Need."

¹¹⁸ Interview with staff at the Austin/Travis County Health and Human Services Department (DHHS).

Chapter 4: Farmers Market Incentive Programs in Austin

This chapter details current farmers market incentive program (FMIP) efforts in the City of Austin and Travis County with the goals of illuminating programmatic successes and challenges, and of better understanding policy options for scaling up existing programs to achieve a greater impact.

Key Findings

- Since the Sustainable Food Center (SFC) Double Dollar Incentive Program (DDIP) launched, the East and Sunset Valley SFC markets has distributed \$20,000 in incentives to WIC and SNAP clients, serving more than 1,300 unique customers.
- DDIP has been instrumental in increasing participation in FMNP, with the redemption rate in Travis County jumping from 25% in 2011 to 87% following DDIP implementation.
- Part of the program's success can be attributed to SFC's recruitment of funding partners who appreciate the connection between food insecurity and diet-related diseases and who are willing to contribute to the costs of program administration, as well as to the cost of the actual incentive.
- It is imperative that farmers markets be sited in areas that are easily accessible by public transportation, and that a robust grassroots marketing campaign accompanies program implementation.
- Logistical issues surrounding EBT capacity and funding continuity continue to act as a barrier to expansion both for SFC and other local farmers markets interested in offering DDIP.

4.1 Nutrition Assistance and Farmers Markets in Austin/Travis County

The first farmers market-managing organization to accept SNAP benefits in Travis County was the Sustainable Food Center (SFC), a local nonprofit organization dedicated to creating opportunities for individuals to make healthy food choices and participate in a local food system.¹¹⁹ SFC began accepting SNAP benefits in 2006. The organization originally operated six farm stands in Austin, each of which was equipped with its own SNAP EBT machine. Today, SFC operates four farmers markets that accept SNAP, WIC, and Farmers' Market Nutrition Program (FMNP) vouchers. Two of these markets provide an incentive for SNAP and WIC customers to use their benefits toward the

¹¹⁹ Sustainable Food Center, "History."

purchase of fruits and vegetables at the market.¹²⁰ This offering is known as the Double Dollar Incentive Program, or DDIP, and is the focus of this chapter.

A few other farmers markets also accept nutrition assistance benefits. Only one, Green Gate Farms, offers the DDIP for SNAP redemptions. Table 5 provides a summary of the type(s) of benefits each market accepts. A more detailed discussion of the DDIP follows.

Table 5: Nutrition Assistance Benefits at Austin Area Farmers Markets

<i>Name</i>	<i>City</i>	Nutrition Assistance Programs Accepted			Double Dollar Incentive Program	
		<i>SNAP</i>	<i>WIC</i>	<i>FMNP</i>	<i>Distributes</i>	<i>Accepts</i>
<i>Barton Creek Farmer's Market</i>	Austin	N	N	N	N	N
<i>Barton Creek Farmer's Market</i>	Austin	N	N	N	N	N
<i>Burnet Road Market</i>	Austin	N	N	N	N	N
<i>Boggy Creek Farm</i>	Austin	N	N	N	N	N
<i>Springdale Farm</i>	Austin	N	N	N	N	N
<i>Pflugerville Pfarmers Market</i>	Pflugerville	N	N	Y	N	N
<i>Mueller Farmers Market</i>	Austin	N	N	Y	N	N
<i>Cedar Park Farmer's Market</i>	Cedar Park	N	N	Y	N	N
<i>Lone Star Farmers Market</i>	Bee Caves	N	N	Y	N	N
<i>Great Hills Open Air Market</i>	Austin	N	N	N	N	N
<i>Cedar Park Market Square</i>	Cedar Park	N	N	N	N	N
<i>SFC Downtown</i>	Austin	Y	Y	Y	N	Y
<i>SFC The Triangle</i>	Austin	Y	Y	Y	N	Y
<i>HOPE Farmers Market</i>	Austin	Y	Y	Y	N	N
<i>SFC Sunset Valley</i>	Austin	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
<i>SFC East</i>	Austin	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
<i>Green Gate Farm Stand</i>	Austin	Y	Y	Y	N	Y ¹²¹

The non-SFC markets listed in Table 5 that accept FMNP vouchers do so through a partnership with SFC. From April 13-September 30, WIC clients can visit one of SFC's markets to collect their FMNP coupons and redeem them either there or at any of these six partner markets.¹²²

4.2 Sustainable Food Center Farmers Market Incentive Programs

As of May 2013, SFC is the first and only organization in Austin/Travis County to operate an FMIP. Green Gate Farms offers an incentive for SNAP redemptions at its farm stand with funding from SFC's DDIP grant monies.

¹²⁰ SFC's Sunset Valley and East markets are unique in that they provide incentives for WIC- and FMNP-benefit spending as well as SNAP-spending. This feature of SFC's Double Dollar Incentive Program sets it apart from programs in other cities, which, as detailed in Chapter 6, may accept WIC and FMNP but only provide an incentive for SNAP-spending.

¹²¹ Green Gate Farm Stand only doubles the value of SNAP purchases, not WIC or FMNP redemptions.

¹²² Sustainable Food Center, "Farmers Market Nutrition Program Kicks Off for the 2013 Season!" 2013.

Background on the Sustainable Food Center (SFC)

The Sustainable Food Center (SFC) is a nonprofit organization that operates farmers markets at four locations in Austin: Downtown, East, Sunset Valley, and The Triangle. Each market accepts SNAP and WIC electronic transfer benefits (EBT) as well as seasonal Farmer's Market Nutrition Program (FMNP) produce vouchers for WIC clients. In 2012, SFC launched the Double Dollar Incentive Program (DDIP). The program's purpose is to double the produce purchasing power of nutrition assistance recipients.

Funding Sources

In 2010, national nonprofit organization Wholesome Wave approached SFC about the possibility of piloting an FMIP for nutrition assistance clients.¹²³ With its mission to improve access and affordability of fresh, healthy, locally-grown products to historically underserved communities, Wholesome Wave had identified SFC as a potential local partner for expanding incentive programs into the southern United States. SFC received a \$17,000 grant from Wholesome Wave to launch DDIP, as well as fundraising support and access to its growing learning community of grantees. SFC invited a local funder, St. David's Foundation, to become a partner and secured grant funding to cover the incentives and some program administration costs. St. David's contributed \$45,000 to the first year of the program and \$75,000 to the second year, which ends in September 2013.

SFC also received a \$5,000 grant from Farm Aid, a nonprofit organization based in Massachusetts. Further support for market operations came from the USDA through the Farmers Market Promotion Program and from the Texas Department of Agriculture (TDA) in the form of Specialty Crop Block Grant Program funding. The TDA grant has provided crucial support to SFC's market operations, helping fund staff member time and other administrative inputs. The two-year USDA Farmers Market Promotion Program grant was key in supporting community outreach staffing at the grassroots level, as well as paid advertising to get the word out about DDIP.

As of May 2013, SFC does not receive funding from the City of Austin or Travis County to run the DDIP. However, the City does waive SFC's market health education tasting booth and cooking demonstration booth fees and other costs associated with operating a farmers market on city property at two of the SFC sites.

SFC is interested in expanding DDIP to its Downtown and Triangle markets and hopes to secure additional funding support to do so.

Logistics

Operations

SFC timed the opening of its new East Market to coincide with the launch of DDIP. Originally, the

¹²³ Wholesome Wave is a nonprofit organization based in Bridgeport, Connecticut. Its approach is to partner with community-embedded organizations to implement the Double Value Coupon Program (DVCP), the Fruit and Vegetable Prescription Program, and Healthy Food Commerce Investments. In 2012, Wholesome Wave partnered with more than 60 organizations in 24 states and the District of Columbia to deliver the DVCP. Source: <http://wholesomewave.org/>

market was located in the parking lot of YMCA of Austin’s East Communities Branch, with the goal of reaching underserved communities in East Austin. However, the market did not receive as much customer traffic as SFC had anticipated, particularly among low-income customers. One of the main challenges was accessibility—the market was not located on a bus or metro line or in a bike-friendly area. SFC responded by moving the market to a new location the following year. Now situated at the intersection of MLK Boulevard and Miriam Street, SFC Farmers’ Market East is one block from a Capital Metro bus stop and one block from the CapMetro MLK, Jr. Rail Station. Since moving and changing its hours of operation (from 10AM-1PM to 3-7PM), the market has experienced explosive growth in its nutrition assistance program clientele.

The SFC Farmers’ Market at Sunset Valley also offers the DDIP for SNAP, WIC, and FMNP redemptions. The market is located next to two of Austin’s major thoroughfares, US Route 290 and Lamar Boulevard, and near several bus lines.

SFC provides market customers with recipes and chef’s demos to generate excitement and confidence about preparing the produce they purchase. The long-term goal of these offerings is to increase the likelihood that customers will want to return to the market and adopt healthier food purchasing and eating habits.

The Incentive

SFC doubles the value of SNAP, WIC, and FMNP benefits redeemed up to \$20 per market per day. The DDIP is restricted to fruits and vegetables. Although SNAP and WIC clients may use their benefits to buy any SNAP-eligible product at the market, they can only double the value of the benefits they spend on produce. Customers can save all or a portion of the incentives they receive one day to spend at an SFC market on another day. The incentives expire at the end of the year.

The EBT and DDIP transactions are somewhat complicated. SFC staffs two bilingual DDIP coordinators, one at East and one at Sunset Valley, whose responsibilities are to promote DDIP; process and record data on the DDIP claims for SNAP, WIC, and FMNP; and distribute the incentives. The benefits and incentives are handled as follows:

- **SNAP** – A SNAP recipient arrives at the market and presents his SNAP EBT card at the SFC information booth. The customer is asked how many benefit dollars he would like to spend at the market that day. At the SFC Farmers’ Market Downtown and the SFC Farmers’ Market at The Triangle, the customer’s card is debited that amount via the SNAP EBT machine, and he is given a SNAP Red Dollar Scrip for every SNAP dollar value he wishes to spend at the market. The SNAP Red Dollar Scrip comes in \$1 and \$5 increments. At the SFC Farmers’ Market at Sunset Valley and the SFC Farmers’ Market East, the DDIP Coordinator explains to the customer that any SNAP benefits he plans to spend on produce will be doubled by SFC up to \$20. If the customer says he would like to spend \$10 of SNAP benefits on fruits and vegetables and \$10 of SNAP benefits on other products, the coordinator will give him \$10 in SNAP Red Dollar Scrip value, which can be used at any farmer’s or vendor’s stalls for SNAP-eligible products, plus \$20 in SNAP DDIP Scrip (\$10 SNAP value out of the customer’s SNAP account + \$10 DDIP incentive) to spend on produce at the market.

- **WIC** – WIC recipients redeem their benefits at the point-of-sale. The customer presents her WIC EBT card to farmers, who then process the transaction with a machine SFC provides. After she purchases produce using the fruit-and-vegetable cash value on her card, she can present her receipt to the SFC information booth to obtain a DDIP Scrip for the same amount of WIC benefits she used to purchase produce. She can then use the Scrip like cash to purchase additional fruits and vegetables.
- **FMNP** – A WIC client arrives at an SFC market and presents her WIC EBT card at the SFC information booth as proof that she is a beneficiary of the program. She receives FMNP vouchers to spend on fruits and vegetables at the market. WIC customers can receive and redeem FMNP vouchers at any of SFC’s four markets, although they can only double the value of purchases made with the coupons at the East and Sunset Valley markets. They can also spend the vouchers they collect from SFC at any of the following farmers markets: HOPE Farmers Market, Cedar Park Farmers’ Market, Mueller Farmers’ Market, Pflugerville Pfarmers Market, Lone Star Farmers Market, and Green Gate Farms. Should the customer wish to double her purchasing power from the FMNP purchases, she can do so by using her vouchers at the East and Sunset Valley markets. After she buys fruits and vegetables from a farmer using an FMNP voucher, the farmer presents her with a receipt for the amount purchased. She then brings the receipt to the information booth and receives another one-for-one match up to \$20 for the purchases she made using FMNP vouchers that day.

Vendor Reimbursement

SFC reimburses vendors for SNAP, WIC, and FMNP benefit and incentive redemptions every two weeks. Vendors present weekly the receipts and DDIP Scrips they collected from customers to the market manager and collect a receipt for the amount owed to them. They receive a check from SFC every two weeks.

As a partner to SFC’s DDIP, Green Gate Farms submits SNAP double dollar redemptions made by its customers to SFC for reimbursement. The funds SFC uses to reimburse Green Gate Farms come out of its grant from St. David’s Foundation.

Staffing

SFC has one part-time bilingual DDIP coordinator at each of the East and Sunset Valley markets. SFC has found it imperative to staff one person at each DDIP market because the transactions involved are complicated and the demand among eligible customers is high. The issuance of FMNP coupons is managed by different staff members at each of SFC’s four markets.

Funding through the Texas Department of Agriculture’s Specialty Crops Block Grant enables SFC to staff market managers, crew members, and other administrative or operational functions. SFC’s Finance Director is responsible for accounting and reporting. On average, the SFC Farmers’ Market Director spends roughly 10% of her time weekly overseeing the DDIP. During the busiest weeks of the year, she might dedicate as much as 50% of her time working on the program.

Technology

In 2012, the USDA announced \$4 million in funding to assist farmers markets in acquiring EBT

machines.¹²⁴ The Texas Health and Human Services Commission (HHSC) applied for and received a grant to buy and distribute machines on behalf of Texas markets. HHSC also used the grant to cover the \$45 monthly fee charged by the EBT service provider for one year. After that, the individual markets would be responsible for the monthly fee. SFC was ready to replace its existing VeriFone EBT devices and had just opened a new market (East), so the organization decided to retire its existing machines and take advantage of the free machines from HHSC.

The state-contracted machines proved challenging to operate. In addition to several technical problems with the machines themselves, SFC experienced difficulty communicating with the service provider about technical support needs. It was unclear who at the state level was responsible for managing the relationship with the EBT provider and responding to the technical assistance needs of markets. After a few months, SFC opted to return to its original EBT service provider, VeriFone, using unrestricted funds to purchase four new machines. VeriFone provides SFC with EBT user manuals and is available to offer technical assistance when SFC has a question or encounters a problem with the machines. The EBT machines are located at each market's information booth.

The process for accepting WIC cash value for fruits and vegetables involves separate technology and staff. SFC has 6 WIC EBT machines that travel between the four markets and are operated directly by vendors at the point of sale. SFC acquired the machines by agreeing to participate in a two-year pilot project administered by HHSC. The project began in December 2011 with three pilot cities, of which Austin was one. The number of participating cities has since expanded to five. The purpose of the program is to boost WIC clients' redemption of the cash value for fruit and vegetables they receive monthly on their EBT cards (\$6-10 monthly per woman and child).¹²⁵

Vendors have experienced some difficulty operating the technology provided by HHSC to redeem WIC benefits. The process is cumbersome because farmers have to input each item and its cost separately into the machine. Redemption at SFC markets ranges from 3 to 20 transactions per market. SFC attributes this demand to the double dollar incentive it offers to WIC clients who spend their benefits on produce at the East and Sunset Valley markets. Without the incentive, SFC believes it would struggle to recruit WIC clients like the other two initial pilot cities, neither of which processed any WIC transactions during the first year of the program.¹²⁶

Outreach

SFC has taken a variety of approaches to marketing the DDIP. Drawing from 10 years of experience managing farm stands and farmers markets in Austin, SFC knew that one of its biggest hurdles would be advertising how the program works, where participating markets are located, and when the markets operate. Nontraditional, grassroots methods had proven successful in the past, so SFC relied on similar strategies to advertise DDIP, including:

¹²⁴ USDA. "Funding Helps Farmers' Markets That Want to Participate in SNAP," 2012.

¹²⁵ Audrey White, "Nutrition Benefits a Mixed Bag for Farmers Markets," 2013.

¹²⁶ Interview with Suzanne Santos, SFC Farmers' Market Director.

- Enlisting bilingual *promotoras* to tell people about DDIP at community events, such as Earth Day and the Viva Streets Austin festival;
- Posting bilingual, low-literacy fliers in neighborhoods surrounding the markets and in community spaces like libraries;
- Advertising at schools where SFC offers its Sprouting Healthy Kids program; and
- Personally inviting participants in SFC's cooking and nutrition education program, The Happy Kitchen/La Cocina Alegre, to visit the markets and utilize DDIP.

SFC also uses more traditional outreach methods such as social media and radio advertising in English and Spanish to spread the word about DDIP. Next to grassroots outreach, SFC believes that the billboard it purchased to advertise its farmers markets and DDIP has been the most successful outreach tactic.

SFC's Farmers' Market Promotion Program grant from the USDA has been imperative in terms of enabling its outreach efforts. The grant period concludes in October 2013. SFC hopes to identify alternative funding sources so that it can sustain current levels of market and DDIP promotion.

Participation

Vendors

SFC averages between 6 and 62 vendors depending on the market. On average, at the Sunset Valley and East markets there are 47 and 6 vendors, respectively. Market Downtown is the largest, averaging 62 vendors each week. The market at The Triangle is mid-sized, with an average of 15 vendors. The drought that began in Texas in 2010 continues to challenge agricultural production and has impacted the number of vendors participating in SFC's markets.

Customers and Redemption Rates

Since DDIP launched, the East and Sunset Valley markets have disbursed more than \$20,000 in incentives to WIC and SNAP clients. The two markets have served more than 1,300 unique customers. Table 6 shows the number of clients served, benefit redemptions, and incentive (matching) funds disbursed. In fiscal year 2012 (July 2011-June 2012), the four SFC markets recorded just over \$27,000 in regular SNAP EBT redemptions and an additional \$27,700 in WIC EBT and FMNP redemptions.

Table 6: Summary of SFC Double Dollar Incentive Program Redemptions

SFC Market Location	Clients (Unduplicated)	Redemptions	Matching Funds Disbursed
Sunset Valley (Aug-Dec 2012)	195 total	WIC FMNP \$3,738	WIC FMNP \$3,040
	30 SNAP	SNAP ~\$60/week	SNAP \$879
	165 WIC		
East (July – Dec 2012)	1119 total	WIC FMNP \$15,067	WIC EBT \$968
	380 SNAP (transactions)	SNAP ~\$100/week	WIC FMNP \$12,243
	118 WIC (transactions)		SNAP \$3,286
	998 WIC FMNP (transactions)		

SFC's DDIP has been instrumental in increasing participation in the WIC FMNP program. The rate of redemption in Travis County was around 25% in 2011. Since SFC began doubling the value of these vouchers, redemption has increased to 87%.¹²⁷ SFC attributes the increase in WIC clients visiting the markets to its FMNP and WIC double dollar programs.

Evaluation

Data Tracking

SFC tracks total benefit and incentive redemption and customer participation for each of the three nutrition assistance programs. It reports DDIP data to Wholesome Wave through a national database that the funder uses to generate reports about its investments in FMIPs across the country. SFC also reports grant progress to St. David's Foundation, the Texas Department of Agriculture, and Farm Aid.

Outcomes

Since implementing the DDIP, SFC has seen an increase in SNAP and WIC redemptions. The program has been in operation for less than one year, so it is too early to say whether or not incentive redemptions have increased over time.

To date, SFC has participated in one qualitative evaluation Market East customer outcomes. The University of Texas School of Public Health conducted the study, which included a paper-based survey and follow-up phone calls. The results demonstrated modest improvement in fruit and vegetable intake among customers, with slightly better outcomes than customers of a market in San Antonio that does not offer incentives. A majority of survey participants at the SFC markets reported that they would not have visited the market in the absence of an FMIP. The study was very small and therefore has limited interpretive value. In the future, SFC hopes to have opportunities to participate in larger, longitudinal evaluations of DDIP customer outcomes.

In the future, SFC would like to be able to show that customers who came to the market because of DDIP continued to shop there even after they stopped receiving SNAP or WIC benefits. Ideally, SFC would like to see the markets become a regular part of customers' food shopping practices.

4.3 Summary of Successes and Challenges

SFC attributes the initial success of its Double Dollar Incentive Program to a variety of factors. Identifying funding partners who appreciate the connection between food insecurity and diet-related diseases and who are willing to contribute to the costs of administering DDIP, not just the costs of the incentives, has been pivotal to launching a strong, well-supported program.

In addition to increasing the number of SNAP beneficiaries who visit the SFC farmers markets, DDIP has been fundamental to engaging WIC customers at the farmers markets. The fruit-and-vegetable cash value on a WIC client's annual plan is only \$6-10 monthly per individual, and the total dollar

¹²⁷ Interview with Suzanne Santos, SFC Farmers Market Director, April 30, 2013.

value in FMNP vouchers she can redeem ranges between \$10 and \$30 *per year*.¹²⁸ By doubling the value of these benefits, SFC believes it makes it more worth the WIC client's effort to visit the farmers market to shop for fruits and vegetables.

Notwithstanding these successes, SFC has identified a few key challenges to implementing farmers market incentive programs. First, the organization's experience demonstrates the difficulty of relying on short-term grants to operate incentive programs. With the exception of the funding it receives through the WIC pilot program and USDA's Farmers' Market Promotion Program, SFC relies on one-year grants to support DDIP. The brevity of these funding commitments makes it difficult for the organization to plan for future expansion of the program. SFC would like to replicate DDIP at its other markets and will require new or renewed funding support to do so. Longer-term grants would help facilitate planning for scale-up and reduce the administrative burden of re-applying for grants every year.

SFC's experience also underscores the importance of locating markets in areas that are easily accessible by public transportation. In addition, staff emphasize that conducting an aggressive grassroots marketing campaign to raise awareness about the FMIP among nutrition assistance clients is a necessity to a new program's success.

Despite the fact that a growing number of markets are interested in having EBT capabilities at their own markets, and implementation expertise among staff at SFC, administrative and cost barriers to scaling up the program in Austin remain. Some markets have tried to become EBT-accepting markets but encountered logistical or funding issues in the various steps that it takes to do so. Barriers included the process of registering to become approved retailer with the USDA, acquiring market staff or volunteers to process benefits, and purchasing EBT machines. Most of the markets that do accept SNAP and/or WIC have experienced challenges using EBT technologies, particularly with the machines provided by the state.

Another challenge facing Austin markets that are interested in offering an incentive program is that the city lacks a dedicated coordinating body or agency that could administer and fundraise for the expansion of FMIPs. SFC has begun to play a facilitator role by serving as the pass-through for FMNP vouchers and partnering with Green Gate Farms to allow it to provide DDIP to its customers. SFC has also trained the Green Gate Farms staff on how to process benefits, and it is preparing partner with local nonprofit Urban Roots to offer a short-term DDIP for FMNP and SNAP recipients in the Dove Springs community.¹²⁹ Moving forward, SFC will require additional resources and capacity to expand its role as a facilitator and support other Austin/Travis County farmers markets in offering DDIP.

Chapter 5 presents lessons learned by other farmers market FMIPs in other states. The challenges and successes experienced by these initiatives should serve as resources to actors in Austin and other cities considering implementing an FMIP or bringing one to scale.

¹²⁸ USDA, "WIC Farmers' Market Nutrition Program," 2012.

¹²⁹ This project is funded by the Michael and Susan Dell Foundation.

Chapter 5: Farmers Market Incentive Programs Beyond Austin

Farmers market incentive programs (FMIPs) in the United States have grown in number and scale since 2004. The first FMIP started in New York City in 2004 as a pilot program in three neighborhoods and redeemed about \$440 in “Health Bucks” incentive coupons. Today, the NYC Health Bucks program operates at 135 markets and redeemed nearly \$375,000 in Health Bucks in 2012. Other FMIPs operate at a much smaller scale – at just one to three markets – and administration of these programs is handled directly by the market managers and staff.

In order to gain a deeper understanding of how FMIPs function and the level of impact they have on improving access to locally grown produce, we surveyed nine currently operating programs in the U.S. The responding FMIPs varied greatly in administration, funding sources, customer participation, and evaluation practices. However, in reviewing all responses, we were able to isolate recurring themes, including best practices and challenges that programs faced in six major topic areas. A copy of the survey instrument is included in Appendix 1.

Key Findings

- Farmers market incentive programs (FMIPs) are helping to increase the frequency with which low-income customers shop at farmers markets.
- FMIPs are enhancing the economic stability and sustainability of the markets and vendors that accept the incentive.
- Continuity in funding, strategic evaluation practices, tailored outreach efforts, and administrative and technical support through a central umbrella organization are critical components of programmatic success.

5.1 Logistics

Start-up

The surveyed FMIPs are all relatively new initiatives. The NYC program is the longest-running, having been established in 2005. Each FMIP started small and grew organically, typically starting at one market location and slowly expanding to other markets as demand and resources increased. For example, the NYC FMIP was initially established at three targeted market locations in collaboration with community organizations and district public health offices. Now, due to the popularity and success of the program, it has expanded to 135 markets across the city. Similarly, the Michigan DUFM FMIP, administered by the Fair Food Network and Michigan Farmers Market Association (MIFMA), started at five market locations in 2009 and, by 2012, operated at 75 markets across the state and served nearly 90,000 SNAP customers.

Operating Models

There are several models employed for administering and operating farmers market nutrition assistance. Many of the programs surveyed have an umbrella organization, but do not operate the FMIP at the market level. For example, Hunger Action Los Angeles administratively supports twelve markets in Southern California in operating the Market Match program. Umbrella organizations, such as Fair Food Network and Boston Collaborative for Food and Fitness, raise and distribute funding, provide technical support, and collect program data, but do not operate farmers markets.

Smaller programs are both administered and operated by farmers market organizations themselves, such as the Portland Farmers Market organization's Fresh Exchange program and the Columbia Heights Farmers Market Festibucks program. These organizations incorporate the administrative costs of the FMIP into their existing operating budget and raise additional funds to cover the costs of the incentive.

In a third "hybrid" model an umbrella organization administers the FMIP at various participating markets by providing funding and technical support but also operates the FMIP at its own farmers markets. For example, Experimental Station (ES) is a nonprofit organization in Chicago that administers an FMIP at 38 markets across the city. One of those markets, the 61st Street Market, is also operated each week by ES. Therefore, ES has the dual role of supporting other independently-run markets in offering the incentive as well as running its own farmers market.

Growing and Expanding

All of the surveyed umbrella organizations administering an FMIP grow the number of markets they serve each year. Program staff said that new markets would often approach them with interest in participating in the FMIP. In order to determine if a market will be a viable partner, the umbrella organization often verifies if the market has sufficient staff, existing capabilities to accept EBT, established market infrastructure, and outreach capacity to support the FMIP in addition to operating the market.

Operations

Farmers markets that offer the FMIP are strategically located in neighborhoods with underserved populations. The markets are often established in highly visible, easily accessible locations such as in church parking lots, outside of community clinics, and in local parks.

Many of the farmers markets offer additional services and activities for shoppers in addition to the incentive. For example, seven of the surveyed programs offer cooking demonstrations during their markets. Others offer market tours and master gardener classes. The Boston Bounty Bucks program partners with the Boston Cyclist Union to provide free bike tune-ups at participating markets. The FMIPs in Chicago, East Palo Alto, and Los Angeles, partner with local administrative agencies and/or food banks to provide nutrition assistance outreach and enrollment services at the markets. Additional activities and services at the market are viewed as a way to increase customer participation and satisfaction in the FMIPs.

The Incentive

All of the surveyed programs offer an incentive to their customers that must be matched with either cash or nutrition assistance benefits, and some programs – such as NYC – offer an additional incentive that is decoupled from nutrition assistance benefits. The value of the incentive ranges from \$2 to \$25. The ratio of customer matching funds to incentive funds ranges is typically 1:1, where each SNAP dollar spent at the market is matched with a \$1 incentive. NYC Health Bucks offers incentives at a ratio on 5:2, meaning that every \$5 in SNAP funds spent is matched with \$2 of incentives. Some programs offer incentive funds to low-income customers without requiring matching funds from the customer.

The incentive benefit is typically distributed in the form of a metal token, wooden token, or paper coupon. Many markets place limits on the items that are allowable for purchase (e.g. fresh fruits and vegetables) and the time frame for spending the incentive (e.g. on the day of receipt).

Table 7: Operational Summary: 10 Farmers Market Incentive Programs

Program	Matching Funds Accepted	Max. incentive offered	Matching Ratio	Eligibility	Incentive Stipulations
<i>Los Angeles Market Match</i>	SNAP, Cash	\$10/market day	1:1	SNAP, WIC, SSI recipients	F&V only, must be used that day at that market
<i>NYC Health Bucks</i>	SNAP, referral coupon from community org.	No limit	5:2 SNAP 0:2 Referral coupon	SNAP recipients, referred clients	F&V only
<i>DC Columbia Heights Market Festibucks</i>	SNAP, WIC, WIC FMNP, Senior FMNP	\$10/week per recipient	1:1	SNAP, WIC, FMNP recipients	WIC and FMNP used for F&V only
<i>Chicago LINK Up</i>	SNAP	\$10/market day*	1:1	SNAP recipients	SNAP eligible products, some markets place expiration date
<i>Boston Bounty Bucks</i>	SNAP	\$10/market day	1:1	SNAP recipients	SNAP eligible products only
<i>Michigan Double Up Food Bucks</i>	SNAP	\$20/market day	1:1	SNAP recipients	Michigan grown F&V only
<i>Portland Fresh Exchange</i>	SNAP	\$5/market day	1:1	SNAP recipients	SNAP eligible products only
<i>East Palo Alto Fresh Checks</i>	SNAP, WIC FMNP, Senior FMNP, Cash	\$20/month	1:1	SNAP, WIC, FMNP, SSI recipients, income-eligible referrals	F&V only
<i>Seattle Fresh Bucks</i>	SNAP	\$10/market day	1:1	SNAP recipients	F&V only
<i>Austin Sustainable Food Center</i>	SNAP, WIC FMNP, Cash	\$20/market day	1:1	SNAP	F&V only

Market and Vendor Reimbursement

The umbrella organizations that administer the FMIPs typically provide a lump sum of funding or incentive coupons to the market operators on an annual or monthly basis. For example, HALA distributes funding to each market operator at the beginning of the month and the twelve participating markets produce incentive coupons to distribute to customers.

In NYC, the Department of Health and Mental Hygiene (DOHMH) actually produces the incentive coupons and distributes them to the market operators every season. Markets distribute the coupons to customers who use them to purchase items from vendors at the market. Vendors send the coupons directly back to a processing entity, the Farmers Market Federation of New York, which then sends a reimbursement check directly to the farmers. The Farmers Market Federation then invoices NYC DOHMH for the total amount of incentives processed plus a 25 cent processing fee per coupon. Smaller FMIPs, administered at the market level, produce their own incentive coupons or coins, and reimburse their vendors on a weekly, bi-weekly, or monthly basis.

Staffing

Markets that operate an FMIP have at least one staff person, usually the market manager, that is responsible for overseeing program. The staff person usually has several part-time staff and/or volunteers to assist in the daily operations of the program. Umbrella organizations, such as Fair Food Network and Boston Collaborative for Food and Fitness, have between one and four full time program staff to administer and support the FMIP.

Logistics Best Practices

- Growing the farmers market incentive program organically; starting small and establishing funding and client base before expanding to additional market locations
- Having full time market or umbrella organization staff dedicated to assisting markets that vary in terms of structure, location, and size through site visits and relationship building
- Establishing an umbrella organization to handle fundraising and/or administration of the FMIP in large geographic areas with the demographics to support an FMIP at more than 3 to 5 markets
- Offering additional services and activities that are appropriate to the customers' needs and interests
- Allowing established and credible farmers markets to join in offering the FMIP as demand and financial support for program grow

Logistics Challenges

- Absorbing the required costs and labor into existing market capacity when administrative support for the FMIP is not provided by an umbrella organization
- Using projections to divide incentive funds among participating markets in attempt to ensure that funds are available to customers at each location through the entire season

5.2 Funding

The FMIPs that participated in the survey are supported by a variety of public and private sources. Nearly all of the programs receive funding from more than one source. Both public and private funders typically provide grants on an annual basis and require yearly reporting and reapplication for sustained funding. Most FMIPs maintained funding from the same source(s) for several consecutive years, although the level of funding from those sources often varied from year to year.

Funding amount and length created barriers for programs regarding the number of markets they can expand to and/or the number of customers they can serve by the level of funding received in a given year. FMIPs with ongoing funding from municipal governments reported the highest level of stability and predictability in funding support. FMIPs with local government funding also reported an increased ability to leverage funds from private sources. Finally, FMIP program administrators reported that funding entities are more willing to grant monies to cover the cost of the incentive dollars than to cover the cost of administration or outreach for the program. This results in the financial burden of the FMIP being absorbed into the existing budget of the farmers market.

Public Funding

Four of the surveyed programs receive public funding from local or state government entities. New York City's Health Bucks is the only surveyed FMIP that is entirely publicly funded. In 2012, the NYC Health Resources Administration provided \$350,000, the Department of Health and Mental Hygiene – in which the program is housed – granted \$50,000, and the NYC Mayor's office supported the program with \$60,000 for program outreach efforts. The Mayor's office also provides funding for one full-time administrative staff person for the program.

Hunger Action Los Angeles (HALA) administers an FMIP at twelve markets and receives a portion of its funding from the California Department of Food and Agriculture (CDFA) via a federal USDA Specialty Crop Block Grant award. HALA also receives funding through a contract with the Los Angeles County Department of Social Services.

The city governments in Boston and Seattle are ongoing sources of financial support for the FMIPs operating in their areas. The Boston Bounty Bucks FMIP, operated by the Boston Collaborative for Food and Fitness (BCFF), began in 2008 with strictly private funding. In 2011, the Boston Mayor's Office became a partner, providing \$50,000 annually to support the FMIP.

Table 8: Programmatic Summary - 10 Farmers Market Incentive Programs

FMIP	Total FMIP Funding (2012)	Public Funding	Nonprofit/foundation funders	Corporate/Individual Contributions
<i>Los Angeles Market Match</i>	\$60,000 Incentive portion: \$35,000	USDA Specialty Crop Block Grant (to Roots of Change). Fee for service sub-contracts with the LA County Department of Public Social Services.	Roots of Change (sub-grants the USDA grant to Hunger Action L.A.)	Fundraising events hosted by HALA or Roots of Change
<i>NYC Health Bucks</i>	\$460,000 Incentive portion: \$310,000	NYC Mayor's Office NYC Health Resources Administration NYC Dept. of Health	N/A	N/A
<i>DC Columbia Heights Festibucks</i>	\$18,000 (incentive only)	N/A	Wholesome Wave	N/A
<i>Chicago LINK Up</i>	71,000 (incentive only)	N/A	Wholesome Wave The Chicago Comm. Trust Aetna Foundation J.R. Albert Foundation The Chicago Comm. Fdn. Walter S. Mander Fdn.	N/A
<i>Boston Bounty Bucks</i>	\$155,000 Incentive portion: \$74,000	Boston Mayor's Office	Wholesome Wave Kellogg Foundation Harvard Pilgrim Fdn. Boston Foundation Greater Boston Food Bank	N/A
<i>Michigan Double Up Food Bucks</i>	\$888,890 (Incentive only)	N/A	Fair Food Network	N/A
<i>Portland Fresh Exchange</i>	\$80,480 Incentive portion: \$34,000	N/A	Herbert A. Templeton Fdn Rose E. Tucker Charitable Trust	Local businesses Community fundraisers
<i>East Palo Alto Fresh Checks</i>	\$20,000 (Incentive only)	N/A	N/A	Anonymous Private Donor
<i>Seattle Fresh Bucks</i>	\$58,000 Incentive portion: \$41,000	USDA Specialty Crop Block Grant Seattle Office of Sustainability and Environment	The Seattle Foundation	J.P. Morgan Chase Bank
<i>Austin Sustainable Food Center DDIP</i>	\$87,000 Incentive portion: \$47,000	N/A	Wholesome Wave St. David's Foundation Farm Aid	N/A

Nonprofit and Foundation Funding

Wholesome Wave, a nonprofit founded specifically to improve the accessibility and affordability of healthy, locally grown produce, provides funding to five of the programs included in the survey. Most of the programs that are grant-funded by Wholesome Wave have additional funding streams. For example, the Chicago LINK Up FMIP receives support from Wholesome Wave but also receives financial support from several local foundations. Other nonprofit organizations provide funding to markets located only in their geographic area. The Fair Food Network (FFN), located in Ann Arbor, Michigan, has over forty private foundations that contribute to its \$7 million project budget. Last year, FFN provided over \$888,000 in incentive funds to the 75 Michigan farmers markets that offer the Double Up Food Bucks (DUFb) FMIP.

Other nonprofits provide smaller amounts of funding. For instance, the Greater Boston Food Bank provides a portion of the funds for the BCFF FMIP that operates at 22 markets in Boston. The Boston Bounty Bucks program receives the bulk of its funding from the Kellogg Foundation, including a \$1 million grant in 2013. In addition to the Kellogg Foundation funding, the Boston program also receives support from the Harvard Pilgrim Foundation, the Boston Foundation and several other foundations. The total cost of the FMIP in 2012, which operates at 22 markets, was just under \$100,000.

Corporate and Individual Contributions

Contributions from individuals and business make up a significant portion of funding for four of the surveyed FMIPs. The Portland Farmers Market organization operates the Fresh Exchange SNAP FMIP at four local markets and has several sources of private funding. In 2012, they received nearly \$30,000 from local businesses, \$4,900 from individual contributions, and \$4,000 in in-kind contributions. Portland Farmers Market also held fundraisers at two local businesses that totaled \$864. Finally, the Collective Roots organization operates the Fresh Checks program at one market in East Palo Alto. Since its inception in 2000, the FMIP has been entirely funded by an anonymous private donation of \$20,000 annually.

Funding Best Practices

- Securing diverse, ongoing funding sources
- Securing adequate administrative funding from funders, in addition to the funding for the value of the incentive
- Securing ongoing public funding from state and local entities
- Maintaining accurate and updated revenue and customer data for grant requests and reports

Funding Challenges

- Maintaining sufficient levels of funding to support program maintenance and growth
- Accurately estimating costs of the farmers market incentive program for the upcoming market year, especially with regard to the cost of the incentive itself, since demand and redemption may vary from year to year
- Securing sufficient funding for administrative costs of the FMIP
- Reporting and reapplying for annual funding from existing sources
- Identifying and securing new funding sources

5.3 Technology

In order to process SNAP and WIC benefits, farmers markets must acquire and maintain the proper Electronic Benefit Transfer (EBT) machines. SNAP and WIC require separate EBT machines and markets have to contract with a third-party entity to process the electronic benefit redemptions. The markets often must pay for the machine and the monthly processing service. The cost of both the equipment and service vary, but, typically, the less the market paid for the EBT machine the higher the costs of the processing service.

Markets are typically responsible for securing their own EBT machines, but some umbrella organizations have secured public or private grant funding that has covered the costs of EBT capacity. For example, a federal grant obtained by the Farmers Market Federation of New York paid for many of the EBT machines for participating markets in the NYC Health Bucks program.

The Boston Bounty Bucks program received a grant from Wholesome Wave to purchase EBT machines in 2008. For markets that joined after 2008, the Kellogg Foundation purchased more EBT machines. Additionally, the Boston Collaborative for Food and Fitness (BCFF) received a grant from USDA to cover the costs of monthly processing service fees. Markets that did not receive their EBT machine from an umbrella organization reported paying between \$700 and \$1500 to obtain one.

For some markets, the EBT machines were provided by the same third-party entity that processed the benefit redemptions. Experimental Station, the nonprofit that administers the Chicago FMIP, recommends that farmers contracts with Merchant Source, an EBT processing company that also provides EBT machines and technical support to farmers markets as an all-in-one package. Chicago markets have the option of renting the EBT machine if they do not have the funds for the up-front costs of purchasing one. Merchant Solutions charges approximately \$200 per month for EBT rental and processing fees.

EBT machines purchased from private vendors also function as debit/credit card processors. Markets can allow customers to swipe their major credit cards on the machine to receive cash to spend at the market vendors. Markets often charge a small transaction fee for each credit card processed, and use that fee to help cover the costs of the EBT machine.

The FMIPs surveyed reported varying levels of technical difficulties in setting up and using the EBT machines and services. Problems reported included establishing a clear wireless signal for the EBT machine at the market, machines breaking down mid-season, and interacting the service providers that were not accustomed to working with farmers markets . Two of the FMIPs reported switching to EBT service providers that were more in tune with the specific needs of farmers markets and better able to help market staff troubleshoot specific technological and customer service issues. These reported challenges were mirrored in the results of a recent USDA farmers market operations study that included data from 1,682 farmers markets nationwide.¹³⁰

¹³⁰ USDA, "National Survey of Farmers Market Managers and Direct Marketing Farmers," 2013.

Technology Best Practices

- Umbrella organizations providing initial training to all market managers on how to operate and troubleshoot EBT machines.
- Ensuring that ongoing technical support is provided through the umbrella organizations and/or service providers

Technology Challenges

- Covering the upfront costs of an EBT machine and service
- Covering the costs of maintenance for broken EBT machines
- Making technology solutions work for the wide variety of market locations and set-ups
- Ensuring that markets have access to technological support during market hours

5.4 Participation

The markets offering an FMIP vary greatly in the number of vendors and customers that participate. Markets and FMIPs operate at the size that is suitable to the number of customers that patronize the market. Therefore markets with lower customer participation have fewer vendors and distribute fewer incentives. This does not indicate a less successful FMIP, but illustrates that markets and FMIPs must be tailored to the specific needs of the community/neighborhood served. Regardless of size, markets and farmers participating in the FMIPs realized increase sales and revenues each year of program participation.

Vendors

Markets with anywhere from 1 to 80 vendors are capable of operating a successful FMIP. However, umbrella organizations that administer the FMIP for many markets are often better able to support the very small and very large markets. Most markets surveyed ranged between 10 and 20 vendors. Smaller markets, such as the East Palo Alto market, reported difficulty attracting and retaining culturally appropriate vendors at their markets due to relatively low customer participation and total revenue.

On the whole, vendors report financial benefit from their participation in the FMIPs. A study by Wholesome Wave, a nonprofit organization that provides funding to FMIPs, found that the majority of vendors (66%) selling at markets with an FMIP reported increased sales. Vendors also reported expanding operations, diversifying products, adding acreage, and hiring additional staff as a result of the increased revenues from the FMIP.¹³¹ The Fair Food Network in Michigan reports data on

¹³¹ Wholesome Wave, *Wholesome Wave's Double Value Coupon Program: Increasing Food Access and Local Farm Business Nationwide, 2009-2012 Outcomes and Trends*, 2012.

average SNAP sales per market and per farmer participating in the Double Up Food Bucks program (see Table 10). Average SNAP EBT redemption per participating farmer increased from \$327 in 2009 to \$1427 in 2012.

Customers

Similar to vendor participation, customer participation varies widely across the surveyed FMIPs and participating markets. Some markets serve only around 50 customers per week while others serve up to 2,000 per week. The percentage of total customers that participate in the FMIP at a given market ranges from 5% to 80%. Some umbrella organizations administering FMIPs do not collect detailed data on total market customers. All surveyed markets saw an increase in SNAP/WIC clients visiting their markets after offering the FMIP. For example, from 2011 to 2012, Chicago farmers markets saw SNAP customers jump from 5,400 to 10,666.

Table 9: Outcomes - Five Farmers Market Incentive Programs

Farmers Market Incentive Program	Total Participating Markets	Average Weekly Market Customers (Total – all markets)	Average Weekly Customers Using Incentive (Total – all markets)
<i>Boston Bounty Bucks</i>	22	34,890	385
<i>Columbia Heights Market Festibucks</i>	1		160
<i>Portland Fresh Exchange</i>	3	2,675	204
<i>Los Angeles Market Match</i>	12	2,300	1,069
<i>East Palo Alto Fresh Bucks</i>	1	105	80

Customer Eligibility

All of the FMIPs cited low-income populations as the demographic they hope to reach. Four of the eight programs surveyed only accept SNAP benefits as acceptable matching funds for receiving the incentive. Two of the markets accept cash from clients who are income-eligible but do not receive SNAP benefits. For example, in California, SSI recipients are not eligible to receive SNAP benefits and the vast majority of California farmers markets are not authorized to accept WIC benefits. Therefore, if a customer can provide proof of receiving SSI or WIC, he or she is eligible to receive the incentive. However, since the markets are unable to process SSI or WIC as the client matching portion, the client must provide cash to receive the incentive match.

NYC Health Bucks provides an incentive to clients at local community organizations that partner with the DOHMH to distribute coupons. The \$2 coupon distributed through community organizations is decoupled from nutrition assistance benefits or other match contribution, meaning that a customer can spend the \$2 coupon at any participating market location without providing a match. The East Palo Alto Fresh Checks program accepts SNAP and cash as matching funds for the \$20 incentive. However, low-income customers who are referred from a community-based

organization or show proof of WIC or SSI receipt, are also eligible to receive the incentive. These customers can provide up to \$20 in cash in order to receive an equal amount in incentive tokens.

Redemption Rates

Established markets that only later added an FMIP saw levels of SNAP and WIC redemption rise significantly after program implementation. Also, if funding has allowed for it, most markets have disbursed an increasing level of incentive benefits each year since launching the program. Some FMIPs have experienced increased demand for incentive benefits at their markets, but have not been able to maintain sufficient funding to support that demand. For example, in the Portland Fresh Exchange program, a dip in funding led to a reduction in incentive spending from \$26,000 in 2009 to just \$9,000 in 2010. The Portland Farmers Market organization proceeded to establish a sister nonprofit to handle fundraising, and subsequently was able to increase its incentive redemption to \$34,000 in 2012.

Participation Best Practices

- Allowing customers who are not SNAP recipients, but can prove income-eligibility for SNAP, to participate in the FMIP
- Tailoring market size and location to the needs of the neighborhood and community
- Allowing for community-based organizations that serve low-income or at-risk populations to refer clients to the FMIP

Participation Challenges

- Establishing repeat or regular FMIP customers
- Retaining vendors at smaller markets with lower revenues and customer patronage
- Ensuring that the vendors attend market despite poor weather or other unforeseeable circumstances
- Operating markets for limited number of hours creates a barrier to participation for some low-income consumers
- Perception that farmers market products are too expensive or take too long to prepare

5.5 Outreach

Strategic outreach efforts are an essential component of any farmers market FMIP. Outreach strategies used by the surveyed programs ranged from distributing brochures, to hosting or attending community meetings, to advertising through traditional media sources. Although umbrella organizations provide some outreach support for all of participating markets within their FMIPs, most individual markets also do targeted outreach to specific communities that they serve.

Some FMIPs partner with state and local agencies that administer nutrition assistance programs to help with outreach for the FMIP. In conducting outreach, markets are careful to tailor their message to the specific demographic groups they hope to serve with the FMIP. Marketing and outreach

materials are produced in various languages and placed in community organizations and spaces that serve a similar demographic.

For example, Michigan farmers markets publish outreach materials in Russian, Mandarin, and Spanish. They strategically place materials in schools, food pantries, health clinics, and local businesses. Additionally, the Michigan DUFB FMIP umbrella organization, the Fair Food Network, does statewide outreach including billboard and radio advertising.

Some market organizations do mailings to low-income zip codes with the specific language and information relevant to the majority population of that area. In Boston, BCFF handles the outreach efforts for all participating Boston markets. BCFF requires their markets to fill out an order form, indicating what amount of materials they need for outreach, including banners, posters, shopping bags, and laminated documents. BCFF also partners with the Department of Transitional Assistance, Boston Public Schools, local housing authorities, and other community-based organizations to assist with program outreach and promotion.

At the market locations, it is important to provide accommodations for a variety of populations including seniors, families with young children, non-English speakers, and individuals with disabilities. Markets do so by having bilingual volunteers and staff, culturally appropriate activities and services, highly accessible locations, and signage and information in multiple languages.

Outreach Best Practices:

- Tailor outreach to specific populations and geographic areas.
- Develop partnerships with governmental and non-governmental agencies to assist in outreach efforts.

Outreach Challenges

- Getting word out about both the market and FMIP to a broader audience than the traditional market customers
- Ensuring that the market is welcoming and culturally appropriate for all potential customers
- The cost of targeted outreach is a limiting factor for many markets and organizations, especially those without an umbrella organization

5.6 Evaluation

Data Tracking

All FMIPs that participated in the survey track the total incentive redemption, and many track customer participation. Most of this data is collected at the market level and aggregated by the administering organization. Umbrella organizations often require reports with varying levels of frequency and detail. Very few markets or umbrella organizations are collecting data on behavior change or health outcomes of program participants.

Markets report that collecting data through surveys or interviews with FMIP customers is often cumbersome and even a deterrent to participation. For example, the East Palo Alto Fresh Checks program reported that they are required by a funder to collect monthly survey data on purchasing patterns and eating behaviors. Market staff cited the eight-question survey as too lengthy and time consuming for both the organization and customers. The Chicago LINK Up FMIP said that they had learned not to ask participants too many questions.

Some umbrella organizations, including funding entities, have successfully conducted more comprehensive evaluations. For example, the Fair Food Network evaluates its FMIP on an annual basis and collects data from market operators, participating vendors, and incentive recipients. It uses this data to determine the effect that DUFB has on promoting healthier food choices and to measure the impact on the local food economy.¹³² FFN also uses the data to identify best practices among markets in implementing the FMIP. They use those best practices for improving and replicating the model.

Several FMIP administrators stated that they would like more data and information regarding customer participation and shopping patterns. Portland Farmers Market Fresh Exchange program staff reported the need to develop a simple way to determine if a SNAP customer was a first time or repeat shopper. The Boston Bounty Bucks program staff stated that it would be helpful to know what percentage of total vendor sales was attributable to SNAP customers.

Outcomes

Markets that ran their FMIP for two or more years experienced significant increases in customer participation and incentive redemption. As participation grows, some markets experience difficulty making the incentive funds meet the demand from customers. For example, the Los Angeles Market Match program and NYC Health Bucks program often have to ration or reduce the amount of incentive distributed to customers at the end of the market season or fiscal year. Programs and markets that are tracking EBT spending and incentive redemption across years have documented significant increases in both incentive redemption and SNAP redemption per participating market from year to year. (see Tables 10, 11, and 12)

¹³² Fair Food Network, *Double Up Food Bucks 2012 Evaluation Report*, 2013.

Table 10: Growth in SNAP and Incentive Redemption Rates - Michigan DUFB

Michigan Double Up Food Bucks	Average number of SNAP client visits per Market	Average SNAP Redemption per Market (does not include incentives)	Average SNAP Redemption per Farmer (does not include incentives)
2009	299	\$ 5,235	\$ 327
2010	446	\$ 7,448	\$ 1,117
2011	730	\$ 12,518	\$ 1,377
2012	1,192	\$ 13,700	\$ 1,467

Table 11: Growth in SNAP and Incentive Redemption Rates - NYC Health Bucks

NYC Health Bucks	Number of Markets Accepting Health Bucks	Average Incentive Redemption Per Market
2006	29	\$ 282
2007	33	\$ 634
2008	41	\$ 3882
2009	49	\$ 3444
2010	60	\$ 3856
2011	65	\$ 3566
2012	135	\$ 2766

Table 12: Growth in SNAP and Incentive Redemption Rates - Boston Bounty Bucks

Boston Bounty Bucks	Number of Markets Accepting Bounty Bucks	Average SNAP Redemption Per Market	Average Incentive Redemption Per Market
2008	7	\$ 187	\$ 150
2009	14	\$ 746	\$ 690
2010	18	\$ 2,271	\$ 1,994
2011	19	\$ 2,973	\$ 3,348
2012	18	\$ 5,355	\$ 4,105

Evaluation Best Practices

- Identifying the most useful metrics for evaluation and collect thorough data on an annual or semi-annual basis
- Making customer survey and interviews optional for participants, if possible
- Offering customers an incentive to participate in the evaluation/survey
- Surveying vendors regarding their perception of the FMIP and real impact that it has had on their sales
- Gathering qualitative data from markets to determine best practices and strategies in order to improve program operation

Evaluation Challenges

- Complying with grant requirements for evaluation without overwhelming customers with survey questions and other evaluation
- Collecting data from customers without deterring participation

5.7 Making the Case for Farmers Market Incentive Programs

Farmers market incentive programs are helping to significantly increase the frequency with which low-income customers shop at farmers markets. The FMIPs are also increasing the economic stability and sustainability of the markets and vendors that accept the incentive. On a per market and per farmer basis, SNAP redemption, incentive redemption, and SNAP customer visits increased annually for the programs that reported data for those indicators.

Based on the information shared by programs included in our survey, farmers market incentive programs have great potential to positively affect the nutrition and food security of low-income consumers as well as the revenue of local farmers and farmers markets. However, the ability to measure the impact and success of the surveyed programs varies because most programs are new. Improved evaluation practices that demonstrate positive results will lead to more ongoing, stable funding sources, which will be the determining factors in whether the FMIPs can continue to increase their impact on the communities they serve. It is imperative that FMIPs across the country share best practices, challenges, and lessons learned to create a strong network of FMIPs working toward a shared vision. With effective programs and a strong network of administrators, the case can be better made for sustained funding and increased investment in this unique model.

Chapter 6: Policy Recommendations for the City of Austin

This report has concluded that farmers market incentive programs (FMIPs), as implemented to date, can be effective tools for increasing the frequency with which low-income consumers access healthy, locally produced fruits and vegetables. These programs can also help funnel consumer dollars into the hands of local agricultural producers. The recommendations that follow are geared toward increasing the capacity and efficacy of Austin’s existing FMIP and toward expanding capacity into existing markets that do not currently offer an FMIP. These recommendations are intended for policymakers, program administrators, and farmers market managers.

Recommendation #1: Increase EBT availability at local food retail locations, especially at farmers markets and farm stands. Consider making EBT mandatory for all farmers markets and farm stands.

As of May, 2013, only six out of the Austin area’s 17 farmers markets and farm stands are EBT-equipped. As these retail locations represent over half of the locations at which shoppers can purchase local produce, the lack of EBT capacity creates a significant barrier to the local food market for SNAP-enrolled shoppers. As noted in Chapter 5, markets in other cities are seeing increased sales from SNAP customers as a result of FMIPs, suggesting that investment in EBT-capacity and FMIP technological infrastructure is beneficial both to consumers and farmers. Austin cannot expand its FMIP unless markets have EBT infrastructure to accept SNAP. Regardless of the organizational model which Austin ultimately adopts for its expanded FMIP program (a variety of actors could conceivably undertake this EBT expansion role), EBT expansion is an important preliminary step to effectively scaling up existing FMIP.

Policymakers should consider requiring all existing farmers markets and farm stands to accept SNAP and WIC benefits. While the expense of installing EBT technology has been a challenge for Austin markets, funds are available to subsidize the cost of the technology, including a recently-expanded USDA Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) program. FNS funds (up to \$1,000) are available to markets and individual farmers to help offset the startup costs of setting up EBT to accept SNAP benefits.¹³³

In Travis County, it is estimated that only 62% of people eligible to receive SNAP benefits are enrolled in the program. Increasing the number of places at which SNAP is accepted is an important way to encourage participation in both SNAP as well as the FMIP. Making EBT available at farmers markets and farm stands is a critical first step toward improving the affordability component of access to local food.

Recommendation #2: Expand farmers market incentive programming to all Austin farmers markets and farm stands within the next two years.

¹³³ For details about this program, see <http://www.fns.usda.gov/snap/ebt/pdfs/fm/FM-update.pdf>.

Increasing levels of incentive redemption observed at participating markets in Austin and in other cities suggest that demand for this benefit continues to grow with the availability of funding. In fact, demand in many cities outweighs supply, and many programs are forced to ration or limit benefits in order to maintain a fair allocation of funding to different markets throughout the year. Little to no money is leftover at the end of the market season with any of the FMIPs surveyed for this report. This indicates that consumers are eager and willing to participate and feel they are deriving real benefit from the program.

Moreover, SNAP redemption and SNAP customer visits have increased from year-to-year at participating markets, suggesting that the incentive draws in SNAP customers who, without the incentive, would not ordinarily shop at the market. The programs also put additional dollars into the local food economy that might not otherwise be spent there. Given these successes and benefits, this report recommends scaling up current programmatic efforts in Austin.

SFC's DDIP is currently only available at three markets in the City of Austin. Given the program's current limited scope and success to date this report recommends that the DDIP model be expanded to all markets in Austin, starting with those located in areas with low local food access and high SNAP enrollment (see Figure 10). As capacity increases, a uniform FMIP should be available at all farmers markets and farm stands, regardless of location. Uniform program implementation throughout Austin will help create consistency and reliability for SNAP customers, who will be guaranteed to receive this valuable benefit at any market to which they have most convenient access. A variety of local actors may have the ability to take the lead on FMIP expansion, and expansion should be undertaken regardless of the organizational model that is ultimately selected. However, Recommendation #3 offers a more specific recommendation for FMIP administration and implementation.

Recommendation #3: Administer Austin's FMIP through a single nonprofit umbrella organization.

As seen in cities like Chicago, Boston, and New York City FMIPs have successfully scaled up to serve multiple markets when the program is operated by a third-party organization. When such an "umbrella" organization operates the FMIP, market managers are relieved of the burdens of fundraising, distributing, tracking and reporting on the FMIP while also running markets. Umbrella organizations are also able to act as an efficient single point of contact for assisting markets in becoming equipped with EBT infrastructure to offer SNAP/WIC/FMNP.

A single umbrella organization with a dedicated staff member should administer the city's FMIP for all Austin farmers markets. This entity should be responsible for securing funding for the program, distributing funding to individual markets, collecting reports from individual market managers, and trouble-shooting problems as they arise. Pulling these functions into a single organization would lower the barriers for starting an FMIP at an individual market. It would also standardize reporting and evaluation across the city and increase the impact of the FMIPs. Reports of the impacts of a city or county-wide FMIP would be attractive to potential funders looking to make a significant impact on improving access to local food.

An umbrella organization would also be able to offer incentive coupons that could be used at any market in Austin rather than limiting individual coupons to the markets at which they are distributed. By allowing users to obtain coupons and redeem them at other markets or on another day, shoppers could have more flexibility in choosing how and where to spend their incentive coupon.

The challenges of securing funding and maintaining adequate staff to administer the program seem to be the limiting factors for FMIPs around the country, including in Austin. The Sustainable Food Center is currently the only organization with the capacity to provide assistance in scaling up farmers market incentive programming in Austin. The organization recently stepped into the role of FMNP administrator for Austin-area markets, and already offers DDIP in partnership with an externally-operated farm stand. The organization is thus uniquely positioned to expand such relationships to other interested markets that may not have the capacity to pursue an FMIP on their own.

Recommendation #4: Establish a single point of contact at the City of Austin or Travis County to provide SNAP assistance to farmers markets and the FMIP umbrella organization.

Currently, it is difficult for local farmers markets and farm stands to know who to contact for help with setting up SNAP infrastructure or getting technical assistance with EBT machines. Markets in Austin have expressed frustration with the quality of the EBT machines provided through the Texas Department of Agriculture (TDA) and there is confusion about which TDA staff person is best poised to answer questions about assistance program administration at markets.

There should be a direct line of communication between markets and a dedicated municipal or county staff person who has expertise on SNAP, SNAP redemption, and EBT infrastructure. This staff person should be in regular communication with TDA to ensure that changes to the SNAP program or the state's EBT contract are well known and documented. This staff person should communicate closely with the lead staff person of the umbrella organization, outlined in Recommendation #3, and help provide technical assistance for markets using EBT machines, as outlined in Recommendation #7.

Recommendation #5: Provide funding for farmers market incentive programs at Austin farmers markets on a multi-year basis from diverse sources, including the City of Austin.

Multi-year grants to FMIPs reduce the administrative burden of annual data collection, reporting, and reapplication for farmers market staff and/or the umbrella organization operating the program. Often, single-year grants require that markets begin surveying customers and collecting data almost immediately, in order to re-apply for funding the following year.

Performing intrusive data collection early in the FMIP operation can deter participation among nutrition assistance clients and consume the limited time and capacity of market staff during market hours. Furthermore, data collection early in the FMIP operation is often inconclusive and does not provide funders with a clear sense of success or impact of the program.

Secure, ongoing funding allows new FMIPs to establish themselves and their customer base before beginning the evaluation process. Additionally, data collected after the FMIP has had time to work through initial kinks and challenges will be more representative of the true impact of the program.

A diverse source of funding would also increase the security and sustainability of an Austin FMIP. Multiple funding streams help ensure that even if one source of funding fluctuates or ceases, markets will be able to continue the program until alternative funding is secured. Diverse funding sources also increase the level of flexibility that markets have in administering the FMIP. If one source of funding must be dedicated to a particular activity, alternative sources can be shifted towards general costs or other necessary activities. For example, some funders require that their contributions be used specifically for the incentive dollars only. Others require that grant monies go towards marketing and outreach only. With multiple sources of funding, markets can ensure that they have adequate funding for general staff costs, administration, as well as the cost of the incentive itself.

How much should the City contribute?

Based on this report's analysis of scaled-up programs in other cities, it is recommended that the City allocate municipal funding in the annual budget in the range of \$50,000 - \$75,000 in order to scale up current incentive program efforts in Austin. Funding should be allocated towards costs incurred from the first wave of program expansion to areas of high need, costs associated with scaled-up program administration and outreach/promotion.

Municipal funding for an FMIP in Austin is an important component of creating a sustainable, ongoing program. Support from local government signifies buy-in from the community and policymakers and allows the farmers markets to develop important lines of communication with the city regarding program logistics, outcomes, and impact. Furthermore, funding FMIPs is a logical next step for local governments, like the City of Austin, that have committed to improving health disparities, decreasing food insecurity, and strengthening the local food economy. Successful and sustainable farmers market FMIPs are aligned with several goals and metrics included in the *Imagine Austin Comprehensive Plan*, including increasing access to fresh, healthy foods and farmers markets.

Recommendation #6: Provide funding for both FMIP administrative costs as well as the cost of the financial incentive to be provided to nutrition assistance customers.

Funders of existing FMIPs often stipulate that their financial support must be used specifically for the costs of the incentive funds provided to nutrition assistance clients. This means that markets have to assume the extra costs of administering the FMIP into their existing, and often limited, budget. This places strain on the market resources for other important activities and programs that contribute to the overall success of the market.

The administrative costs of FMIPs are a significant portion of total program costs, especially early in the program operation. Upon start-up, administrative costs often make up over 50% of the total

costs of the FMIPs. As the programs grow and become established, administrative costs typically decrease as a portion of the total costs of the program.

Start-up administrative costs include:

- Training staff, volunteers, and participating vendors to administer the program
- Securing materials (e.g. tokens, EBT machines, signage, and tables)
- Conducting outreach and marketing to announce the launch of the program

Ongoing administrative costs include:

- Continued outreach and marketing to reach new clients
- Assistance for technical and operational difficulties
- Staff time to process vendor reimbursements
- Evaluation and reporting for grant requirements

It is important that funders are sensitive to the differences in the initial and ongoing needs of a farmers market that is operating an FMIP when reviewing and approving grant applications.

Recommendation #7: Provide EBT training and technical support to farmers markets.

Ensuring the smooth operation of EBT technologies is critical to the sustainability of an FMIP. Markets that repeatedly experience delays or disruption in EBT processing run the risk of losing their customers. They also risk alienating the farmers who participate in their markets. Farmers are typically insulated from SNAP EBT challenges because the market staff manages the processing, but WIC EBT machines are often operated by the farmers themselves. If the machines they use are unreliable, they may decide not to accept WIC benefits.

Farmers markets, umbrella FMIP administrators, and City staff should collaborate in taking the following steps to prevent or mitigate technology challenges:

- Develop new or adapt existing how-to manuals to guide market staff and/or farmers in the set-up, use, and maintenance of EBT machines. Include tips on how to troubleshoot common problems or mistakes so that markets are equipped to address minor issues. One potential model is the manual that three nonprofit organizations in Montana collaborated to produce for markets participating in the state's Farmers Market EBT Pilot Project. It includes a checklist for market managers and information on the SNAP retailer authorization process, EBT machine set-up and operation, accounting procedures, and a variety of useful templates.¹³⁴
- For more challenging issues, establish a protocol for whom to call and clear expectations of the vendor or agency that is responsible for technical assistance. Toward this end, contract with a service provider that is not only willing but capable of providing technical assistance to farmers markets, specifically. Many vendors have never worked with nontraditional

¹³⁴ National Center for Appropriate Technology et al., *Montana Farmers Market Electronic Benefits Transfer Manual: How to Accept SNAP Benefits at Your Farmers Market*, 2012.

retailers before and are ill-equipped to address challenges that are unique to farmers markets, such as operating an EBT machine outdoors with variable internet connectivity. If a government agency is managing the contract, communicate early with that agency about the importance of having access to dependable technical support.

- Designate a point person on the market staff who has additional training in or experience operating EBT machines. This individual will be responsible for resolving EBT issues as much as he or she is capable and triaging more complicated issues that arise. He or she should elevate service requests to the appropriate contact (whether a public staff person, EBT machine/service provider, or other) as necessary.

Recommendation #8: Advertise the FMIP through other public and private programs that reach SNAP participants.

Outreach is a critical component of any successful FMIP. Outreach can come in a variety of forms, but costs can be reduced, connections can be leveraged, and messaging may be better received if programs are advertised through venues that are already familiar to SNAP participants, and that have already proven efficacious in reaching SNAP-eligible populations.

The umbrella organization responsible for administering the program should seek to partner with state or city agencies to combine FMIP outreach with ongoing SNAP enrollment outreach efforts. The availability of an FMIP may even encourage individuals to enroll in SNAP for the first time. Combining current efforts with additional SNAP-related outreach will likely reduce material costs and staff time, and will enable FMIP outreach materials to better reach the desired populations.

Additionally, FMIP administrators might enlist the assistance of local community organizations and nonprofits that work with SNAP-eligible and enrolled populations to get the word out and increase community awareness about the program. New York City Health Bucks, for example, initially launched its FMIP simply by distributing decoupled incentive coupons to community organizations to distribute to their clients. The New York City Health Bucks staff cited the role of community organizations, as well as satellite health offices, as being imperative to the success of the outreach program. Care should also be taken to include advertising through culturally appropriate venues, as well as to include print materials in multiple languages.

In Austin, many programs already implemented by the Austin/Travis County Health and Human Services Department would be ideal outreach partners for an Austin FMIP. Austin Texas Benefit Bank locations – currently Helping the Aging, Needy and Disabled (H.A.N.D.), Con Mi Madre, Breast Cancer Resource Centers of Texas, River City Youth Foundation, Front Steps, and Family Keys Center – should also be tapped to help provide outreach.

Does Austin need more farmers markets?

While the answer to this question lies beyond the scope of this study, research conducted for this report strongly suggests that decisions to open new farmers markets, including those with an FMIP, need to be informed by data about community need, demand, and accessibility.

Policymakers and potential market managers should ask the following questions:

- Are people in the area in which a new market may be located interested in shopping at a farmers market?
- Are the people in the community participating in nutrition assistance programming? If they are not, what are the barriers to enrollment and how can we support eligible individuals in enrolling? If eligible households are not currently enrolled in nutrition assistance programming, could the opportunity to participate in an FMIP serve as an impetus to enroll, or does enrollment need to take place first?
- Will the market be located in an area where people will feel safe and comfortable? Are the promotional materials printed in the language(s) that community members speak? Do market staff and farmers speak the language(s) that community members speak? If not, can you provide a translator?
- Are the fruits and vegetables that will be available for purchase culturally appropriate to the people who are likely to shop at the new market?
- How will people travel to the market? Is it accessible via car only, or can customers take public transportation, bike, or walk to the market?

Farmers markets are not a silver bullet solution to food access issues in the Austin area, but are one of a suite of mechanisms for improving access to locally produced foods.

For further reading about considerations in choosing sites for new farmers markets, see “From the Ground Up: Land Use Policies to Protect and Promote Farmers’ Markets” (Change Lab Solutions, 2013): http://changelabsolutions.org/sites/default/files/From_the_Ground_Up-Farmers_Markets_FINAL_20130415.pdf

Chapter 7: Beyond the Farmers Market

While farmers market incentive programs (FMIPs) have proven themselves to be successful policy initiatives worth investing in, farmers markets are not the only available venue in which to increase low-income consumer purchasing power for local foods. In fact, several of the FMIP managers surveyed for this study share a hope that similar incentive programs will be expanded to additional retail venues, including brick-and-mortar retail stores.

There are limited data on the outcomes of incentive programs in other retail venues because they are very new and few in number. However, several fledgling programs have emerged in recent years that deserve recognition, and provide fodder for future topics of research.

Examining these alternative iterations of nutrition assistance incentive programs in detail is out of the scope of this report, but such innovations offer the potential to further alleviate access barriers attributed to farmers markets. Refer to the three emerging programmatic case studies below as alternative iterations that may further enhance access to local food for low-income consumers.

7.1 Grocery Stores

In April 2013, The Fair Food Network (FFN) announced that it would expand its existing FMIP (DUFNB) to three Detroit-area grocery stores. FFN received approval from USDA to conduct this first-of-its-kind pilot with 5,000 SNAP recipients. FFN received \$195,000 in grants from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation and Bank of America Charitable Foundation to support the pilot. When a customer purchases fruits and vegetables at a participating grocery store with their SNAP benefits, they will receive “credits” on a separate electronic debit card. The credits earned can then be used to purchase additional Michigan-grown produce at the participating grocery stores. This pilot builds upon FFN’s existing FMIP at 75 Michigan farmers markets. In announcing the pilot, FFN stated that expansion of the incentive program to grocery stores is an important next step for its program because it addresses the challenges that some SNAP clients face in accessing farmers market locations.

7.2 Mobile Vending

Many cities have begun to experiment with mobile grocery stores as a way to bring healthy food to areas underserved by traditional brick-and-mortar grocers. Mobile vending can have a dramatic effect on the accessibility of high-quality foods. Chicago’s Fresh Moves Mobile Product Market¹³⁵ or Madison, Wisconsin’s Freshmobile are examples of successful mobile vending programs. Fresh Moves makes 22 stops per week and is open between 1-2 hours at each stop; Freshmobile has 11 stops each week and is open for three hours at each stop. The City of Baltimore has taken this idea one step further with the “Virtual Supermarket Program” in which residents can order and pick up

¹³⁵ Fresh Moves, “Mobile Produce Market.”

groceries directly from libraries, elementary schools or senior housings and pay with credit cards, cash, debit, or SNAP.¹³⁶

Programs like these offer several benefits. First, mobile vendors are able to be nimble and responsive to community needs, changing stops when needed in order to accommodate customers. Second, a single mobile vendor is able to stock produce from multiple sellers simultaneously. Because sales volumes are lower, local producers may be able to get product into a mobile vending operation, whereas a grocery store may be more limited due to the volume needs. Finally, the operation and staff costs of a mobile vending operation are far lower than a brick-and-mortar grocer, which can reduce the price to consumers.

Finally, mobile vending operations would be an excellent outlet for expanding a city-wide incentive program for nutrition assistance beneficiaries. With a single point of contact umbrella organization to administer the coupons, there would be minimal burden for participating mobile vendors and shoppers would have additional locations to pick up and redeem incentive coupons.

7.3 Community-Based Farm Stands

Small farm stands strategically placed in locations convenient to target populations are another innovative model for improving access to locally grown produce. Farms stands located outside schools, health clinics, and other community access points increase the visibility and convenience of local vendors and their produce. Two separate initiatives in Austin have piloted this model and have reported positive outcomes based on their quantitative and qualitative data collection.

Farm-to-Families School Farm Stand Pilot

In 2012, the Farm-to-Families (F2F) program employed a farm stand-based strategy at a local Austin elementary school. Of the 597 students that attended the school in 2012, 96% were economically disadvantaged and 60.5% had limited English proficiency. In order to make their offerings affordable, the farm stand operators received produce from a local farmer at below wholesale price and sold it to students and their families at wholesale prices. The school farm stand did not have the ability to accept nutrition assistance EBT funds, but due to the relatively low cost, the stand operators did sell all of their produce during each day of operation.

The farm stand operated every Friday afternoon during the time when parents picked their children up from school. This allowed for high visibility and increased interaction between farm stand operators, parents, and students.

The pilot lasted for six weeks and in the final two weeks of operation a survey was conducted to determine the effectiveness of the project in increasing access to fresh produce. Of the 52 families that responded to the survey, 85% reported that their consumption of fresh vegetables had

¹³⁶ City of Baltimore, "Planning/Baltimore Food Policy Initiative/Virtual Supermarket."

increased since buying produce from the farm stand. All of the survey respondents reported that they would like the farm stand to return to their school. The success of this single school pilot indicates that schools could serve as a workable location for improving the physical accessibility of local produce for children and their families. Adding the ability to accept EBT and a nutrition assistance incentive program to the school farm stand concept would serve to further increase the financial accessibility of the stands' healthy offerings.

WIC Clinic Farm Stand Pilot

Another community-based farm stand initiative was piloted in Austin outside two local WIC clinics. Small farm stands were set up outside the WIC clinic locations in East Austin once per week for two to three hours. Each stand consisted of two to three farmers selling only fresh fruits and vegetables and each had the capacity to accept SNAP EBT, WIC FMNP coupons, and cash payments.

The stand was open to WIC recipients as well as the general public. The farm stands operated for a 12-week period and data was collected both before and after the period of operation. Survey data was collected at random from households within a half-mile radius around the farm stand. In the pre and post intervention period, respondents answered questions regarding their awareness and use of farmers markets and purchasing and consumption of fruits and vegetables. The final report indicated a significant increase in usage of farmers markets and consumption of fresh produce.

¹³⁷ The report also cited the benefits of increasing access to fruit and vegetables through farmers markets versus supermarkets, because the latter also increase access to unhealthy food items. Based on the success of this pilot, community-based farm stands may serve as a viable way to expand FMIPs to neighborhoods and communities that don't have access to a full farmers market .

Offering access to FMIPs through innovative methods such as those described above helps ensure that the programs reach the maximum number of consumers. It is important that when new methods of increasing healthy food access are implemented, that they include the ability to accept EBT and, if possible, to offer incentives to consumers. Those additional capacities will help to increase the impact that the new initiatives have on the populations they were intended to serve.

¹³⁷ Sandra Evans, et al., "Introduction of Farm Stands in Low-income Communities Increases Fruit and Vegetable among Community Residents," 2012, pg. 1141.

Conclusion

The purpose of this report has been to explore farmers market incentive programs (FMIPs) as a tool for increasing access to healthy foods among eligible individuals while channeling food dollars into the local food economy. To provide a context for Austin's incentive programs, the report begins by depicting the landscape of social opportunity (high versus low), food insecurity, and food access in the City of Austin and Travis County. It then describes nutrition assistance participation in these communities and the location of food retailers that accept SNAP and WIC benefits, highlighting the gap between the number of people enrolled and the number of people who are eligible to enroll. An overview of the actors involved in facilitating benefit enrollment and increasing participation indicates growing interest and investment in addressing food insecurity through federally-funded nutrition assistance programs.

Recognizing the importance of expanding access to fresh produce among individuals with limited food dollars, the Sustainable Food Center (SFC) launched the Double Dollar Incentive Program (DDIP) in 2012. This report describes the design and implementation of DDIP, highlighting the major successes and challenges SFC has experienced since the program's inception. Following this discussion of how FMIPs have been implemented in Austin, the report synthesizes lessons learned by the implementers of nine FMIPs across the country. The report concludes with policy recommendations for strengthening the design, implementation, capacity, and scalability of such programs, and offers a brief summary of alternative or complementary approaches to increasing the reach and impact of FMIPs.

Despite several shared challenges, the programs studied in this report generally have been successful in terms of increasing redemption of SNAP and/or WIC benefits at farmers markets. What remains to be seen is the longer-term impact and sustainability of these programs. Future research should strive to answer the following questions:

- Does increasing the affordability and accessibility of fresh produce to nutrition assistance beneficiaries effect lasting change in food-shopping and eating habits? If so, does this shift translate into improved health outcomes, lowering the risk of diet-related diseases? Answering these questions will require resources for longitudinal data collection and analysis.
- How should farmers market incentive programs be brought to scale? What are the key criteria for deciding where to expand markets and FMIPs? How can these efforts be more participatory in terms of involving the community in the design and promotion of such programs?
- Culturally appropriate food is identified by this and other reports as one key component of food access. To what extent are existing farmers markets culturally appropriate for SNAP and WIC recipients?

With a driving focus on improving the food security and nutrition outcomes of consumers, this report does not address the production side of the food system. To be sustainable and just, the local food system movement should include both consumers and producers who come from communities of low social opportunity. Future research efforts might explore the barriers (e.g., land ownership) to participating in local agricultural production.

Finally, there is a wide variety of programs and policies designed to prevent or reduce food insecurity. This report focused specifically on federally-funded mechanisms for increasing the food-purchasing power of eligible individuals: the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC). It does not address emergency food assistance programs, such as the services provided by food banks or one-time cash assistance from the county; or locally administered programs designed to meet the needs of specific populations, such as Mobile Loaves and Fishes, serving the chronically homeless, or Meals on Wheels and More, serving individuals who are homebound. These programs play an important role in meeting the nutrition needs of many individuals and could be potential partners in future efforts to increase the accessibility of healthy local foods.

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Appendix 1: Methods

Unit of Analysis

The City of Austin is the primary unit of analysis for the contextual chapters of the report, which illustrate the local food access and nutrition assistance landscape. The City of Austin was selected as the primary unit of analysis because the report seeks to address municipal policy and decision-making bodies that might act as public partners in scaling up existing local FMIPs. Travis County, however, is frequently referenced as a secondary unit of analysis, since some data of interest are only available at the county level and since several public bodies have joint jurisdiction (such as HHSD and SFPB). Spatial GIS analysis for the county and city is performed at the U.S. Census tract level. The Austin-Round Rock-San Marcos MSA and the state of Texas are referenced intermittently for comparative analysis. The FMIP best practices portion of the report references program-level data from a selection of FMIPs across the county, and considers the unit of analysis to be the individual FMIP.

GIS Analysis

This report uses the USDA's Food Access Research Atlas (previously referred to as the Food Desert Locator) as a tool for understanding gaps in spatial proximity to healthy food in Austin, Texas. The USDA's methodology has become the dominant paradigm for examining physical access, and is one of the most influential tools used to determine where public money should be spent in order to improve food access. Atlas GIS data were downloaded from the USDA website, joined with U.S. Census Tract data for Texas in ArcMap10, and projected to display USDA-designated food deserts as well as areas with low vehicle access for Austin.

Additionally, this report presents an analysis of the current spatial distribution of food retailers in Austin, using data provided by HHSD and the City of Austin Parks and Recreation Department. Food retail locations were mapped, and a hot spot analysis was conducted using ArcMap10 to identify areas with high concentrations of grocery stores and convenience stores. The report also includes a presentation of SNAP enrollment and the location of EBT-equipped retailers in Austin, with data culled from the U.S. Census American Community Survey and USDA, respectively.

Kirwan Institute Data: Opportunity Communities

This report uses data derived from an Opportunity Mapping study recently completed by the Kirwan Institute in partnership with Green Doors. Opportunity is defined as environmental conditions or resources that are conducive to healthier, vibrant communities and that are more likely to enable residents in a community to succeed. Indicators can either be impediments to opportunity or conduits to opportunity, depending on the nature of the resource or environmental condition in question. See the indicators used to develop Austin's Opportunity Index below.

Components of Austin’s Opportunity Index

Education	Economics & Mobility	Housing and Environment
Adult Educational Attainment	Unemployment Rate	Neighborhood Poverty
Student Poverty	Job Access	Residential Vacancy Rate
Student/Teacher Ratio	Mean Commute Time	Proximity to Parks
Reading Proficiency	Transit Access	Proximity to Toxic Release Sites
Math Proficiency	Median Household Income	Proximity to Brownfields
Graduation Rate		Crime Rate
Enrollment Rate		Food desert Status
		Health Care Facility Access
		Home Ownership
		Median Home Value

Farmers Market Incentive Program (FMIP) Survey

In order to evaluate FMIP challenges and best practices, the research team administered a 51-question survey to 10 FMIP managers and directors from across the country. Programs were selected based upon a loose set of criteria, with the hopes of achieving the following qualities amongst the study group: diversity in city size (some programs in large cities, some in cities more comparable in size to Austin), geographic diversity (representing different areas of the country), varied lengths of operation (some newer and some more established), and inclusive of municipal funding models (where possible). The only absolute criterion was that each case be an FMIP. The 10 programs include: Austin’s Double Dollar Incentive Program, Los Angeles Market Match, New York City Health Bucks, DC Columbia Heights Festibucks, Chicago LINK Up, Boston Bounty Bucks, Michigan Double Up Food Bucks, Portland Fresh Exchange, Seattle Fresh Bucks, and East Palo Alto Fresh Checks.

The research team was able to collect either full or partial survey responses for all 10 of the selected FMIPs. The majority of the program representatives received the survey in electronic form via e-mail, wherein they had the opportunity to answer both open and closed-ended questions, and to submit online. A handful of program representatives were contacted via phone by a research team member who collected survey responses during one or several follow-up phone interviews. Some responses were also gleaned during follow-up email discussion. See the survey instrument below.

Survey Instrument

General

1. How did your organization (or your city) decide to start a farmer’s market incentive program? Did you do any kind of needs assessment to gauge whether or not and how much people would take advantage of the program?
2. When did the incentive program begin? Please provide the month and year.
3. At how many markets does your incentive program operate?
4. How did you choose the markets at which the incentive program would be offered?

5. Where are those market(s) located (city/state land, public parks, private property, other public locations)?
6. Does your market offer any other services in conjunction with the incentive program (i.e. cooking classes, referrals to food assistance programs, etc...)?

Logistics and Administration

7. What is the incentive offer (\$10/\$20, weekly/monthly) and does it require matching funds?
8. What can be accepted as matching funds (cash, SNAP, WIC, FMNP, Senior FMNP)?
9. How do you disburse the matching or incentive funds?
10. Are participants allowed to buy any items with their matching funds or are they restricted to fruits and vegetables?
11. Must the incentives be spent at that same market on that day, or can they be spent at other markets at other times?
12. How do you reimburse vendors at your market for EBT or incentive redemptions?
13. How many staff administer your incentive program? (Include separate count of volunteers)
14. Who is responsible for program oversight?

Funding

15. What is your main source of funding for the incentive program? Secondary sources? Please include figures from at least the most recent year and specify the amount you received from each funding source that year. If your program has been operating for several years and you have access to historical budget data, we'd be grateful if you could provide figures from previous years, too.
16. What percentage of your incentive program budget goes directly towards benefits? Administration? Other costs?
17. Are your funding source(s) ongoing?
18. What total amount of matching funds do you disburse annually (on average)?
19. What other indirect costs are associated with the incentive program? (Staff, materials, technology, marketing, work that other organizations do to support the program, etc.?)
20. Has there been a difference in the initial costs compared to long-term costs?

Logistics (Technology)

21. Where did you procure your EBT machine(s)?
22. What service do you use to process EBT funds?
23. Does your market staff have access to EBT training or technological support to operate the EBT machines?
24. How did you pay for initial EBT installation, and how do you pay for ongoing technological costs?
25. Do you have a separate machine for different benefit programs (SNAP/WIC?)
26. Have you experienced technical difficulties with the EBT hardware and/or processing company? If yes, please briefly describe.

Participation

27. Approximately how many customers visit your market(s) each week? If more than one market, please list number of participants at each.
28. Approximately how many SNAP/WIC customers visit your market(s) each week?
29. Approximately how many customers do you distribute incentive funds to at your market(s) each week?
30. What levels of redemption and matching funds do you have for each individual assistance program that you accept?

31. How do you determine who is eligible to receive matching funds?
32. Approximately how many vendors operate at each of your incentive program market(s)?
33. What mode(s) of transportation do your customers largely use to access your market? (Car, public transit, walking, bicycle, taxi)
34. Is your market easily accessible by public transit (bus or metro) or by pedestrians/bicyclists?

Outreach

35. How did you advertise the launch of the incentive program?
36. What outreach strategies do you use to continue to attract potential incentive program customers to your market(s)?
37. Do you have a target demographic (i.e. ethnic, socioeconomic, age) that you'd like to serve with your incentive program?
38. How do you make your incentive program/markets culturally and linguistically available to your target demographic?

Evaluation/Outcomes

39. What metrics, if any, are you tracking in your incentive program?
40. How do you track incentive redemption, specifically?
41. Have you experienced an increase in revenue and/or customers since starting the incentive program? If so, by how much?
42. Have you seen an increase in nutrition assistance redemption at participating markets as a result of your program (and do you have numbers you could share with us)?
43. Have you seen an increase in incentive redemption at your participating markets over time (and do you have specific numbers to share, etc.)?
44. What tracking or evaluation do you think would be helpful to inform your work at the market?

Best Practices & Challenges

45. What is unique about your incentive program that has made it successful?
46. What would you change about your incentive program if you could?
47. What challenges have you faced and how did you overcome them?
48. What policy hurdles did you face when setting up the program?
49. Are there venues or outlets that you'd like to expand to or would be better able to reach your targeted demographic?
50. Are there other programs that you think would be equally or more effective at improving access/food security?
51. If you could give general advice to a market/organization that is launching a new incentive program, what you say?

Appendix 2: SFPB SNAP Recommendations



SUSTAINABLE FOOD POLICY BOARD

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Executive Liaison
Austin/Travis County HHSD
P. O. Box 1088
Austin, TX 78767



April 16, 2012

Honorable Lee Leffingwell, Mayor
Austin City Council
301 West Second Street
Austin, Texas 78701

Dear Mayor and Council Members:

The Sustainable Food Policy Board (SFPB) has been studying the issue of enrollment in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP, or “food stamps”) in the Austin/Travis County area. It is estimated that only 53% of the SNAP-eligible population in Travis County receives SNAP benefits.

SNAP provides critical food assistance to our most vulnerable citizens. In fact, the majority of SNAP recipients are children and the elderly. SNAP has also been credited with being the most responsive federal program providing additional assistance during economic downturns. As you are aware, many of our citizens are still suffering the effects of the recent recession and are struggling to put food on the table.

SNAP benefits are spent in local communities at retailers and grocers. It is estimated that every \$1 in SNAP benefits generates \$1.79 in economic activity. With only 53% of the SNAP-eligible population receiving benefits, Travis County businesses are losing \$349,052,961 in economic return.

Therefore, the SFPB recommends that the Austin City Council create a citywide outreach campaign to increase SNAP enrollment, including providing a variety of technical assistance options for the SNAP-eligible population. It is also recommended that this campaign be led by a trusted bilingual public official and that it be disseminated using media and social services outreach methods.

The SFPB also recommends that the City of Austin research possible grants or other sources of funding to increase the value of SNAP dollars spent locally at farmers markets and other retailers for fresh produce. Currently, the Sustainable Food Center is doubling the value of SNAP dollars with a match of up to \$10 weekly at one of its farmers market locations in East Austin. The city can measure the economic and access benefits of this effort as well as resources allocated to similar incentive programs in such cities as Chicago, Boston and New York with proven results. Such benchmarks can help justify resource allocation and support for additional incentive opportunities throughout the city. Increased enrollment in SNAP can also help offset the cost investment made by smaller retailers to participate in the program—such as equipment and paperwork.

The SFPB recommends that the city council take action by asking city staff to implement an effective outreach and assistance effort to increase participation in the SNAP program as well as expand SNAP benefits at local farmers markets, thereby greatly benefitting our local economy. The SFPB will support city staff and its partners in these efforts.

Attached is a report from the SNAP working group as well as a list of cities with best practices on SNAP outreach, enrollment, and incentive programs.

Please do not hesitate to contact me if I can answer questions or be of further assistance.

Sincerely,



Paula J. McDermott
Chairperson
Austin/Travis County Sustainable Food Policy Board

Enclosures:

SNAP Working Group Report
List of Cities with Best-Practices for SNAP Outreach and Enrollment

cc: Marc A. Ott, City Manager
H. G. (Bert) Lumberras, Assistant City Manager
Carlos Rivera, Director, HHSD, Public Health
Philip Huang, Executive Liaison
Lucia Athens, Chief Sustainability Officer
Sherri Fleming, Executive Manager, Travis County HHS & Veteran Services
Travis County Commissioners