



The Farmers Market.co

2012 End-of-Season Report

April 2012 – December 2012



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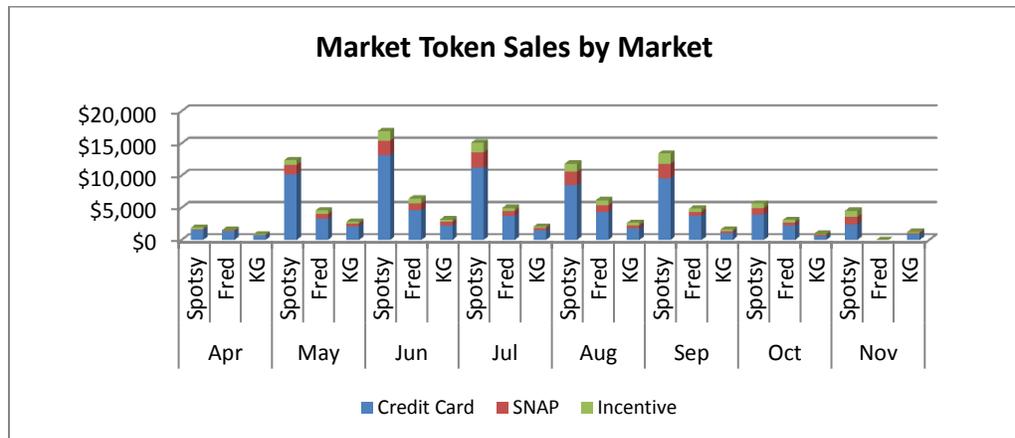
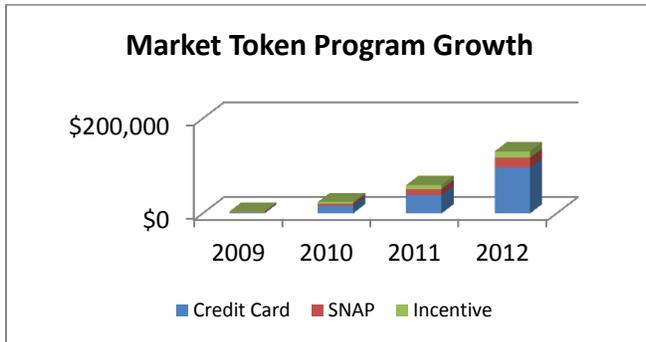


Market Token Program

As a regional farmers market network, The Farmers Market.co operates a Market Token Program at four farmers markets in Spotsylvania, Fredericksburg, and King George. **These markets serve over 100,000 visitors per year, and contribute an estimated \$1.5 million to the local farm and food economy.** The Market Token Program promotes local food access and affordability by operating a centralized wireless card reader to assist consumer purchases and to build new revenue for farmers. The program allows Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP, formerly Food Stamps) participants to use their Electronic Benefit Transfer (EBT) cards to shop at these farmers markets with \$1 market tokens. Market shoppers can also use their credit cards to acquire \$5 market tokens, which are used like cash while purchasing at the markets.

Research shows that every \$5 in new SNAP benefits generates up to \$9 of economic activity (The Food Assistance National Input-Output Multiplier Model and Stimulus Effects of SNAP, USDA/ERS 2010)

In 2012, customers purchased \$131,097 in market tokens across the four farmers markets in which The Farmers Market.co operates. This is **more than double the \$59,962 that was distributed in 2011**, continuing the exponential growth of the Market Token Program since it was instituted at the Spotsylvania Farmers Market in 2009.

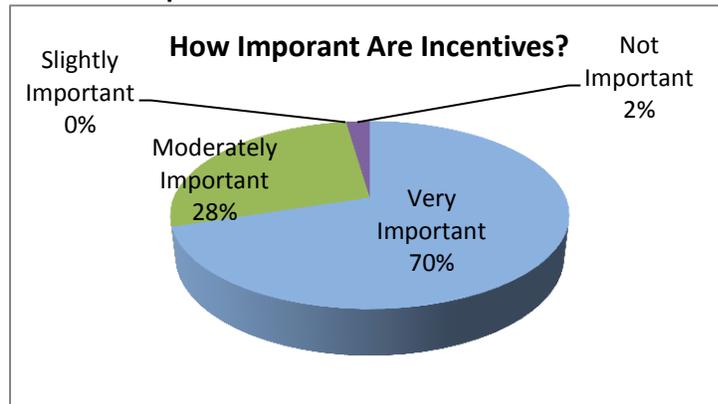


Nutrition Incentive Program

In collaboration with the George Washington Regional Commission (GWRC), The Farmers Market.co seeks to improve access and affordability of fresh, locally grown fruits and vegetables for SNAP consumers at area farmers markets. **Leveraging seed funding provided by the USDA Farmers Market Promotion Program and Specialty Crop Block Grants**, The Farmers Market.co established and operates a Nutrition Incentive Program for SNAP participants.

A growing number of SNAP consumers struggle to put fresh food on the family table. According to the Virginia Department of Social Services, as of December 2012, there are 19,170 persons receiving SNAP benefits in the three localities with a total monthly issuance of \$2.5 million. By attracting federal benefit dollars to be spent at the farmers markets, these funds remain in the local economy.

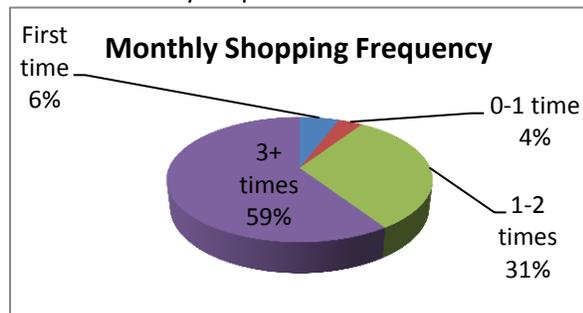
Each week, the Nutrition Incentive Program **matches the first \$10 of SNAP purchases to increase the buying power of low-income families.** By effectively doubling federal benefit dollars, the Nutrition Incentive Program benefits both the consumers and farmers. The matching incentives help residents purchase more fresh fruits and vegetables than they could with just their federal benefits. **Over two-thirds of SNAP shoppers said that the Nutrition Incentives were very important to their decision to spend their benefits at the farmers market instead of elsewhere.** The Farmers Market.co



has established partnerships with Social Services, Community Health, feeding agencies and faith-based organizations to successfully provide direct outreach to low-income families. **In 2012, \$20,542 in SNAP benefits were matched by \$13,782 in nutrition incentives, which represents an over 60% growth from 2011 (SNAP - \$12,181, Incentives - \$8,637).** Combined with over \$96,000 in credit card sales, the

Market Token Program had **significant impact on the revenues of the more than 65 local producers** who sell at The Farmers Market.co markets, promoting a growing and sustainable regional food system.

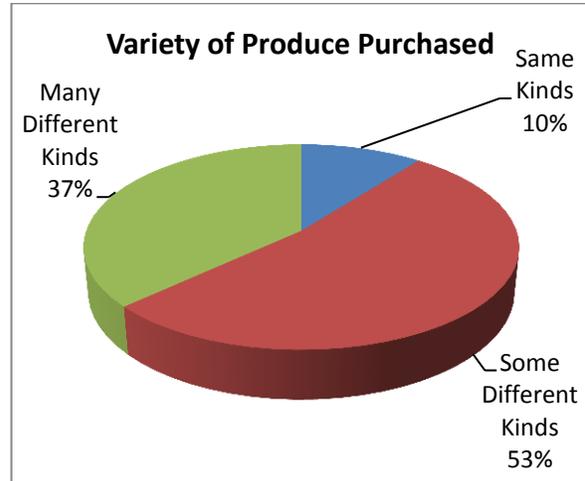
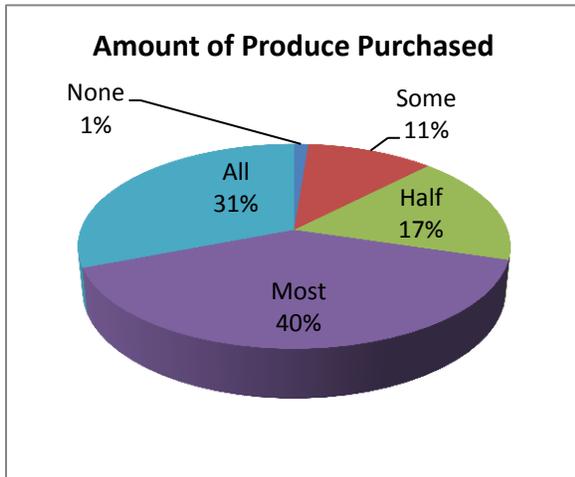
The community response to the Nutrition Incentive Program has been very positive. A young mother of



two says: "I think a lot of families would love to hear about the program for families that are on Food Stamps. **In addition to the monthly SNAP credit, the extra \$10 matching program at the farmers market really helps me with my quest to eat healthy. It's like having an extra \$40 a month for groceries, and double the vegetables!** I can't wait till it opens again, because this program has helped my family

tremendously!" Because of their enthusiasm, SNAP shoppers are visiting the farmers market often, with **1459 EBT transactions and 411 new SNAP shoppers in 2012.**

A mid-season survey of SNAP customers demonstrated the positive impact the Nutrition Incentive Program has made on their purchase and consumption of fresh fruits and vegetables. SNAP shoppers indicated that **during the market season, they were buying most of their fresh fruits and vegetables at the farmers market.** In addition the **amount of fruits and vegetables that they are eating has increased substantially,** as has the variety of what they eat.



Education Program

Another aspect of The Farmers Market.co's mission is educating our customers about **all aspects of seasonal fresh food production, selection and preparation.** To support this mission, The Farmers Market.co provided space at their markets for **Master Gardeners** to offer informational materials and answer customer questions about plants and plant management. The Farmers Market.co also established a partnership with the **Central**

Rappahannock Regional Library, providing market space from which librarians displayed, and checked out, gardening books, cookbooks and other food-related books.

Vegucation Station a big hit; now the encore!

"What a hit! The program ran all summer at the markets, made stops at a few local schools this fall, and ended the year at the King George Holly Jolly Holiday Market", writes Pegi Wright in the Free-Lance Star on 4 January 2013.



In 2012, The Farmers Market.co, **in partnership with Virginia Cooperative Extension and other healthy food advocates,** developed a fresh-food education program, the **Vegucation Station.** This new

program is **designed to increase awareness and consumption of Virginia-grown fruits and vegetables.** The Vegucation Station offers seasonal fresh food education using fresh fruits and vegetables provided by the producers at the farmers markets. A typical weekly instruction would include food demonstrations, sampling and recipes.

Opportunities and Challenges of a Growing Regional Food Economy

The 2012 market season was a banner one for local foods in The Farmers Market.co markets. **Strong consumer demand and abundant production** made for a flourishing year. A **new weekday market was launched** at Spotsylvania Regional Medical Center in May, adding a successful new retail agriculture channel that **links healthy eating and community health.** Matt Lohr, Virginia's Commissioner of Agriculture and Consumer Services officially opened the market.

Visits by several ranking governmental officials highlight our successful 2012 season. In July, **USDA Under Secretary Edward Avalos** visited two local markets, to highlight the successful use of Farmers Market Promotion Program and Specialty Crop Block Grants funding. Under Secretary Avalos conducted a follow up farm visit to Ochoa Produce in Warsaw, Virginia in September. First District **Congressman Rob Wittman** also visited the Wednesday Spotsylvania Farmers Market to dialog with producers and shoppers from his district.

The Farmers Market.co continued **our long time partnership with national charitable ventures foundation Wholesome Wave**, which provides advocacy, technical assistance, data collection and access to a learning community around healthy food access. Our partnership with Wholesome Wave brought us together with other Mid Atlantic partners to work on common issues arising in the support SNAP and nutrition incentives on a broader scale. We also **actively partnered with Virginia Cooperative Extension, Virginia Department of Social Services and the Virginia Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services.** The Farmers Market.co market managers have played a key role in the establishment of the new Virginia Farmers Market Managers Association (VFMMA) leveraging their experience with market token and nutrition incentive programs statewide.

Many new opportunities continue to emerge in the regional food system for The Farmers Market.co, **from food hub prospects to healthcare promotions to farm share programs.** Grassroots local food organizations, such as The Farmers Market.co, continue to be on the frontlines of community food system development. Direct community support is needed to further the momentum of our efforts. **Please visit TheFarmersMarket.co to make a contribution to support the Nutrition Incentive Program for the upcoming season.**

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