

May 21, 2013

Dear Mayor, Council Members, Sustainable Food Policy Board, and Other Interested Stakeholders:

In April 2012, the Austin/Travis County Sustainable Food Policy Board recommended 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. The attached report expands upon that recommendation. Its purpose is to support the City in building upon local organizations' current efforts to increase access to healthy, local foods through farmers market incentive programs (FMIPs).

**We see the City of Austin as being a key source of steady funding and support for FMIPs. Based on our research of best practices, we recommend that \$50,000 – \$75,000 be allocated in the FY 2014 budget cycle to support these programs.**

Our report is designed to serve as a resource to the City of Austin as practitioners and policymakers consider how to build upon the early successes of the Sustainable Food Center's Double Dollars Incentive Program (DDIP), Austin's local FMIP. In addition to documenting the characteristics of this program and the challenges and accomplishments it has charted to date, we provide current data on food access, food security, and social opportunity in Austin/Travis County. You will find a series of unique maps that underline a mismatch between the location of EBT-equipped local food retailers and the geography of food insecurity, low social opportunity, and SNAP enrollment in our communities. After developing this context, we synthesize the best practices and challenges that 10 FMIPs across the US—including SFC's DDIP—have experienced implementing their programs. Based on our findings, we identified eight specific recommendations for increasing the value of nutrition assistance dollars spent farmers markets:

**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.

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

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

**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.

**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.

**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.

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

**Recommendation #8:** Advertise Austin's FMIP through other public and private programs that reach SNAP participants.

We hope that this report underscores the importance of the SFPB's original recommendation and provides a starting point for moving forward on it. Please let us know if we can do anything to support City Council Members, city staff, and other interested stakeholders in addressing this important issue.

Sincerely,

Amy Madore, MPAff  
Kate Vickery, MPAff/MSCR Candidate

Megan Randall, MPAff/MSCR Candidate  
Jeanie Donovan, MPAff/MPH Candidate

# INCREASING ACCESS TO LOCALLY PRODUCED FOOD

## Best Practices in Farmers Market Incentive Programs & Recommendations for Local Implementation

Jeanie Donovan | Amy Madore | Megan Randall | Kate Vickery



# SFPB RECOMMENDATIONS TO COUNCIL, APRIL 2012

- Create a citywide outreach campaign to increase SNAP enrollment, led by a bilingual public official
- Explore funding options to increase the value of SNAP dollars spent locally at farmers markets and other retailers of fresh produce
- Ask city staff to implement an effective outreach and assistance effort to increase participation in SNAP and expand SNAP benefits at local farmers markets



## CONTEXT: IMAGINE AUSTIN & THE EIA

- **Imagine Austin Comprehensive Plan**
  - Goal of creating “complete communities” where all residents have access to a variety of essential services and resources within their community, including healthy food
- **The Economic Impact of Austin’s Food Sector (TXP)**
  - Investment in local agriculture is a source of economic growth in Austin: every \$10 spent yields more than \$8 in additional economic activity
  - Finding #6: In spite of Austin’s bounty, issues related to hunger and food access remain.



# NEXUS: LOCAL FOOD & NUTRITION ASSISTANCE



Photo Credit: Sustainable Food Center

## Research Goal

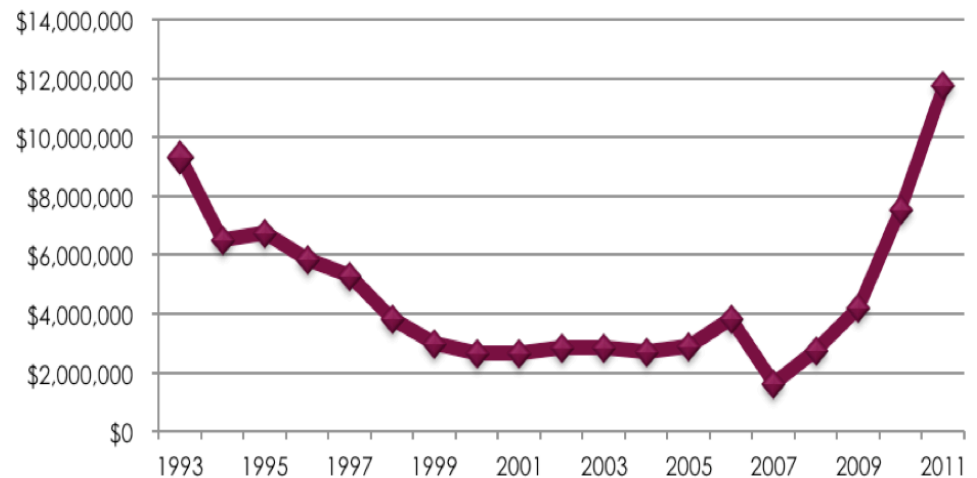
Explore farmers market incentive programs as vehicles for **increasing access** to healthy food for food-insecure consumers while also channeling dollars into the **local food economy**



# FARMERS MARKET INCENTIVE PROGRAMS (FMIP)

- Increases **availability** and **affordability** of healthy, locally-sourced foods for nutrition assistance beneficiaries
- SNAP multiplier effect (\$1.79) benefits the local food economy
- **Survey findings:**  
FMIPs increased SNAP redemption, incentive redemption, and SNAP customer visits every year, per-market and per-farmer.

National SNAP Redemption at Farmers Markets & Farm Stands



# LOCALLY: THE SUSTAINABLE FOOD CENTER'S DOUBLE DOLLAR INCENTIVE PROGRAM (DDIP)



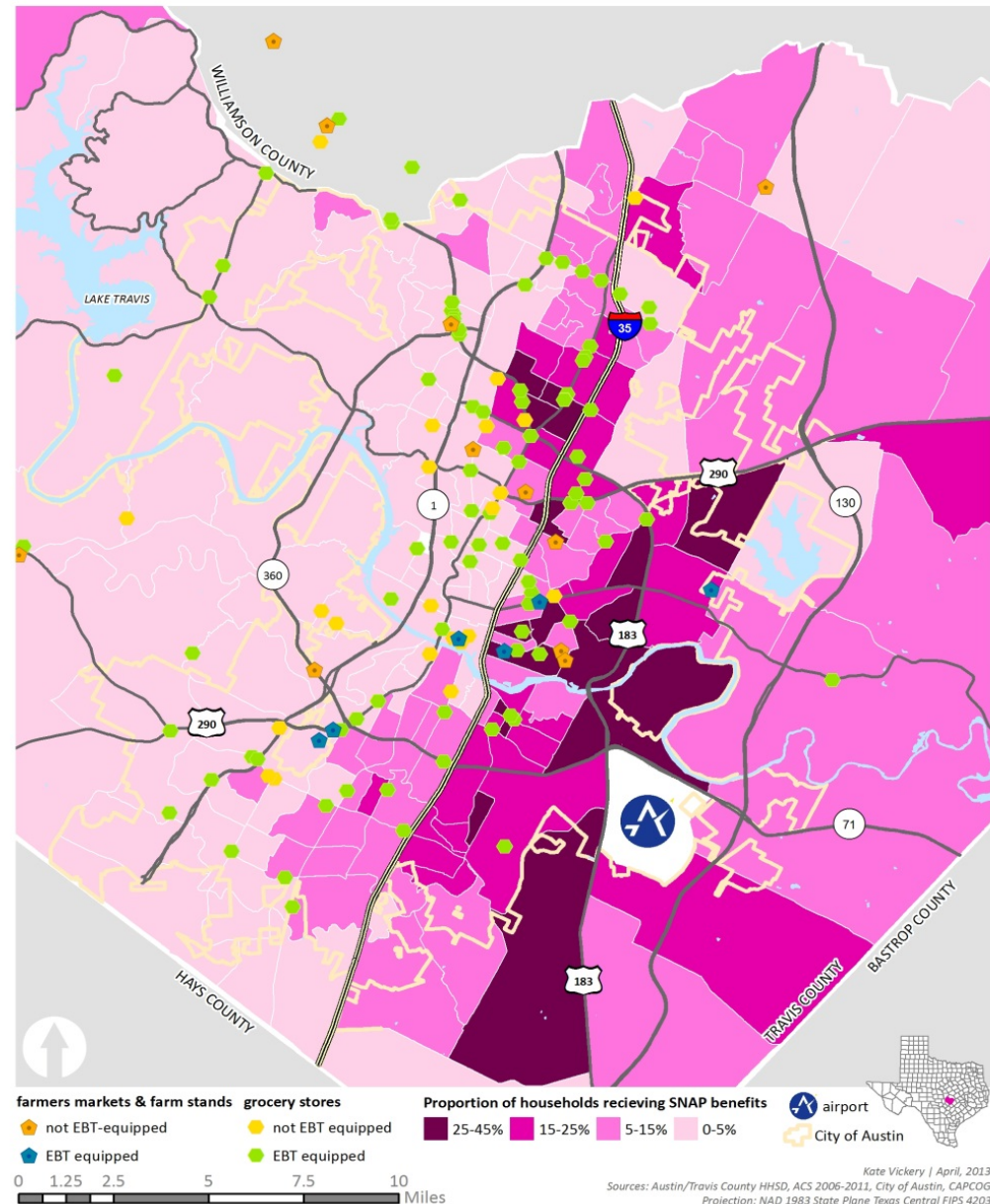
Photo Credit: Jen Reel, *Texas Observer*

- Began in 2012
- Operates at two farmers markets (Sunset Valley and East)
- \$2:\$1 coupon value
- Privately funded through St. David's Foundation and others
- Strong infrastructure ready to scale up



# THE LANDSCAPE OF SNAP ENROLLMENT AND EBT

- SNAP enrollment is concentrated in the eastern half of Austin and Travis County
- Lack of traditional food retailers and retailers that source local foods in areas with high SNAP enrollment
- Only **six of 17** farmers markets and farm stands are EBT equipped





# RECOMMENDATIONS:

## SCALE UP CAPACITY OF CURRENT AND NEW FMIPs

- **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.
  - Only 6 of Austin’s 17 farmers markets and farm stands accept EBT.
- **Expand** farmers market incentive programming to all Austin farmers markets and farm stands within the next two years.
  - As funding for FMIPs increases, program participation increases.



# RECOMMENDATIONS:

## FMIP COORDINATION AND TECHNICAL SUPPORT

- Administer Austin's farmers market incentive program through a single nonprofit **umbrella organization**.
  - Responsible for fundraising and administration functions of FMIP
- Establish a **single point of contact** at the City of Austin or Travis County to provide SNAP administration assistance to farmers markets and the FMIP umbrella organization.
  - This individual will serve as a resource to markets on SNAP-related issues, including EBT, and as a liaison to local and state stakeholders.
- Provide EBT training and **technical support** to farmers markets.
  - Develop resources for EBT use and maintenance, and determine who is responsible for technical assistance.



# RECOMMENDATIONS:

## STABILIZE AND INCREASE FMIP FUNDING

- Provide funding for FMIPs at Austin farmers markets on a **multi-year** basis from **diverse** sources, including the City.
  - Longer-term funding carries a lower administrative burden, and the City's investment in FMIPs would promote program sustainability.
- Provide funding for both FMIP **administrative** costs as well as the cost of the financial **incentive** to be provided to nutrition assistance customers.
  - Administrative costs typically account for more than 50% of the initial cost of FMIPs. This cost decreases over time.



# RECOMMENDATIONS:

## IMPROVE OUTREACH THROUGH KEY PARTNERSHIPS

- Advertise the FMIP through other **public and private programs** that reach SNAP participants.
  - When appropriate, information about Austin’s FMIP should be included in SNAP-related outreach provided by city and state agencies and nonprofit organizations.
  - The umbrella organization and city/county point of contact can help facilitate this collaboration.



# NEXT STEPS FOR THE CITY OF AUSTIN

- The City of Austin has the potential to be a key source of steady funding and support for FMIPs.
- We recommend that **\$50,000 – \$75,000** be allocated in the FY 2014 budget cycle to support these programs.
- Potential complementary approaches to delivering incentive programs for SNAP recipients:
  - Traditional grocery stores
  - Mobile vending
  - Community-based farm stands

