



2016 Report

From the Executive Director

Experimental Station has said it before: whether or not access to healthy food is a human right is a debatable issue, and we are not interested in debating. For the past ten years, our interest has been in finding practical solutions to the lack of access to healthy food faced by thousands of Illinoisans every day. In the course of building Link Up Illinois to address the challenges of food insecurity in our urban, suburban, and rural communities, we have learned a lot about the high costs incurred by our state as a result of non-existent or inadequate access to healthy foods. As we have worked to rebuild lost linkages between our low-income population and Illinois farmers, we have also come to see and understand better the connections between ourselves, the Link/SNAP recipient living in a 'food desert,' Illinois' current farming economy, and our changing climate.

As we now know, lack of access to healthy food is a primary cause of obesity and diet-related diseases such as diabetes. As taxpayers, citizens, medical care users, and neighbors, the fact that Illinois' adult obesity rate in 2015 was 30.8%, up from 20.4% in 2000 (The State of Obesity: Better Policies For a Healthier America), should be a concern for all of us. Each of our lives is affected by the fact that in 2010, 9.4% of adult Illinoisans were diagnosed with diabetes and that, in 2011 alone, the cost of diabetes in Illinois was estimated at \$8.98 billion, which includes direct medical costs of \$6.6 billion attributed to diabetes, and \$2.4 billion in indirect costs, such as disability, work loss, and premature mortality (Illinois Department of Public Health). Besides multiplying these costs over decades and lifetimes and considering how they impact our personal, state, and federal pocketbooks, we must also ask ourselves about the yet un-quantified costs of food insecurity on, for instance, childrens' poor school performance or aggression in our inner cities, where healthy foods are least accessible.

While the Obama administration did much to promote and support the increased availability and consumption of fresh fruits and vegetables in our schools and communities, another problem has come to light—the U.S. simply does not produce enough fruits and vegetables to meet the daily requirements we are being encouraged to consume. Illinois is an example of this issue. Illinois farms cover approximately 75% of our state's total land area, but less than 1% of that prime farmland is dedicated to the production of fruits and vegetables for Illinoisans to consume. The vast majority of Illinois' farmland is for the production of commodity crops, which are fed to animals, turned into ethanol, or require processing to become consumable by humans. Thus, while Illinois is first or second place nationally in corn and soybean production (accounting for over \$15 billion in sales annually), ours is a food insecure state, with Illinoisans almost entirely dependent on imports from other states and countries for fresh fruits and vegetables. The situation begs the question: to what degree does a state that almost exclusively produces commodity crops (often processed as vegetable oil or high fructose corn syrup) promote the benefits of consuming fresh fruits and vegetables? We are at odds with our own agricultural economy in doing so.

As greenhouse gases heat our planet, the linkages between industrial agricultural practices and our changing climate have also become increasingly apparent, with the U.S. food system being responsible for almost 20% of the nation's carbon dioxide emissions (Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change). Currently, most commodity crop producers employ unsustainable monocultural farming methods that depend on use of chemical pesticides and fertilizers to boost yields. In so doing, they harm our lakes and rivers, destroy beneficial insects, and decrease crop resilience, as monocultural commodity crops fare poorly under drought and heavy rain conditions. Most importantly for influencing climate change, monocultural industrial farming depletes the soil of organic matter, resulting both in nutrient-poor crops and in the soil's inability to play its role as a natural storehouse for carbon. Thus, monocultural commodity crop farming both contributes to climate change and is at greater risk of suffering from climate instability and weather extremes.

Recognizing the linkages between food insecurity, costly diet-related diseases, commodity agricultural production and practices, and our climate crisis, Experimental Station's Link Up Illinois works to bring fresh fruits and vegetables to our state's low-income population while supporting a larger vision for Illinois agriculture. Link Up Illinois supports the growth and expansion of Illinois' fruit and vegetable-producing farms, many of which employ widely available sustainable or organic management practices that regenerate the soil, thereby increasing soil nutrient content (making our fruits and vegetables more nutritious) and sequestering carbon.

We can solve food insecurity in Illinois, while helping to mitigate climate change. Link Up Illinois stands ready to do its part.



Connie Spreen, PhD

Executive Director
Experimental Station



Photo courtesy of Marc Monaghan

Overview

Link Up Illinois is a program of Experimental Station, undertaken in partnership with Wholesome Wave Charitable Ventures and the Illinois Farmers Market Association.

Experimental Station and its partners seek to increase the affordability and accessibility of fresh and nutritious foods sold at Illinois farmers markets for low-income Illinoisans. Link Up Illinois was created in 2011 to combat urban and rural food deserts, ensure the viability of local small and mid-size farms through increased revenues, offer lasting health benefits to Illinois' most at-risk communities, and provide data and advocate for policy change on a state and federal level.

Link Up Illinois achieves these aims by providing farmers markets and other direct-to-consumer venues across the state with funding for Double Value Coupon incentive programs for recipients of Illinois Link (federal SNAP) benefits. Link Up Illinois also provides free EBT consulting, funds, training, and technical assistance to ensure successful implementation of these programs.

As a program of Experimental Station, Link Up Illinois is directed and operated by Experimental Station. Program partners provide outreach and advocacy at the state level (Illinois Farmers Market Association) and fundraising support, technical support, outreach, and advocacy at the national level (Wholesome Wave). Link Up Illinois also works closely with the Illinois Department of Human Services.

A photograph showing a person in a blue long-sleeved shirt handing a blue card to another person. The card has some text and a logo on it. The background is slightly blurred, showing what appears to be a market or community setting.

“Being able to serve the entirety of our community and surrounding neighborhoods by providing an equal opportunity to everyone to have the ability to shop for locally sourced, organic options. That, in turn, supports local farms and small businesses. Makes me feel like I am doing something to help.” David Oakes, Andersonville Market Manager

Expanding SNAP Acceptance

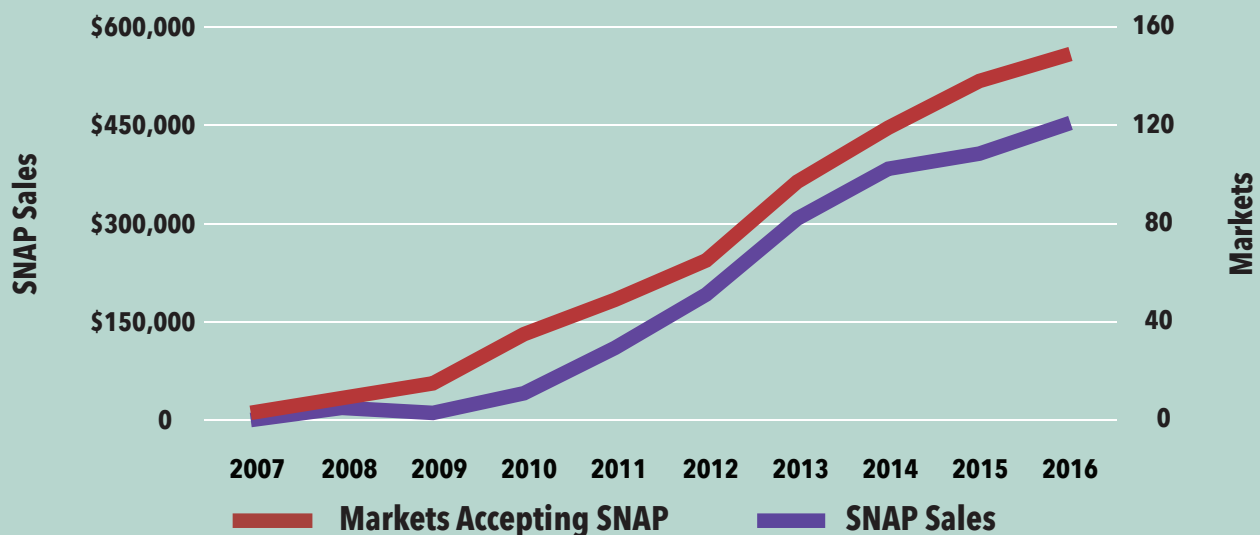
Acceptance of SNAP benefits is a critical first step in making the fresh and healthy foods sold at farmers markets accessible for our low-income population. Since 2010, Experimental Station has worked to expand SNAP acceptance at Illinois farmers markets by providing a variety of training and consulting opportunities.

This past year, Experimental Station was awarded a \$250,000 USDA Farmers Market SNAP Support Grant (FMSSG). The goal of the USDA FMSSG program is to increase SNAP accessibility and participation at farmers markets, by supporting the establishment, expansion and promotion of SNAP/Electronic Benefits Transfer (EBT) services at farmers markets. Experimental Station's award will enable Link Up Illinois to provide both funding and free SNAP consulting to as many as 40-50 Illinois farmers markets to establish and implement EBT/SNAP acceptance in 2016 and 2017. FMSSG funding will also allow Link Up Illinois to create

and provide a series of farmers market EBT training webinars, carry out a television advertising campaign to promote the use of SNAP at farmers markets, and design and print a farmers market brochure with the Illinois Farmers Market Association.

In 2016, Link Up Illinois provided a total of \$126,600 in SNAP support grants to 34 Illinois farmers markets. The two-year grants ranged from \$1,500-\$5,000 per market. In addition, Link Up Illinois program manager, Corey Chatman, provided two webinar trainings (SNAP I / SNAP II) and free EBT consulting to farmers markets to teach them how to become authorized to accept SNAP and to implement their SNAP program. Subsequently posted on YouTube, the SNAP I webinar training was viewed 81 times, while SNAP II was viewed 56 times. In 2016, 102 Illinois farmers markets were authorized to accept SNAP, from a total of 96 markets authorized in 2015.

Growth of Illinois Markets Accepting SNAP and SNAP Sales



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Expanding Double Value Nutrition Incentives

With generous support from the USDA Food Insecurity Nutrition Incentive (FINI) Program, City of Chicago, Chicago Community Trust, Harmony WellCare, Wholesome Wave and others, in 2016 Link Up Illinois was able to provide funding, training, and technical support to 74 Illinois farmers markets to implement Double Value Coupon Programs, granting a total of \$222,077.

The return on that investment was a combined total of SNAP, WIC, and Double Value Coupon sales of \$412,788, including DVCP sales representing \$184,352 of that amount, versus \$129,126 in 2015—a 43% increase.

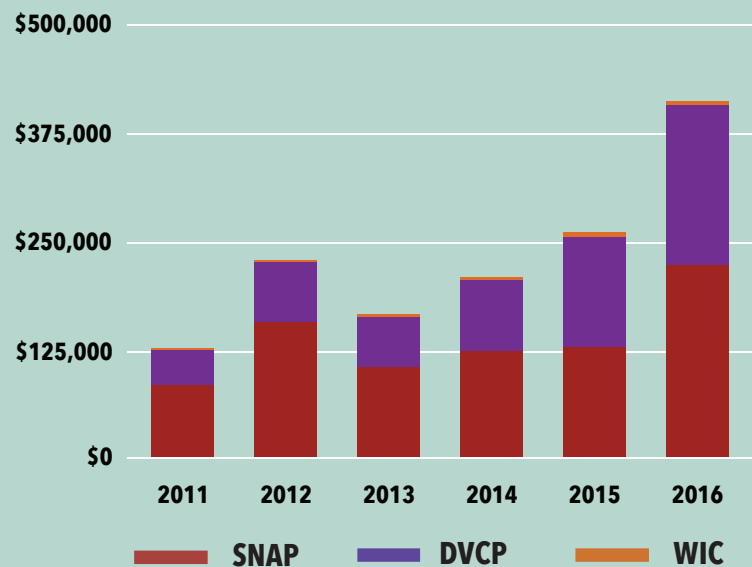
A central goal in 2016 was to expand the Link Up Illinois network to additional ‘downstate’ (i.e. non-Chicago) farmers markets. 32 of the 74 markets funded were non-Chicago markets, including markets as far north as Rockford and as far south as Carbondale.

“Being able to receive help and by providing me a choice of where I can spend what I receive each month puts me in control of my health.”
Steve R., Link shopper since 2016

57%

growth in SNAP, WIC, and DVCP sales from 2015 to 2016

Growth of SNAP, WIC, and DVCP Sales



“We love the coupons! We’re getting new customers each week that want to try something new. And our sales have all been going up too. It’s a nice program.”
North End City Market Vendor



2016 Link Up Illinois Partner Markets

61st Street Farmers Market, Chicago
Andersonville Farmers Market, Chicago
Aurora Farmers Market, Aurora
Aurora Farmers Market - East, Aurora
Aurora Farmers Market - West, Aurora
Austin Town Hall Farmers Market, Chicago
Back of the Yards Community Market at The Plant, Chicago
Batavia Farmers Market, Batavia
Blackhawk Courts Farm & Garden, Chicago
Bronzeville Farmers Market, Chicago
CPS - Lawndale, Chicago
CPS - Roseland, Chicago
Carbondale Farmers Market, Carbondale
Columbus Park, Chicago
Community Farmers Market in Carbondale, Carbondale
Daley Plaza Farmers Market, Chicago
Division Street Farmers Market, Chicago
Downtown Bloomington Farmers Market, Bloomington
Downtown Evanston Farmers Market, Evanston
Edens Place Farmers Market, Chicago
Elgin Harvest Market, Elgin
Englewood-Anchor House Farmers Market, Chicago
F.R.E.S.H. Farmers Market, East St. Louis
Federal Plaza Farmers Market, Chicago
Fresh Beats and Eats Farmers Market, Chicago
GPS Farmers Market, Machesney Park
Garfield Park Community Council Farmers Market (2 markets), Chicago
Green Youth Farm, Waukegan
Growing Power's Fresh Moves Mobile Markets (12 sites), Chicago
Glenview Farmers Market, Glenview
Glenwood Sunday Market, Chicago

Healthy Food Hub - Senior Pop Up, Cook County
Healthy Food Hub - South Shore, Chicago
Healthy Food Hub - Riverdale, Riverdale
Illinois Products Farmers Market, Springfield
La Follette Park Farmers Market, Chicago
Lanark Farmers Market, Lanark
Lincoln Square Farmers Market, Chicago
Logan Square Farmers Market, Chicago
Loyola Farmers Market, Chicago
McKinley Park Farmers Market, Chicago
North End City Market, Rockford
Northbrook Farmers Market, Northbrook
Oak Park Farmers Market, Oak Park
Old Capitol Farmers Market (2 markets), Springfield
Palos Heights Farmers Market, Palos Heights
Park Forest Farmers Market, Park Forest
Park Ridge Farmers Market, Park Ridge
Peoria Riverfront Farmers Market, Peoria
Printers Row Farmers Market, Chicago
Pullman Farmers Market, Chicago
Rockford City Farmers Market, Rockford
Seaway Bank Farmers Market, Chicago
South Halsted Farmers Market, Chicago
South Shore Farmers Market, Chicago
The Land Connection Champaign Farmers Market, Champaign
Trinity UCC Farmers Market, Chicago
Urbana's Market at the Square, Urbana
West Humboldt Park Farmers Market, Chicago
Wicker Park Farmers Market, Chicago
Willis Tower Farmers Market, Chicago
Windy City Harvest Farm - Lawndale, Chicago
Windy City Harvest Farm - Washington Park, Chicago
Woodstock Farmers Market (2 markets), Woodstock

At the 61st Street Farmers Market



Average SNAP basket



Average non-SNAP basket

55%

of SNAP users spent at least to the \$25 match

2016 Survey Results

Both locally and nationally, it has been demonstrated that providing incentives to SNAP recipients to shop at farmers markets and other direct-to-consumer venues increases the quantity of healthy foods they purchase and consume.

Engaging the assistance of the University of Illinois at Chicago Institute for Health Research and Policy, Link Up Illinois undertook a survey of 140 SNAP customers shopping at six Illinois farmers markets (Chicago's 61st Street Farmers Market,

City of Aurora Farmers Markets, Springfield Old Capitol Farmers Market, Northbrook Farmers Market, Urbana's Market On The Square, Woodstock Farmers Market). SNAP customers were asked questions about their shopping behaviors and attitudes, the importance of the Double Value Coupon Program on their decisions to spend their SNAP benefits, their fruit and vegetable intake, their attitudes toward their consumption of fruits and vegetables, their demographics and their perception of their own health.

82% agree that coming to the farmers market has **positively affected their overall health**

96%

state that **DVCP is important when deciding to spend their Link benefits**

96%

report that **DVCP positively affected their fruit and vegetable intake**

99%

come to the farmers market to **purchase fruits and vegetables**

55%

come to **purchase meats, cheeses, and eggs**

30%

state that **the DVCP match limit prevents them from using DVCP more**

39%

come to **enjoy the event or socialize**

"Being able to afford healthy, organic, food like everyone else makes me feel like normal. I may be down, but I'm not out."

Link shopper since 2016

"Matching programs allow me to shop at farmers markets, which affords me healthier options for my me and my kids."

M. K., Link shopper since 2014

Local Economic Impact

591 small scale farmers
and food producers
supported

78 farmers markets
supported

\$738,891 Total economic impact from SNAP, WIC, and DVCP
purchases in 2016 (\$412,788 x USDA multiplier of 1.8)

“Over the past 5-7 years we have noticed almost a 10-15% increase with the Link sales alone. So for our business it has been a wonderful program to have. It’s been a wonderful thing with the matching Link Bucks as well, to be able to give them a little more incentive to keep shopping at the farmers market.” Kenny Stover, Stovers Farm

“Link has definitely impacted our sales. It opens up more opportunities for people in our community. It allows people to shop here that otherwise wouldn't be able to. The DVC's definitely help, because they are able to match up to a certain amount, so they can basically get double the produce. I think it really opens the door to getting healthier foods into people's lifestyles which is the goal of all of us here. I would say that Link & DVCP sales probably account for 15-20% of our overall sales.”

Kalina Mark, Marks Family Farm



Eat Up!

First piloted in 2014 at the Experimental Station's 61st Street Farmers Market, Link Up Illinois' Eat Up! initiative grew to serve 11 Illinois markets in 2016. Through Eat Up!, Link Up Illinois takes and tracks health metrics of participating SNAP customers. SNAP customers learn about their health and which seasonal produce is helpful in lowering blood pressure, receiving with each visit a \$5 reward to purchase fruits and vegetables at the market. Over the years, Eat Up! has grown quite popular, serving close to 200 customers in a single day at Chicago's Division Street Farmers Market. In 2016, 1,225 SNAP customers made 4,940 Eat Up! visits.

With two full years of data logged through our Eat Up! app, Experimental Station aims in Spring 2017 to analyze the data, hoping to demonstrate improved health metrics over time for our farmers market SNAP customers.



Illinois Healthy Food Incentives Fund

With the aim to create a sustainable source of funding for Illinois farmers market SNAP Double Value Coupon Programs, Experimental Station worked with a coalition of health and hunger partner organizations to ensure passage of Illinois House Bill 6027 (Healthy Local Food Incentives Fund). Introduced by State Representative Mike Tryon (R, 66th District) and co-sponsored in the House by Representative Barbara Flynn Currie and 21 additional State Representatives, and in the Senate by State Senator Don Harmon, David Koehler and 14 additional State Senators, the bipartisan bill passed the Illinois General Assembly unopposed in May 2016. Rather than sign HB 6027 as written, Illinois Governor Bruce Rauner issued an Amendatory Veto, cutting the funds

requested in the bill from \$1 million per year to \$500,000. The Amendatory Veto also limited the funding to a single year grant, with a June 2018 expiration, and required that all funds be used for double value incentives, and none for program operations, promotion or administration. While the amendments pose several challenges, Experimental Station does not deem them insurmountable. In November, state legislators succeeded in getting the amended legislation passed once again by the Illinois General Assembly. In January 2017, Governor Rauner signed the bill (Illinois Senate Bill 1367, in its final version), creating Illinois' Healthy Local Food Incentives Fund and making Illinois a national leader in the effort to institutionalize SNAP nutrition incentive funding.

Looking to 2017

Hopeful that Illinois lawmakers will agree on a state budget, Experimental Station expects to see major growth of farmers market SNAP nutrition incentive programs across Illinois, as a result of the passage of the Healthy Local Food Incentives Fund legislation.

Whether Healthy Local Food Incentives Fund monies are allocated or not in 2017, Link Up Illinois is poised for a year of strong program growth.

- USDA Farmers Market SNAP Support Grant (FMSSG) funds will allow Link Up Illinois to continue to expand SNAP acceptance at farmers markets and to provide funding to markets to implement their SNAP programs. In addition, with FMSSG funding, Link Up Illinois, the Illinois Farmers Market Association and Illinois Department of Human Services will produce and distribute to SNAP clients an Illinois Farmers Markets brochure, listing Illinois farmers markets accepting SNAP and doubling SNAP purchases.
- Link Up Illinois will rebrand the Double Value Coupon Program as 'Link Match,' creating a statewide brand.
- With USDA Food Insecurity Nutrition Incentives (FINI) funding, Experimental Station will carry out a summer television advertising campaign on CBS-TV.
- With USDA, municipal, and private foundation funding, Link Up Illinois will provide grants, training and technical support to as many as 70 farmers markets and direct-to-consumer sites.
- In December 2016, Experimental Station applied for a 2017 USDA FINI program grant. With this proposal, working with a number of new partners, including the Cook County Health & Hospitals System, Link Up Illinois seeks to expand Link Match to two new types of sales venue—community health clinics and food cooperatives. If awarded the 2017 FINI grant, patients at participating community health clinics will be able to purchase boxes of fresh produce directly from a local farming cooperative. Patients spending SNAP benefits on their purchase will double the value of their benefits, by receiving a coupon to spend on another box of fresh produce the next time they come.

Link Up Illinois Funders and Partners



City of Chicago
Mayor Rahm Emanuel

CHICAGO DEPARTMENT OF
DCASE
CULTURAL AFFAIRS & SPECIAL EVENTS



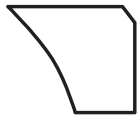
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