



2019 Report



From the Executive Director

Dear friend,

We have said it before, but it must be repeated: Illinois is a food insecure state. Despite the fact that Illinois is one of the nation's top agricultural states, with farmland covering 75% of our land area, we import 96% of our food. Coming from places like California, Mexico, Central America, and China, our food travels thousands of miles to get to us.

Over the past 40 years, in Illinois and other Midwestern states, agriculture has untethered itself from food production, producing for global corn and soy export markets. In doing so, we have put agriculture itself and our food security at risk. The past year alone has laid bare our vulnerability. Unprecedented rainfall that crippled commodity farms, the loss of export markets due to tariffs on farm commodities, and now a trade-paralyzing pandemic have demonstrated the lack of resiliency built into our agriculture and food systems.

Illinois agriculture needs to diversify, and we need Illinois agriculture to grow more food for Illinoisans.

The opportunity is there. With continued rising demand for locally grown fruits, vegetables, meats, and dairy, we can increase the viability of Illinois farms in the face of unpredictable weather, export markets, and whatever else comes our way.

Experimental Station's Link Up Illinois program aims to help create that opportunity. In 2019, Link Up Illinois provided funding, training, and technical assistance to over 100 Illinois farmers markets and food cooperatives across the state to enable them to implement Link Match at their locations. The result: thousands of Illinois' SNAP/Link beneficiaries across the state were able to afford, purchase and enjoy the nutritious fresh fruits and vegetables produced by local farmers, while hundreds of Illinois farmers put more dollars in their pockets, invested in their farms, and supported their local economies.

Since 2011, Link Up Illinois has worked to rebuild the linkages between Illinois' low-income consumers and Illinois farmers, witnessing every year the transformative power of those linkages. In coming years, we look forward to building on the progress we have made, and to helping to make us all healthier and more secure. We are hopeful that you will be there to support us in that effort.



Photo courtesy of Marc Monaghan

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Connie Spreen". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Connie Spreen, PhD

Executive Director
Experimental Station

From the Program Manager

*"Service to others is the rent you pay for your room here on earth."
—Mohammad Ali*

In 2019 our Universal Link Match incentive worked extremely well at partner markets throughout Illinois. Both customers and partners alike appreciated the opportunity to earn the incentive in one location, and the flexibility of spending it at yet another. At the same time we saw an enthusiastic embrace of the program at our retail partner locations. In some instances farmers were able to plant more crops due to increased demand for products as a direct result from Link Match purchasing power. We have heard from countless shoppers and supporters of the program about how gaining access to healthy foods really changed their lives for the better.

So it appears to us that the experiment is working. Making fresh, local produce affordable and accessible to everyone also helps our local farmers and economies. It is our hope and belief that the more we consume local healthy products, the more we positively impact our own and our planet's health and wellbeing.

I am extremely grateful to all of our partners for all the hard work and sacrifice they pour into Link Up Illinois. Together we are making a huge difference in people's lives...one delicious wholesome bite at a time!



A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Corey Chatman". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Corey Chatman

Senior Program Manager
Link Up Illinois

A photograph showing three people at a farmers market stall. In the foreground, a woman in a green sweater and a grey cap is looking down at a SNAP card. In the middle, a woman in a yellow jacket and a black cap is looking towards the camera. On the right, a woman in a blue cap is smiling. The stall is filled with fresh produce, including pumpkins, squash, and leafy greens. A metal fence and a parking lot are visible in the background.

Experimental Station's Link Up Illinois program has been the primary force in bringing SNAP nutrition incentives to more Illinois farmers markets each year.

Overview

Link Up Illinois is a program of Experimental Station, undertaken in partnership with Wholesome Wave 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 and other venues selling locally produced foods. Link Up Illinois was created in 2011 to combat urban and rural food deserts, support local small and mid-size farms, offer lasting health benefits to vulnerable Illinoisans, and advocate for policy change on the state and federal level.

Link Up Illinois achieves these aims by providing farmers markets, other direct-to-consumer venues, food co-operatives, and small grocers across the state with funding to implement Link Match programs for recipients of Illinois Link (federal Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, or SNAP, benefits). In addition, Link Up Illinois provides free EBT (Electronic Benefits Transfer) consulting, funds, training, and technical assistance to ensure successful implementation of these programs. With support from our generous funding partners, Link Up Illinois also provides statewide marketing and promotion.

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, which administers the SNAP program in Illinois.

“Our customers who benefit from this program say it has changed their lives. Sometimes they get emotional when sharing their personal stories with us, which is both humbling and gratifying. We’re grateful for the grant and the support we receive, so that we can continue to help people buy healthy food without breaking their budgets.”

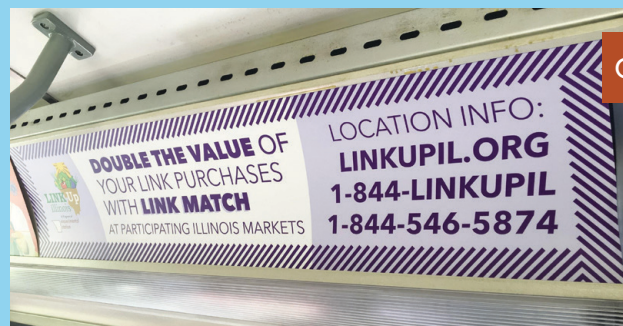
Amy Dion, Loyola Farmers Market

Partners in Promotion

Link Match improves the lives of Illinois' Link recipients only to the degree that they have heard about and use it. Informing Link recipients that they can double the value of their Link benefits with Link Match is a challenging undertaking. First, Illinoisans receiving Link are an ever-changing population. Secondly, many Link recipients need to be persuaded that there is no catch—that when they spend their Link dollars at participating markets, they will simply receive an equal amount of Link Match to spend on fresh fruits and vegetables! Promotion is therefore key to the success of the program.

And, if promotion is key to the program's success, partnership is key to the program's promotion. Link Up Illinois is grateful for the partnership of so many in our effort to promote Link Match to Link recipients across the state in 2019.

Our many Link Up Illinois partner markets carried out advertising on the ground throughout the year. Their efforts were supported by television advertising in Chicago and neighboring counties and targeted statewide social media promotion, undertaken by Experimental Station thanks to our continued partnership with CBS Broadcasting's Community Partnership Division. With the assistance of the Illinois Farmers Market Association and Illinois Department of Human Services, we were able to create and broadly distribute the *2019 Guide to Illinois Farmers Markets Accepting Link, Link Match, WIC & Senior Coupons*. Chicago's Department of Cultural and Special Events, Catholic Charities, the University of Illinois at Chicago, and University of Illinois Extension also helped to get the word out. Finally, all of that, plus targeted promotion on Chicago Transit Authority trains and buses, led to record Link and Link Match sales!



CTA ad



CBS ad

linkupil.org

"I wouldn't be able to shop at the Farmers Market as I do if it weren't for the Link Match program. I love the Farmers Market and it gives me a sense of community that I don't find elsewhere in the city. I am so grateful for the Link Match program—it lets me continue to get fresh produce at the steeper Farmers Market prices while staying within my food budget each week."

Logan Square Farmers Market Link Shopper

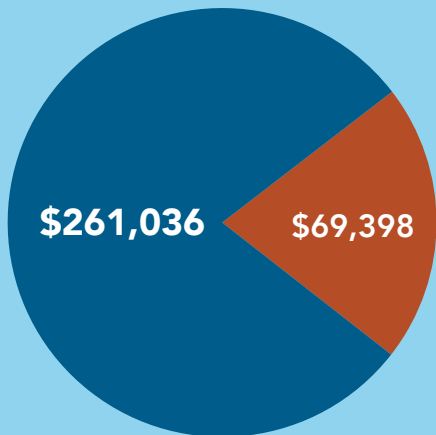
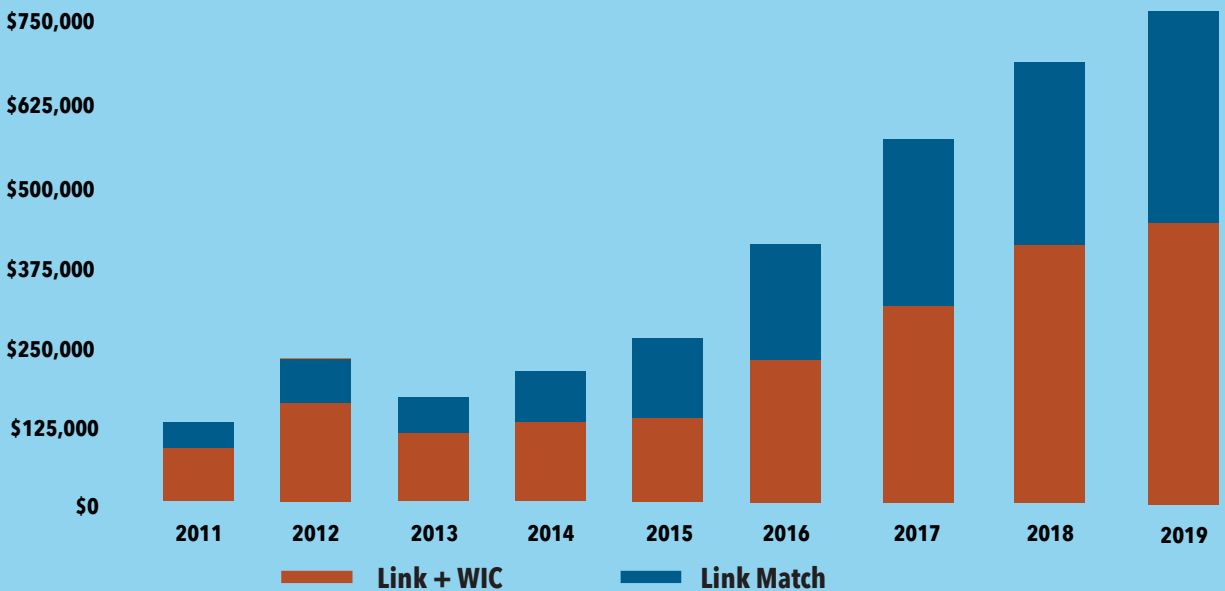
Link Match Across Illinois

With generous support from the USDA Food Insecurity Nutrition Incentive (FINI) Program, the City of Chicago, The Chicago Community Trust, and others, Link Up Illinois was able to grant \$357,081 to 103 farmers markets, 4 food cooperatives, and 1 small grocery to implement Link Match programs in 2019. Together, they distributed \$281,269 in Link Match.

\$747,319

Total Link, WIC, and Link Match purchases among Link Up Illinois Partner and Affiliate Markets

Link, WIC, and Link Match Sales at Link Up Illinois Markets



2019 Illinois Link Redemption

79% of all farmers market Link purchases were at Link Up markets

- Link Up Illinois Partners
- Other Markets

Link Match Builds Community in Downtown Bloomington

Community life has been growing in downtown Bloomington, happening gradually to the pulse of the weekly farmers market.

Catherine Dunlap, downtown development specialist for the city's Economic Development Department, has seen the farmers market grow and provide more food for families as it secures a livelihood for local farmers. But she has also seen it pay unexpected dividends as one of the few public spaces where families from all across the city come together.

Dunlap said that unexpected bonus only started after they joined the Link Up program and started seeing new regulars at the market. One woman who has now been coming for four years "came up to me and said, 'My kids definitely know the difference between fresh fruits and vegetables and the frozen ones and ask to come with me to the market,'" Dunlap said. "I've seen her kids grow up at the market."

Over the past 10 years, the program has brought in nearly \$93,000 in sales for local farmers and that has allowed them to expand and provide more options at the market.

"Troyer Farms started off by just bringing their sweet corn at our market, and now have expanded to a number of items," Dunlap said, listing off zucchini, eggplants, tomatoes and other vegetables the farm now grows for the market.

Those cycles of produce have tapped out a new rhythm to life downtown. Everyone comes out in late June for the peaches. There is a line for sweetcorn as the Fourth of July approaches. Anticipation is always high for the first tomatoes of the season.

"Our farmers market has a direct impact on our businesses too," Dunlap said. "They will come get a coffee and they will visit a gallery too — when they come downtown, they come for the whole experience."

She said the farmers are a primary concern and she is glad to hear Link Match sales now account for up to 5 percent of sales for a lot of the vendors, even as they face more competition from the market's expansion to 35 vendors from 25.

"Every little bit helps," Dunlap said.

Sam Cholke

"Even though the crops were slower this year due to rain, we still did well and were able to make it to our average profit for the year. Link and Link Match are the largest part of our income and the only reason we do the market!"

Dekalb Farmers Market Farmer



Old Capitol Farmers Market

2019 Link Up Illinois Partner Markets

61st Street Farmers Market, Chicago
Alton Farmers and Artisans Market, Alton
Andersonville Farmers Market, Chicago
Aurora Farmers Market, Aurora
Aurora Farmers Market - West, Aurora
Austin Town Hall Farmers Market, Chicago
Batavia Farmers Market, Batavia
Benton Farmers Market, Benton
Bronzeville Farmers Market, Chicago
Carbondale Farmers Market, Carbondale
CCHHS - Cottage Grove Health Center, Ford Heights
CCHHS - Oak Forest Health Center, Oak Forest
CCHHS - Robbins Health Center, Robbins
Columbus Park Farmers Market, Chicago
Community Farmers Market in Carbondale, Carbondale
Daley Plaza Farmers Market, Chicago
DeKalb Farmers Market, DeKalb
Division Street Farmers Market, Chicago
Downtown Bloomington Farmers Market, Bloomington
Downtown Elgin Harvest Market, Elgin
Downtown Evanston Farmers Market, Evanston
Edens Place Farmers Market, Chicago
Englewood-Anchor House Farmers Market, Chicago
F.R.E.S.H. Farmers Market (3 locations), East St. Louis
Faith in Place Winter Farmers Market, Chicago
Federal Plaza Farmers Market, Chicago
Garfield Park Community Council Farmers Market (2 markets), Chicago
Gary Comer Youth Center, Chicago
Glenview Farmers Market, Glenview
Glenwood Sunday Market, Chicago
Green Top Grocery Co-op, Bloomington
Illinois Products Farmers Market, Springfield
IMAN Fresh Beats and Eats, Chicago
La Follette Park Farmers Market, Chicago
Lanark Farmers Market, Lanark
Land of Goshen Farmers Market, Edwardsville

Logan Square Farmers Market, Chicago
Loyola Farmers Market, Chicago
McKinley Park Farmers Market, Chicago
Morton Grove Farmers Market, Morton Grove
Neighborhood Co-op Grocery, Carbondale
North End City Market, Rockford
Northbrook Farmers Market (Affiliate), Northbrook
Oak Park Farmers Market (Affiliate), 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
Pullman Farmers Market, Chicago
Quincy Farmers Market, Quincy
Ravenswood Farmers Market, Chicago
Rockford City Farmers Market, Rockford
Roseland Farmers Market, Chicago
Skokie Farmers Market, Skokie
South Shore Farmers Market, Chicago
Terripin Farm Stand Co-op, Fowler
The Dill Pickle Food Co-op, Chicago
The Land Connection Champaign Farmers Market (Affiliate), Champaign
The Plant Farmers Market, Chicago
Town Square Market, Carbondale
Trinity UCC Farmers Market, Chicago
Ujamaa Co-op Farmers Market (5 markets), Chicago
Urban Growers Fresh Moves Mobile Markets (9 sites), Chicago
Urbana's Market at the Square, Urbana
West Humboldt Park Farmers Market, Chicago
Windy City Harvest Farm - Lake County, Waukegan
Windy City Harvest Farm - Lawndale, Chicago
Windy City Harvest Farm - Washington Park, Chicago
Woodstock Farmers Market (2 markets), Woodstock

Affiliate Markets

A number of Link Up Illinois partner markets raise funds to support their Link incentive programs, in addition to receiving support from Link Up Illinois. Several markets have been so successful in their fundraising that they do not require Link Up Illinois support. In order to tell the complete

story of nutrition incentives in Illinois, we invite these markets to become Affiliate Markets and to share their Link and incentive sales data with us. In 2019, Link Up Illinois Affiliate markets saw almost \$70,000 in Link and nutrition incentive sales!



Universal Link Match

Link Up Illinois made a leap forward this past year with the implementation of a single universal Link Match currency. Piloted in 2018 at Chicago markets, in 2019 it became possible for Link Match earned at one participating farmers market to be spent at any other participating market in the state. What this means for our Link customers is greater convenience. What this means for Link Match is stronger branding recognition statewide.



“Link Match has helped our farm to grow, allowing our family to increase the type and amount of produce we grow! It’s a win win, benefitting both farmers and community members.”

Kurt S., Farmers Market of Carbondale farmer

103 farmers markets supported

5 food co-operatives and groceries supported

The Neighborhood Co-op Serves Southern Illinois

In Carbondale, the Neighborhood Co-op Grocery has become an unexpected place for broad swathes of the Southern Illinois community to come together during difficult times.

The food cooperative nestled between a UPS Store and a realty office in the Murdale Shopping Center is shedding its reputation as the grocery store you need a Ph.D. to shop in and reconnecting with its mission to serve the broader community thanks in part to the Link Up program.

Francis Murphy, manager of the 25-year-old cooperative, said the extra business has helped them serve parts of the city they'd struggled to reach in the past and in the process put a lot more money back into the pockets of local farmers.

"Some of the farmers have reported to us they've been able to double the amount of food they've sold to the food co-op since the program started and they're delighted by the financial success," Murphy said. "They're also excited that there's less waste and they're able to sell what they grow — some farmers have really benefited tremendously."

He reported the co-op was able to redeem over \$14,000 in Link currency last year and all of it went to local farmers.

Southern Illinois farmers produce a bounty of peaches, blueberries and sweet corn. Those local fruits and vegetables had consistently drawn customers to the co-op, but it was previously a very narrow slice of the community, according to Murphy.

"The best predictor of whether someone was going to walk through our doors of our store is their level of education. Many of the people who supported the co-op over the years had Ph.D.s or masters degrees — I'm talking more than half of our customers had advanced degrees." Murphy said. "What that means is co-ops have become a place for people with high levels of education with a lot of disposable income and are predominantly white — it's frankly gotten embarrassing."

With Southern Illinois University's student body contracting and economic pressures making fresh fruits and vegetables harder for more people to access, Murphy said the co-op realized it needed to change. The store moved to the shopping center to be closer where more of the community shopped and joined the Link Up program.

So far, the changes are giving a boost to the co-op and the farmers it works with.

"We're fortunate that we have number of strawberry and blueberry farms around here, and we can sell as many berries as we can get in here," Murphy said. "Peaches and apples are extremely popular with everyone."

He said the customer base is changing and starting to look more like the broader community. He said they're starting to talk to farmers about what additional crops they could grow now that demand is increasing.

It's a bright spot in the farming community around Carbondale and Murphy hopes to increase the diversity of farmers he works with in the future and find ways to incorporate more products from local pecan and nut orchards.



Neighborhood Co-op

Sam Cholke

Impact: Improved Health

Since 2017, Link Up Illinois has partnered with the Cook County Health & Hospitals System (CCHHS) and The Black Oaks Center For Sustainable Living to create Fresh Food Markets at three CCHHS community clinics located in Chicago's southern suburbs. Food insecurity testing at the Robbins, Oak Forest, and Ford Heights CCHHS clinics had revealed high incidence of food insecurity in those areas—meaning there is little, distant, or no access to healthy foods. The markets were created to provide in-clinic access for patients to healthy fruits, vegetables, grains, and other products.

In addition to providing Link Match, market promotion, and technical assistance for the Fresh Food Markets, in 2019 Link Up Illinois undertook a survey evaluation of the Fresh Food Markets' impact on Link shoppers' fruit and vegetable consumption, health status, and farmers market shopping behaviors. The evaluation was led by Dr. Chelsea Singleton (University of Illinois-Urbana/Champaign) and carried out at all three markets.

The snapshot provided by the survey is reflective of a food insecure community: 66% of respondents self-identified as obese, 39% diabetic, 51% with high blood pressure, 6% with cancer. 50% of respondents reported consuming fruit 2 or fewer times per week, while 35% consume vegetables 2 or fewer times per week. Only a quarter to a third reported consuming fruits (26%) and vegetables (29%) 1 or more times per day.

We also learned a lot about the barriers to fruit and vegetable consumption for our Link customers. For some, fruits and vegetables cost too much, they spoil before having a chance to eat them, or they take too long to prepare. Others do not know how to choose or prepare fruits and vegetables, they are still hungry after they eat them or do not even think about fruits and vegetables when hungry. Some contend with their family simply not liking them. For low-income shoppers carefully managing their dollars, these barriers are often prohibitive.

Helping our Link customers overcome such barriers has been a central aim of Link Up Illinois and our many farmers market partners. We congratulate CCHHS and Black Oaks Center on the hard work they have carried out these past three years in doing so. We look forward to seeing their impact continue to grow!

71% report that **coming to the farmers market has improved their health**

66% **shop once or more per week**, while another 12% shop every other week.

78% report that **Link Match positively affected their fruit and vegetable intake**

Batavia Farmers Market



Eden Place Market



At the 61st Street Farmers Market



Average SNAP basket

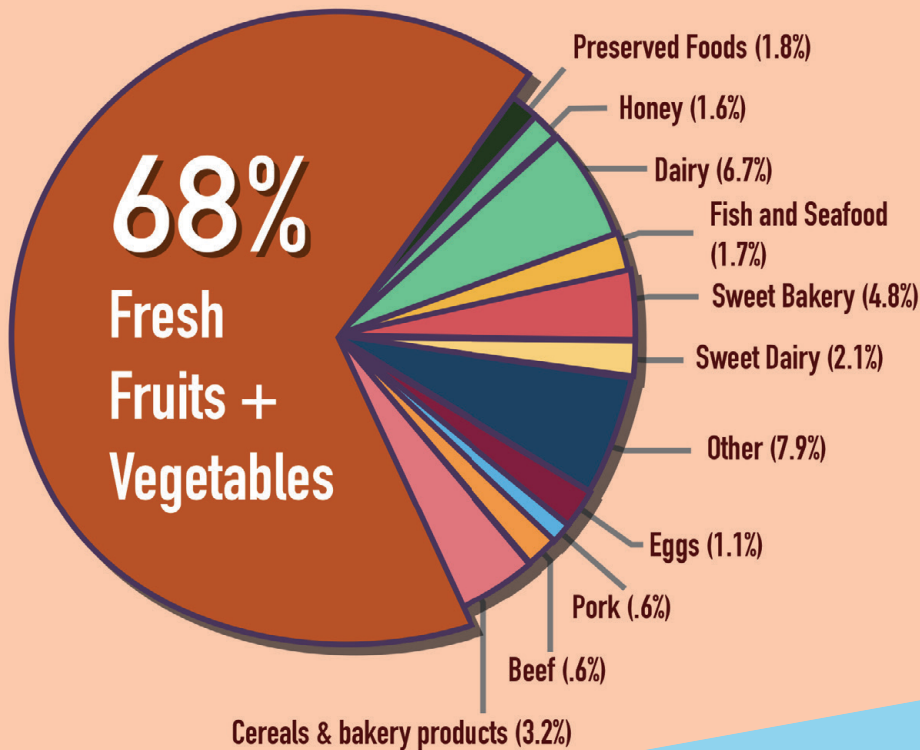


Average non-SNAP basket

51%

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

Link and Link Match Sales by Category



“Link match makes fresh, organically grown produce affordable and accessible for our low-income neighbors. Additionally, it supports small scale farmers and keeps purchases local.”

Wendy Zeldin, 61st Street Farmers Market

99%

of Link Customers state that **Link Match is important when deciding to spend their Link benefits**

86%

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

79%

report that **Link Match positively affected their fruit and vegetable intake**

56%

learned something new about nutrition and healthy eating.

Impact: Local Economic Growth

Link Up Illinois is committed to supporting our local farm economies. Each year, farmers selling their produce at farmers markets offering Link Match tell us that Link and Link Match sales now represent 15-30% of their market revenues. Local farmers selling their produce to food cooperatives offering Link Match have reported seeing their sales rise by as much as 36%. These growing sales translate into increased profitability, new investments in farm infrastructure, and more dollars circulating in the local community.

700+ small scale farmers and food producers supported

\$1,345,174 Total economic impact from Link, WIC, and Link Match sales in 2019 (\$747,319 x USDA multiplier of 1.8)

"The SNAP program has really helped with sales. Almost half of all my sales are from Link Match!"
Illinois Products vendor

"Link Match is essential to providing local nutritional food to communities throughout Chicagoland. Customers love the value that Link Match offers, providing greater access to fruits and veggies while supporting local growers and businesses. This increased engagement helps us thrive as a small business and achieve our goal to create a more sustainable food system."

Alton Farmers Market Manager



Andersonville Farmers Market

Towards a State of Health: Illinois' Healthy Food Incentives Fund

By improving the health of our Link population, Illinois will save tax dollars on Medicaid.

According to the Illinois Department of Health, 12.8% of Illinois' adult population has diabetes, while 37.5% (3.7 million) are prediabetic. Without intervention, 15-30% of those with prediabetes can be expected to develop Type 2 diabetes in the next 5 years (IDPH, "Illinois Diabetes Action Plan, 2018-2020").

The cost of diabetes to Illinois is astronomical—an estimated \$12.2 billion each year. As reported by the Center for Disease Control, Medicaid expenditures associated with diabetes are substantial; Medicaid enrollees with diabetes cost Illinois 1.9 to 2.9 times more than people without diabetes ("Medical Expenditures Associated With Diabetes Among Adult Medicaid Enrollees in 8 States," September 2018).

With a 97.5% eligibility overlap in Illinois between Link and Medicaid, and with Medicaid representing over 27% of Illinois' state budget in 2015, it is clear that by improving the health of our Link population, Illinois will save tax dollars on Medicaid expenditures.

The Healthy Local Food Incentives Fund (Public Act 100-0636), signed into law in 2017 and made permanent in 2018, has been recognized by Illinois lawmakers as an important investment in the health of our Link population and farm economies. However, lawmakers have yet to include the \$500,000 annual appropriation for the program in the state budget.

2020 is the year to get this done!

Spotlight on Success: Sugar Beet Food Co-op

Sourcing local and sustainable produce, food co-ops are natural partners for Link Up Illinois, meeting our aims to provide affordable healthy food and to support local farmers. Joining Chicago's Dill Pickle Co-op and two others in southern Illinois, in 2019 Oak Park's Sugar Beet Food Co-op partnered with Link Up Illinois to launch its Link Match program. Sugar Beet Food Co-op's commitment to Link Match is as impressive as their signage, both of which translated into impressive SNAP sales of \$17,449 in just over 4 months (between mid August and December 31st of 2019)!

Gary Comer Youth Center



Alton Farmers Market



Link Up Illinois Funders and Partners

THE BUILDERS INITIATIVE



Lori E. Lightfoot
Mayor of Chicago
Department of Cultural
Affairs and Special Events



THE CHICAGO
COMMUNITY TRUST
AND AFFILIATES



wholesome
wave



Looking to 2020

Thanks to funding from the United States Department of Agriculture, the City of Chicago, The Chicago Community Trust, and other foundation support, Link Up Illinois will continue to bring Link Match to more Illinoisans in 2020!

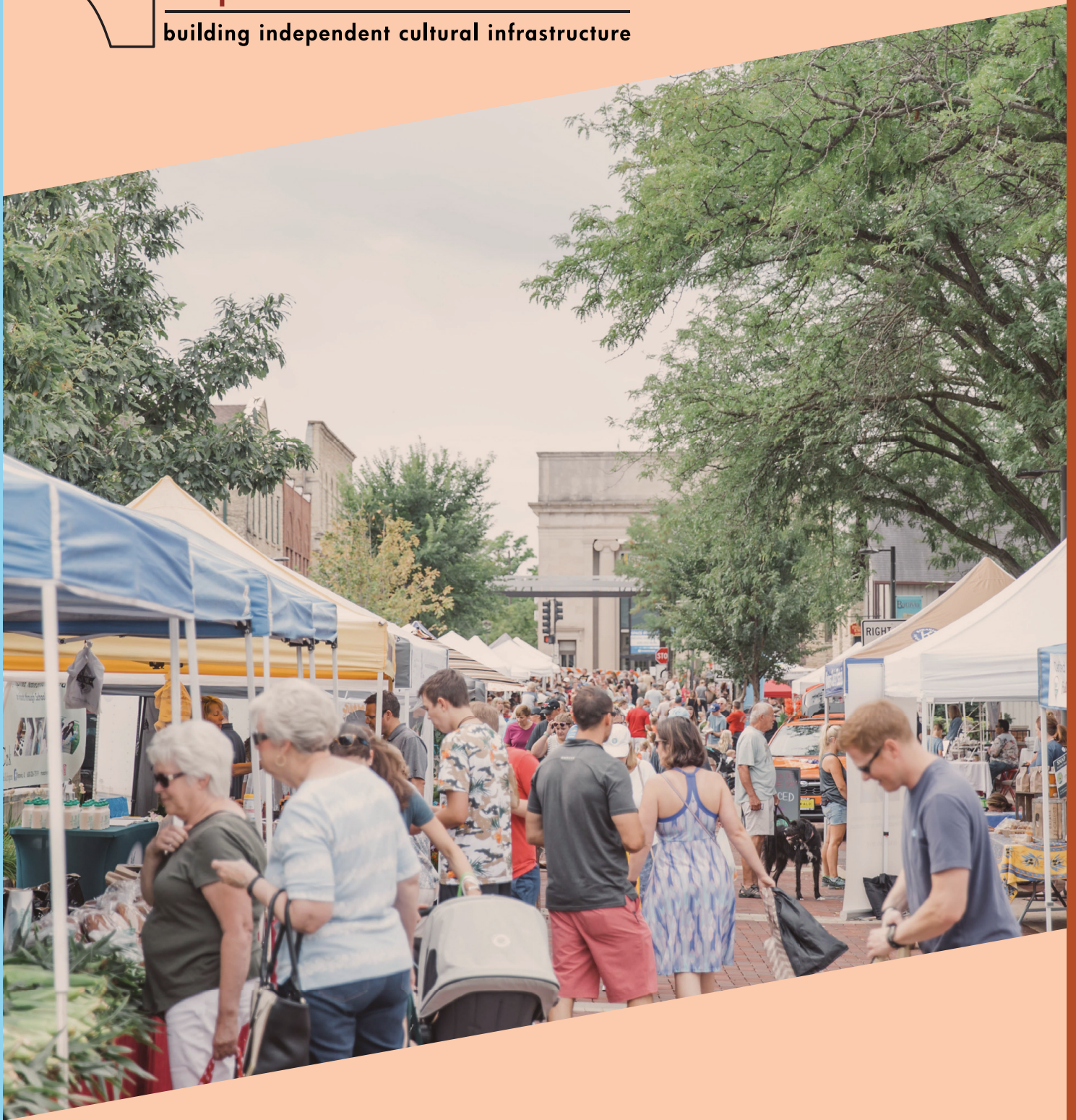
- Experimental Station will continue to work with our coalition of health and hunger sector partners to ensure that the \$500,000 appropriation for the Healthy Local Food Incentives Fund will finally be included in the next state budget. We will also work with state agencies to ensure that, once the appropriation is made, the rules and regulations written for the Fund enable the hard-won dollars to be used effectively.
- Link Up Illinois looks forward to a partnership with the Midwest Independent Retailer Association to bring Link Match to independent grocers in Chicago.
- With increased federal funds for nutrition incentives made available in the 2018 Farm Bill through the USDA's Gus Schumacher Nutrition Incentive Program (GusNIP), Experimental Station will apply for 2021-2023 funding to support our current Link Up Illinois partners as well as to expand our programs and initiatives to Chicago independent grocers and mid-size stores.

"Fresh fruits and vegetables are the first things to be cut from the grocery list when money is tight. Link Match doubles our spending power and helps us make healthier choices while living within a limited budget. Alton Farmers Market Customer

"I burst into tears the first time I used Link Match."
Judy P., Farmers Market of Carbondale Customer



IMAN Farmers Market



linkupil.org @linkupil 773.241.6044
6100 S. Blackstone Ave., Chicago, IL 60637