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Update on the use of LINK cards (Food Stamps) in Illinois Farmers Markets

Public Act 96-1088: Farmers' Market Technology Improvement Program

House Sponsors

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Senate Sponsors

(Sen. [Toi W. Hutchinson](#) - [Linda Holmes](#) - [Mattie Hunter](#) - [A. J. Wilhelmi](#) - [David Koehler](#), [William Delgado](#) and [Jacqueline Y. Collins](#))

Key Stakeholders for this legislation:

Experimental Station, Illinois Farmers' Market Network, Harvest America, Green City Market, Chicago Department of Family and Support Services, Illinois Local Food & Farms Coalition, Chicago Food Policy Advisory Council, Illinois Food, Farms and Jobs Council, Center for Excellence in Elimination of Disparities (UIC), Consortium to Lower Obesity in Chicago Children (CLOCC), Wholesome Wave, Office of the Lieutenant Governor, and others

Key Provisions of the Law Enacted:

(a) The Department of Human Services and the Department of Agriculture shall implement a Farmers' Market Technology Improvement Program. The purpose of this program is to increase access to fresh fruits and vegetables and other LINK eligible food products, including quality meat and dairy, for all Illinois residents by allowing LINK program participants to redeem their SNAP benefits at farmers' markets. The Department of Human Services and the Department of Agriculture shall solicit federal and State funding for the purpose of implementing this program.

(b) The Farmers' Market Technology Improvement Fund is created as a special fund in the State Treasury for the purpose of implementing the Farmers' Market Technology Improvement Program. All monies received pursuant to this Act shall be deposited into the Farmers' Market Technology Improvement Fund. Funding for the program must be used for one or more of the following purposes: (1) The purchase or rental of wireless point of sale terminals capable of processing SNAP benefits disbursed under the LINK program; (2) Monthly or transaction fees associated with LINK card transactions. No fees related to credit or debit transactions will be reimbursed; (3) Outreach to LINK program participants.

PROGRESS AND UPDATE – OCTOBER 12, 2011:

1. Illinois ranks 4th in the nation in the number of farmers markets, with 315. 45 Illinois farmers markets now accept LINK, up from 25 last year. A list of these farmers markets can be found at www.lashawnford.com.
2. From 2009 to 2010, LINK sales at statewide farmers markets grew from \$11,000 to \$41,000. In 2010, there were \$29,000 in LINK sales in the City of Chicago at 5 markets. In 2011, the City's program is on track for a 40-50% increase in sales at 10 farmers markets in the City.
3. Barriers to greater usage include: funding to obtain the wireless technology necessary for accepting the electronic benefits transfer (EBT) card and for covering the service fees and outreach; trained staff for operating the machines, accounting, writing checks to farmers, collecting data; consumer education on the use of goods purchased at farmers markets; transportation of consumers to markets; and the stigma associated with being on LINK.
4. LINK Up Illinois, a program of Experimental Station (with Wholesome Wave and Illinois Farmers Market Network), aims to increase healthy food access by doubling the value of LINK purchases at farmers markets. This incentive program has spurred jumps in sales at participating farmers markets, such as a 555% increase in LINK sales on the first day at Illinois Products Farmers Market in Springfield.
5. Momentum continues to build, and private organizations and government agencies are working from all angles to expand these types of programs to provide better access to better nutrition for all.