

Background

In 2017, Buy Fresh Buy Local of the Greater Lehigh Valley – working with the Kellyn Foundation, Lehigh Valley Health Network (LVHN) and the Healthy Corner Store Initiative (HCSI), and St. Luke's University Health Network (SLUHN) – piloted Double SNAP incentives in three Lehigh Valley Healthy Corner Stores. One store was selected in each city (Allentown, Bethlehem and Easton) based on proximity to area food deserts/low-income neighborhoods, as well as through references from other store owners.

Double SNAP provides people using food stamps, or the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), with \$10 per day in matching funds to buy fresh, local produce. The program is primarily funded through a 2017 Food Insecurity Nutrition Incentives (FINI) program grant through the USDA's National Institute of Food and Agriculture; funding assistance was also provided by the Two Rivers Health and Wellness Foundation and a Lehigh Valley Community Foundation 50th Anniversary Spark grant.

Participating Double SNAP Healthy Corner Stores in 2017 were:

- Allentown – Jayden Grocery & Deli, 802 S. 8th St., Allentown (beginning in July)
- Bethlehem – Rodriguez Family Grocery, 802 E. 5th St., Bethlehem (beginning in September)
- Easton – 12th Street Market & Deli, 1201 Bushkill St., Easton (beginning in June)

Prior to launching the program in each store, BFBLGLV and the Kellyn Foundation met with store owners to discuss the program goals and requirements. As part of the agreement to participate in Double SNAP, each corner store also agreed to participate in the HCSI, coordinated by LVHN. Stores also were required to source locally grown produce to participate. (While the purchase of any SNAP eligible item is able to trigger the incentives, incentive dollars can only be spent on local items.)

Kellyn served as the wholesale purchaser/distributor of local and non-local food items, noting on order forms which items were eligible for Double SNAP incentive purchases. Kellyn arranged pick-up and/or delivery for the stores on a rolling basis, filling orders as needed through the season. The stores were not required to source through the Kellyn Foundation, but were offered the opportunity.

BFBLGLV served as a value chain coordinator throughout the process and also managed and paid DS incentive reimbursements. BFBLGLV also developed signage and outreach materials, promoted the corner stores through various platforms, worked to help store owners trouble-shoot problems and distributed and collected surveys.

LVHN provided organizational support through the HCSI program; and SLUHN assisted with broad outreach efforts through clinical staff and support networks.

Purchasing

Through the pilot program, the three stores sourced more than 2,379 pounds of food grown in the Lehigh Valley. This number is likely significantly higher because it does not reflect the items such as cabbages or berries, which were not priced by weight (efforts to reflect these purchases in reports are

underway). Produce was sourced from eight different local farms. In total, the stores purchased \$3,835.33 in local produce from June through December.

Double SNAP Redemption

Redemption of Double SNAP incentives at the corner stores was far more successful than expected. In 2017, corner stores reported 768 Double SNAP transactions. A total of \$5,628.52 worth of free locally grown, fresh fruits and vegetables was distributed to people using SNAP at these locations over the course of the season.

	2016	2017	Corner Stores only
Number of Transactions	1,148	2,706	768
Total EBT Sales	\$15,635.78	\$33,152.22	\$9,552.77
Total Double SNAP Sales	\$10,344.8	\$20,453.53	\$5,628.52
Total Sales	\$24,588.89	\$53,438.75	\$15,181.29
\$EBT/Transaction	\$13.64	\$12.25	\$12.44
\$Double SNAP/Transaction	\$6.35	\$7.56	\$7.33

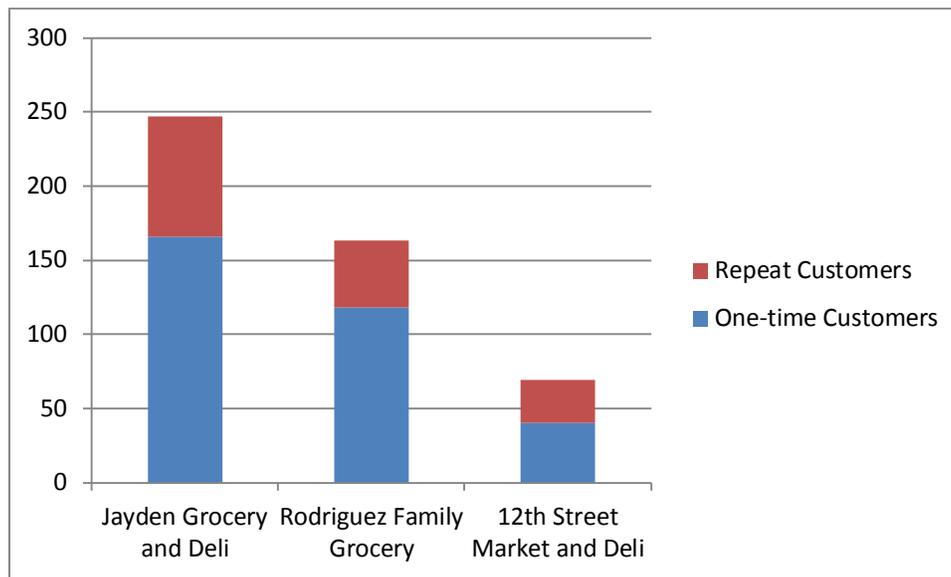
Corner stores transactions accounted for more than a quarter (28%) of all Double SNAP transactions and sales in 2017. Given that there are more than 30 locations where customers can access the Double SNAP program across the Lehigh Valley, the number is significant. EBT sales at these locations also accounted for about 30% of total sales that triggered SNAP incentives, indicating that the targeted areas – corner stores in neighborhoods with high rates of SNAP utilization – were on point.

In 2017, Double SNAP transactions more than doubled across the Lehigh Valley, with the number of corner store transactions accounting for just over half of the increase (51%).

Customers

There were 479 unique customers using the Double SNAP program at a corner store from June through December 2017. Of those customers, 155 (32%) were repeat visitors who used the Double SNAP incentives more than once during the season.

- 12th St. Market and Deli - 69 unique customers, 29 repeats (42%) [June-Dec]
- Rodriguez Family Grocery - 163 unique customers, 45 repeats (28%) [Aug-mid Nov]
- Jayden Grocery and Deli - 247 unique customers, 81 repeats (33%) [July-Aug, mid Nov-Dec]



Challenges

Despite the success of the pilot phase, challenges in corner store implementation remain.

- **Store Owner Turnover:** Sale of the corner stores themselves led to program delays at both Rodriguez and Jayden during the course of the year. Jayden's owner had recently purchased the store when incentives began and was required to register for a new FNS number. This process removed Jayden from the incentive program from September to late November (harvest season!) because they could not accept SNAP benefits as payment. The owner of Rodriguez sold the store in mid-November. We are currently awaiting news of the new owner to continue incentives there. Store owner turnover is a common problem in the HCSI, as well, requiring repeated re-enrollment of the same stores as new owners take over.
- **Store Owner Knowledge:** There have been some issues with the store owners improperly storing or displaying local produce. Efforts to educate store owners to maintain attractive and healthful displays are needed. LVHN's HCSI could serve as an educator in this capacity.
- **Supply/Demand:** Corner store purchasing could eventually represent a boon for local farmers looking to break into the wholesale market; however, many small GLV farmers are not focusing on a wholesale model. The supply of cold storage crops to carry the program through the winter months is also a challenge that should be addressed in the 2018 season. A separate BFBLGLV project is currently looking at the feasibility of increasing wholesale supply and generating additional demand.
- **Infrastructure:** Although Kellyn is a mission-driven organization with the goal of improving access to healthy foods in underserved areas, efforts to make distribution economically viable are needed. Additional work is being done in tandem with the Double SNAP program to assess the infrastructure needs of local aggregators.

Lehigh Valley Healthy Corner Stores
Double SNAP 2017 Pilot Results

- Funding: The program's astounding initial success, coupled with program growth across all outlets has created a funding challenge. Additional funds will be needed to not only expand the incentive program to additional corner stores in 2018 and beyond, but to keep up with growth at current stores. Without additional funding to cover incentives at the stores, the program may have to be altered to offer a lesser incentive (for example, a halving the incentive offered at the stores) or eliminated. It is estimated that in 2018, each store will need between \$5,000 and \$15,000 in incentives for the year, depending on location.