



# 2017 Report

# From the Executive Director

Experimental Station introduced the Double Value Coupon Program to Illinois in 2009. What are now broadly called 'SNAP nutrition incentives' have become de rigueur at many farmers markets throughout the country. Experimental Station's Link Up Illinois program has been the primary force in bringing SNAP nutrition incentives to more Illinois farmers markets each year. Link Up Illinois ensures that farmers markets have the capacity to accept SNAP (or Illinois 'Link') and provides funding to those markets to implement a nutrition incentive program. Over the past nine years, Link Up Illinois has convincingly demonstrated the desirability and positive impact of SNAP nutrition incentives in supporting the health of Illinois' SNAP population and farming economies.

Recognizing the many benefits of SNAP nutrition incentives to our state, Illinois lawmakers almost unanimously passed the Healthy Local Food Incentives Fund legislation, signed into law by Governor Rauner in January 2017. The new law calls for a \$500,000 annual appropriation to provide SNAP nutrition incentives for Illinois farmers markets. Although the appropriation was not included in the current state budget (we hope to see it included next year), Illinois remains a leader nationally in the effort to institutionalize nutrition incentive funding at the state level.

With an eye to the future, 2017 saw the renaming of the generic Double Value Coupon Program as 'Link Match,' to create a recognizable statewide brand. With increased marketing and brand recognition, Link Up Illinois aims to heighten awareness and demand among SNAP recipients, Illinois farmers, lawmakers and other stakeholders for this program.

That Illinois continues to move forward to support its low-income population and its food-producing farmers is critical. Illinois remains a profoundly food-insecure state, with less than 1% of its farmland being used to produce fruits and vegetables for human consumption. This means that, despite having the best farmland in the world, we are dependent for almost all of the foods we eat on other states and countries. At the same time, current discussions in Washington regarding the 2018 Farm Bill—the legislation that authorizes the SNAP program—threaten to render the already insecure lives of our low-income neighbors ever more precarious.

Experimental Station remains committed to enabling permanent access to affordable healthy, locally produced foods for our state's SNAP population, while supporting food-producing farmers and growing our rural economies. Whether you are a Link Up Illinois partner organization, funding partner, farmers market manager, farmer, advocate, SNAP customer, lawmaker, or other form of stakeholder, we invite you to learn here about what we have accomplished this past year and hope that you will join our 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.

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**Connie Spreen, PhD**

Executive Director  
Experimental Station

# From the Program Manager

*"When we give cheerfully and accept gratefully, everyone is blessed."*  
—Maya Angelou

Today, more than ever, there is a need to cheerfully give and gratefully receive. Link Match, provided by Link Up Illinois, continues to do just that! With cheer we have assisted over 80 sites in Illinois with their Link Match programs this year. Those sites in turn have given access to over \$546,000 worth of local farm fresh foods to SNAP recipients in Illinois. Grateful SNAP recipients supported our local farmers and vendors, thereby strengthening our local agricultural economy. 2017 was an impressive year for the program. Together with our partner markets we helped thousands of SNAP shoppers and small scale farmers. However, the need is great, and there is still more work to do. Here's why.

About 1 in 7 people in Illinois receive SNAP benefits. Of those recipients most are working poor, elderly, or disabled. Over 50% of these benefits go to families with children, with the average benefit for a single-person household being around \$137 per month. SNAP and Link Match sales go directly to the farmers and vendors at the market. And—let's face it—our farmers are struggling to make a living, especially those that grow food you can actually eat! Being a farmer—a steward of the land—is a true labor of love!

As the Link Match program expands, and our ability to help more and more people grows, I feel honored and blessed to be a part of such important work.



**Corey Chatman**

Program Manager  
Link Up Illinois

**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 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 to implement Link Match programs for recipients of Illinois Link 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.



**"[I love] 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."**

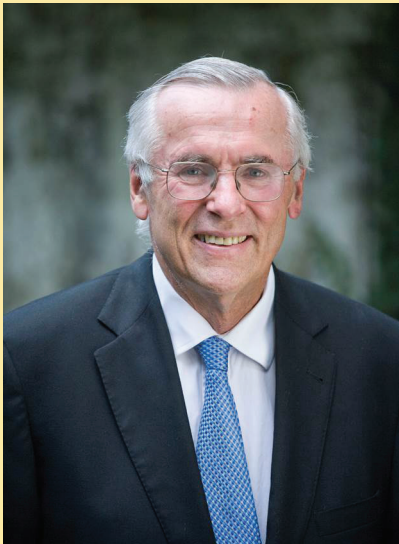
David Oakes, Andersonville Market Manager

**“This is so great! Not only can I use my Link card and still buy local but you’re matching my purchase with even more fresh produce? Best Day Ever!”**

River Rock Link shopper

**“I like that fact that I can meet the farmers that help grow the food. It is a family fun trip to go shopping on Wednesday and teach them about where their food comes from.”**

Andersonville Link shopper since 2015



## Celebrating Gus Schumacher

Experimental Station was deeply saddened this past year with the sudden passing of Gus Schumacher, former USDA Under-Secretary, Wholesome Wave co-founder, and world’s greatest cheerleader for our work. Besides inventing the Double Value Coupon Program with Wholesome Wave CEO, Michel Nischan, and providing key leadership in the 2014 Farm Bill negotiations—which resulted in a \$100 million appropriation for ‘SNAP nutrition incentives’—Gus Schumacher was a man of tremendous grace. Gus knew everyone’s name and everyone’s program, was always ready to make an introduction, was the first to congratulate on a success, and attributed the credit for his many accomplishments to someone other than himself. He was a guide, a friend, and a model for us all. We miss him.

**“I only receive \$16 per month on my Link card, so your \$15 match doubles my spending ability. After the company I worked for 25 years eliminated its pension and left me with no retirement savings, I’m especially dependent on Link. How can you live on Social Security and \$16 per month on Link? This is saving my life!”** Palos Heights Link shopper

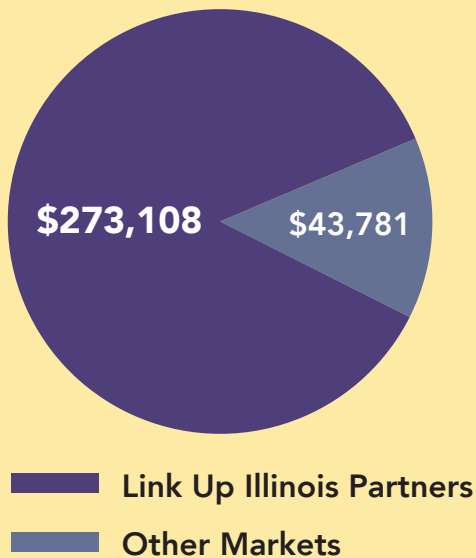
# Expanding SNAP Acceptance

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.

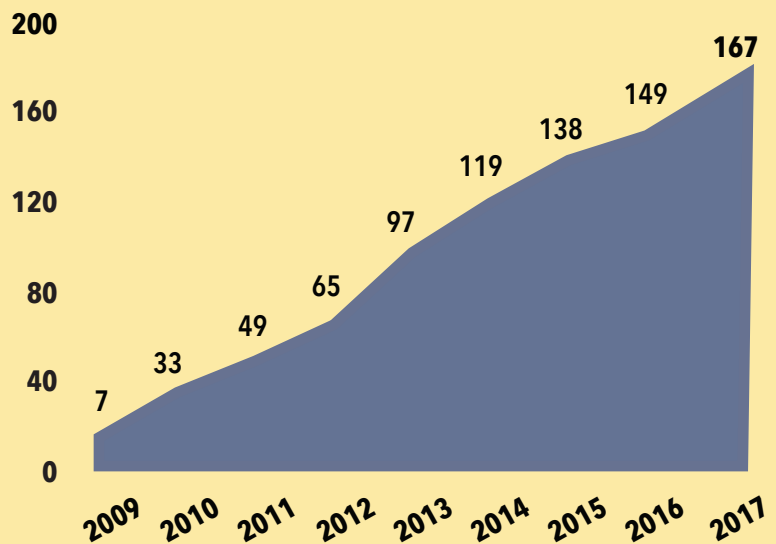
From 2016-2017, with a \$250,000 USDA Farmers Market SNAP Support Grant (FMSSG), Link Up Illinois provided both funding and free SNAP

consulting to 45 Illinois farmers markets to establish and implement EBT/SNAP acceptance. The two-year grants ranged from \$1,500 - \$5,000 per market. FMSSG funding also allowed Link Up Illinois to create and provide a series of farmers market EBT training webinars, carry out a 3-week television advertising campaign ('It's a SNAP!') to promote the use of SNAP at farmers markets, and design and print a farmers market brochure with the Illinois Farmers Market Association and the Illinois Department of Human Services.

## 2017 Illinois SNAP Redemption



## Growth of Illinois Markets Accepting SNAP



## Affiliate Markets

Many Link Up Illinois partner markets raise funds to support their SNAP incentive programs, in addition to receiving support from Link Up Illinois. Several markets have been very successful in their fundraising, no longer needing 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 SNAP and incentive sales data with us. In 2017, two markets operated by Green City Market generated an additional \$22,439 in combined SNAP and incentive sales, bringing the combined impact of SNAP and nutrition incentive sales at Link Up Illinois Partner and Affiliate Markets to \$568,620!

# Link Match Across Illinois

With generous support from the USDA Food Insecurity Nutrition Incentive (FINI) Program, City of Chicago, Chicago Community Trust, and others, in 2017 Link Up Illinois was able to provide funding, training, and technical support to 85 Illinois farmers market sites to implement Link Match programs, granting a total of \$290,334 (including \$250,334 in individual grants and \$40,000 to City of Chicago Farmers Markets).

**The return on that investment was a combined total of SNAP, WIC, and Link Match sales of \$546,181, a 24.35% increase from 2016. Link Match sales alone totaled \$246,218!**

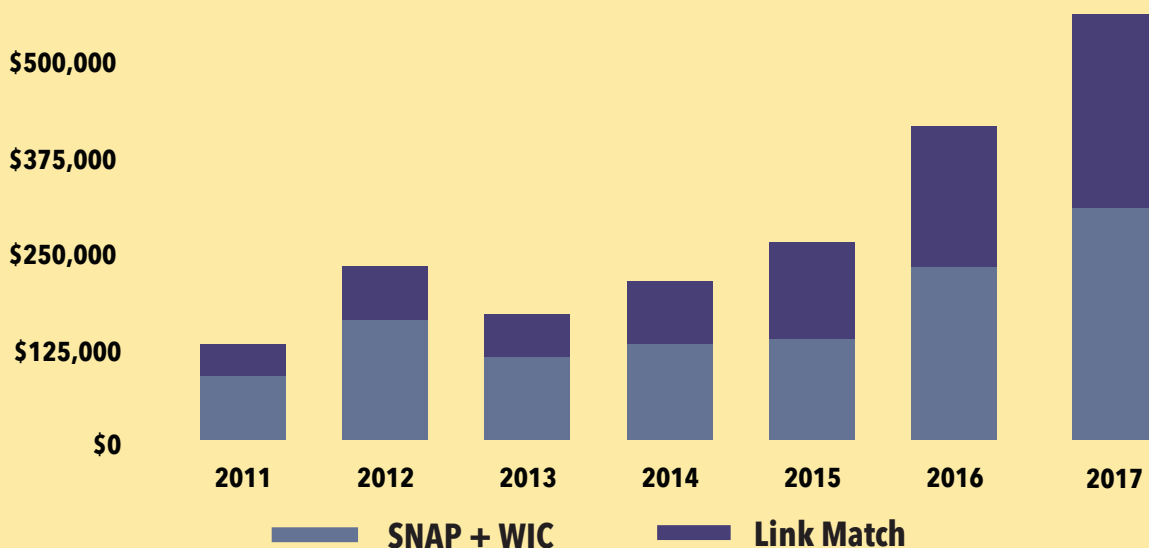
For the first time, in addition to providing support to Illinois farmers markets, Link Up Illinois extended Link Match to two new types of venues: three Cook County community health centers located in south suburban Chicago, and two retail food cooperatives operating in Bloomington and Carbondale.

In partnership with the **Cook County Health & Hospitals System** (CCHHS) and the **Black Oaks Center** in Pembroke Township, Link Up Illinois carried out a food insecurity intervention at

three CCHHS community health centers in Ford Heights, Oak Forest, and Robbins. Through its food insecurity screenings, CCHHS had learned that 15% of their south suburban adult patients are food insecure, with even higher rates for children. To address this problem, together the partners created a weekly 'Fresh Market' at each of the three sites, providing \$10 and \$20 boxes of fresh produce grown by Pembroke farmers and matching Link purchases up to \$20 per day.

In 2017, seeking to increase year-round access for Link customers to fresh fruits and vegetables, Link Up Illinois also partnered with the **Neighborhood Co-op Grocery** in Carbondale and **Green Top Grocery** in Bloomington to introduce Link Match in their brick-and-mortar food cooperatives. Socially oriented and locally sourcing much of the produce they sell, food cooperatives are natural partners. They meet Link Up Illinois' aims to provide affordable access to healthy food for Illinois' low-income population and to support our local farm economies (according to the National Cooperative Grocers Association, the average co-op purchases from 51 local farms and 106 local product producer). Green Top Grocery launched their Link Match program in January 2018.

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



# 2017 Link Up Illinois Partner Markets

**51st Street Farmers Market**, Chicago  
**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  
**Back of the Yards Community Market at The Plant**, Chicago  
**Batavia Farmers Market**, Batavia  
**Blackhawk Courts Farm & Garden**, Rockford  
**Bronzeville Farmers Market**, Chicago  
**Carbondale Farmers Market**, Carbondale  
**Columbus Park Farmers Market**, Chicago  
**Community Farmers Market in Carbondale**, Carbondale  
**CCHHS - Cottage Grove Health Center**, Ford Heights  
**CCHHS - Oak Forest Health Center**, Oak Forest  
**CCHHS - Robbins Health Center**, Robbins  
**CPS - North Lawndale Farmers Market**, Chicago  
**CPS - Roseland Farmers Market**, Chicago  
**Daley Plaza Farmers Market**, Chicago  
**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  
**Faith in Place Winter Farmers Market**, Chicago  
**F.R.E.S.H. Farmers Market**, East St. Louis  
**Federal Plaza Farmers Market**, Chicago  
**GPS Farmers Market**, Machesney Park  
**Garfield Park Community Council Farmers Market** (2 markets), Chicago  
**Gary Comer Youth Center**, Chicago  
**Glenview Farmers Market**, Glenview  
**Glenwood Sunday Market**, Chicago  
**Green City Market (Affiliate)**, Chicago

**Green Youth Farm of Lake County**, Waukegan  
**Growing Power's Fresh Moves Mobile Markets** (12 sites), Chicago  
**Growing Solutions Farm Stand**, Chicago  
**Healthy Food Hub**, Chicago  
**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  
**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  
**Pullman Farmers Market**, Chicago  
**Quincy Farmers Market**, Quincy  
**Ravenswood Farmers Market**, Chicago  
**Rockford City Farmers Market**, Rockford  
**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  
**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

\$41

Average Link basket

\$34

Average non-Link basket

53%

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



## Spotlight on Success: Food Works and Carbondale Farmers Market

In 2016, Experimental Station partnered with Food Works, a non-profit organization dedicated to creating a sustainable food economy in southern Illinois. Through farmer training and consumer education, Food Works promotes long-term farming networks that create healthy soils, healthy food, and healthy communities in the 23 counties that comprise southern Illinois. Supporting farmers markets and SNAP expansion is an important aspect of their mission. In addition to operating the Winter Carbondale Community Farmers Market and supporting SNAP and Link Match processing at the Carbondale Farmers Market, Food Works supports the efforts of Link Up Illinois by engaging farmers markets in the region about accepting SNAP payments.

The Carbondale Farmers Market has been providing fresh and seasonal fruits and vegetables, cultivated mushrooms, meats, pastured eggs, baked goods, and more to southern Illinois since 1975. A diverse mix of multi-generational family farms, sustainable growers, artists, and craftspeople, the Carbondale Farmers Market is committed to bringing the best local food and arts to the market every week during the season.

Experimental Station was thrilled to see that **efforts by Food Works and the Carbondale Farmers Market led to a 154% increase in SNAP and Link Match sales at the Carbondale Farmers Market from 2016 to 2017!**

**85** farmers markets supported



## 2017 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 263 SNAP customers shopping at six Illinois farmers markets (Chicago's 61st Street Farmers Market,

Springfield's Old Capitol Farmers Market, Carbondale Farmers Market, Urbana's Market On The Square, Woodstock Farmers Market, and East St. Louis's F.R.E.S.H. Market). SNAP customers were asked questions about their shopping behaviors and attitudes, the importance of the Link Match 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.

**76%** agree that coming to the farmers market has **positively affected their overall health**

**91%**

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

**86%**

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

**97%**

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

**"Wednesdays during the summer in Chicago are my favorite. I am able to come and shop for fresh local produce, hear live music, and be surrounded by beauty. I think of my Link card as a passport."** Andersonville Link shopper since 2015

**"[Link Match] really helps my family stretch out dollars. The kids can really taste the difference from the veggies we buy at the market to the ones in the store, and they prefer the market produce."**

Downtown Bloomington Link shopper

# Local Economic Impact

**614** small scale farmers and food producers supported

**\$983,125** Total economic impact from SNAP, WIC, and Link Match purchases in 2017 (\$546,181 x USDA multiplier of 1.8)

**“Link and Link Match increase our sales by at least 33%, if not more!”** René Gelder, Ellis Family Farms

**“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. [Link Match] definitely helps, 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 and [Link Match] sales probably account for 15-20% of our overall sales.”**

Kalina Mark, Marks Family Farm



# Spreading the Word

With generous support from the USDA, CBS Broadcasting's Community Partnership Division, and other partners, Link Up Illinois carried out a multi-faceted marketing campaign this past year to build awareness of farmers markets that accept SNAP and offer Link Match incentives.

Created by CBS Community Partnership Division, Link Up Illinois' 'It's a SNAP!' and '1 Link Match!' television advertisements aired approximately 200 times over six weeks during the summer within Cook, Lake, McHenry, Kane, DuPage, and Will counties.

In partnership with the Illinois Farmers Market Association and Illinois Department of Human Services (IDHS administers SNAP in Illinois), for the second year, Experimental Station produced and distributed a *Guide to Illinois Farmers Markets That Accept SNAP* brochure. Listing Illinois farmers markets that accept SNAP, WIC, Senior Farmers Market Coupons, and Link Match incentives, 45,000 copies of the brochure were mailed directly to SNAP recipients by IDHS, while more

were distributed through IDHS offices across Illinois and other ILFMA and Link Up Illinois outreach efforts.

For the second year, Link Up Illinois promotion also found its way onto major Chicago rail and bus lines. Riders were directed to our website and 844 call in number for details about local farmers markets that accept SNAP and Link Match.

Experimental Station's national strategic partner, Wholesome Wave, developed the *You SNAP. We Match.* campaign to provide marketing materials for SNAP nutrition incentive programs. 2017 partners Green Top Co-op Grocery and the Downtown Bloomington Farmers Market successfully rolled out the campaign this winter!

**"Several frequent Link customers got so excited about the Link Match program that they brought their Link shopping friends to the farmers market to shop with them."** Carbondale Farmers Market

**"Many customers hadn't ever been to, or even heard of, our Farmers Market until they heard about Link Match through a social service."**

Alton Farmers Market



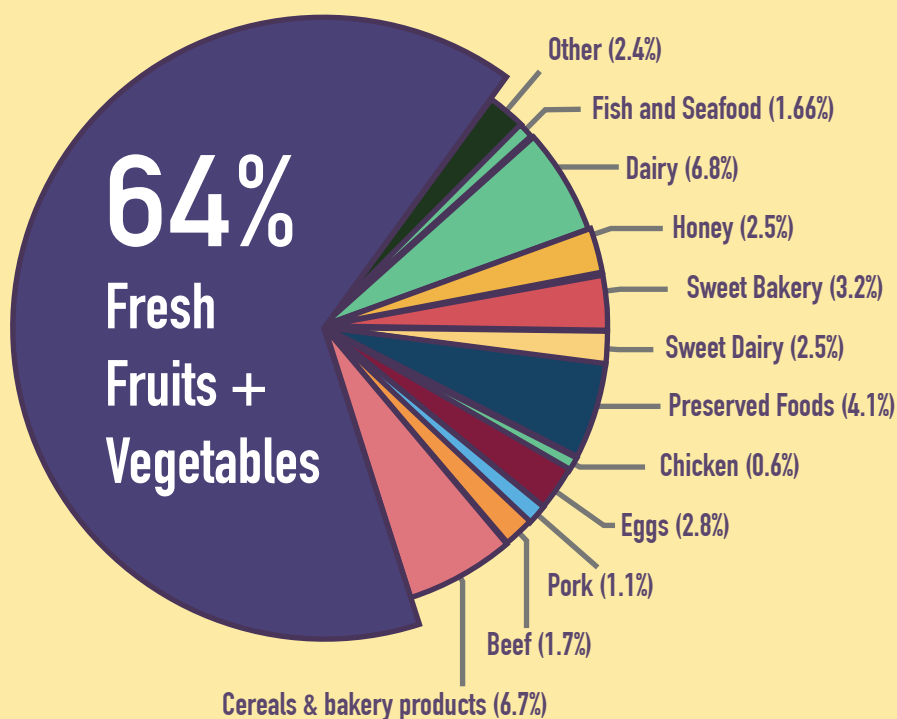
# Eat Up!

First piloted in 2014 at the Experimental Station’s 61st Street Farmers Market, Link Up Illinois’ Eat Up! initiative grew to serve 5 markets in 2015 and 11 Illinois markets in 2016. Through Eat Up!, Link Up Illinois takes and tracks health metrics of participating SNAP customers. Additionally, SNAP customers learn which seasonal produce is helpful in lowering blood pressure and receive with each visit a \$5 reward to purchase fruits and vegetables at the market. With two full years of data logged through our Eat Up! app, in 2017, researchers at the University of Illinois at Chicago Institute For Health Research and Policy analyzed the data.

We learned that:

- 1,408 SNAP customers visited the Eat Up! tent, with 360 customers visiting 5 or more times, 170 visiting 10 or more times, and even one customer visiting 51 times!
- The primary demonstrable benefits of Eat Up! to SNAP customers were to provide continued awareness of their health status, to offer nutrition education in a convivial environment, and to enable SNAP recipients to purchase even more healthy food.

## Link and Link Match Purchases by Category at the 61st Street Farmers Market



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

Illinois has the opportunity to improve the health of our low-income population and to reduce the high cost of diabetes to our state.

According to the American Diabetes Association, diabetes and pre-diabetes cost Illinois an estimated \$12.2 billion each year. Currently, 12.8% of Illinois' adult population has diabetes, with another 37.5% of Illinois' adult population estimated to be pre-diabetic. It has also been demonstrated that low-income populations, lacking access to fresh fruits and vegetables, are twice as likely to suffer from Type II diabetes and accompanying complications (James Levine, "Poverty and Obesity in the U.S.," American Diabetes Association, *Diabetes Journal*, November 2011). Care for low-income Illinoisans with diabetes—often Medicaid recipients—costs 2-3 times more than non-diabetics in direct medical costs.

2017 saw the signing of the Healthy Local Food Incentives Fund bill by Governor Bruce Rauner, making Illinois a national leader in the effort to

institutionalize SNAP nutrition incentive funding. Although signed into law, the Fund did not receive its \$500,000 annual appropriation in the 2018 state budget. Consequently, Experimental Station continues to work with a statewide coalition of health and hunger partner organizations (American Diabetes Association, American Heart Association, Illinois Alliance to Prevent Obesity, Illinois Stewardship Alliance, Illinois Farmers Market Association, Consortium to Lower Obesity in Chicago's Children, Greater Chicago Food Depository, and others) to encourage Illinois lawmakers to appropriate the funds in this next year's budget and to remove a June 2019 expiration date. If these efforts are successful, the Healthy Local Food Incentives Fund will ensure an ongoing source of funding for SNAP nutrition incentive programs and help to put Illinois back on the road to health.



## Looking to 2018

Thanks to funding provided by the United States Department of Agriculture, City of Chicago, The Chicago Community Trust, and other foundation support, Link Up Illinois will live on to bring Link Match to more Illinoisans in 2018!

- We aim to provide funding, training, and technical support for as many as 90 Illinois farmers market sites.
- We will work with four food cooperatives to implement Link Match programs in their brick-and-mortar retail stores.
- We will pilot a universal currency for Link Match at Chicago farmers markets.
- In partnership with CBS Community Partnership Division, we aim to provide television advertising in the seven counties located in the northeastern corner of the state and to promote Link Match statewide through targeted mobile phone and email advertising.
- We will continue to educate our state legislators about the benefits of SNAP nutrition incentives.



**“Fresh fruits are a luxury we usually can’t afford, but with Link Match we can!”**

Downtown Bloomington Link shopper

**“All of the farms who participated saw a boost in sales and are very excited that we are a part of the program.”**

Alton Farmers Market

## Link Up Illinois Funders and Partners



City of Chicago  
Mayor Rahm Emanuel

CHICAGO DEPARTMENT OF  
**DCASE**  
CULTURAL AFFAIRS & SPECIAL EVENTS



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