



Background

Buy Fresh Buy Local of the Greater Lehigh Valley, a program of the Nurture Nature Center, was awarded a Food Insecurity Nutrition Incentives (FINI) program grant in 2017 to expand its incentive program for low-income residents purchasing local fruits and vegetables. The goal of the FINI grant program is to increase fruit and vegetable consumption among SNAP beneficiaries. Survey results show that the BFBL program is a success: Since the launch of the program in 2015, more customers using the benefit report that they eat fresh (non-fried) vegetables more than once per day and eat fresh fruit at least once per day.

The Lehigh Valley Fresh Food Bucks program provides a 1:1 match (up to \$10 per day) for people using SNAP to buy more local fruits and vegetables at farmers markets, farm stands and stores, and farm shares. SNAP is the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, formerly called food stamps.

In 2017, BFBLGLV expanded the program across the Lehigh Valley, as well as pilot incentives in several Healthy Corner Stores with a focus on areas designated by USDA as having low fresh-food access. Our partnership with the Kellyn Foundation made local sourcing by corner stores possible: the Foundation sources wholesale produce from local growers across the region and serves as the distributor to the stores. This arrangement allows the stores to purchase smaller amounts of produce than other types of wholesale distributors may have demanded, while keeping the cost of produce low enough to make it affordable for store owners and residents.

A list of participating locations is available online at www.lvfreshfoodbucks.org. More locations will be added throughout the grant period.

Grant partners include Lehigh Valley Health Network; St. Luke's University Health Network; the Kellyn Foundation; and the Greater Easton Development Partnership. Funding has also been provided by Two Rivers Health and Wellness Foundation, a Lehigh Valley Community Foundation 50th Anniversary Spark Grant, and United Way-Greater Lehigh Valley.



Fresh Food Bucks Rebranding

In 2018, the program formerly known as Double SNAP was rebranded as Lehigh Valley Fresh Food Bucks. This rebranding effort was launched to address confusion about the program's previous name (customers were not familiar with the term SNAP), as well as to bring the name in-line with other SNAP incentive programs across the nation.

Incentives

The number of Fresh Food Bucks transactions and the dollar value of incentives issued across the Lehigh Valley increased by 18% and 19% in 2018, respectively (vs. 2017). Significantly, the percentage of incentives redeemed increased by 10 points, indicating that customers were either using farmers market



tokens they had obtained during previous years or were more fully spending tokens purchased in 2018. Incentives were offered at more than 30 locations throughout the season, including six corner stores.

Table 1. SNAP incentive use since 2016 (pilot phase).

	2016	2017	2018
Number of Transactions	1,148	2,706	3,205
Total EBT Sales	\$15,635.78	\$33,152.22	\$39,780.79
Total Fresh Food Bucks Sales	\$10,344.8	\$20,453.53	\$24,279.02
Total Sales	\$24,588.89	\$53,438.75	\$64,132.81
\$EBT/Transaction	\$13.64	\$12.25	\$12.41
\$FFB/Transaction	\$6.35	\$7.56	\$7.58
% of Incentives Redeemed	--	89%	99%

Some interesting data points from 2018 to note:

- There was a 59% increase in the number of transactions in the off-season in 2018 (January-April), driven largely by the participation of two corner stores. The winter months have traditionally been challenging because of the lack of regularly open outlets for people to use the incentives.
- September 2018 saw record-breaking transaction numbers, with 728 transactions (the previous high was 571 transactions in August 2017).
- Total EBT and FFB sales in 2018 generated roughly \$100,000 in local economic activity¹.

Outlets

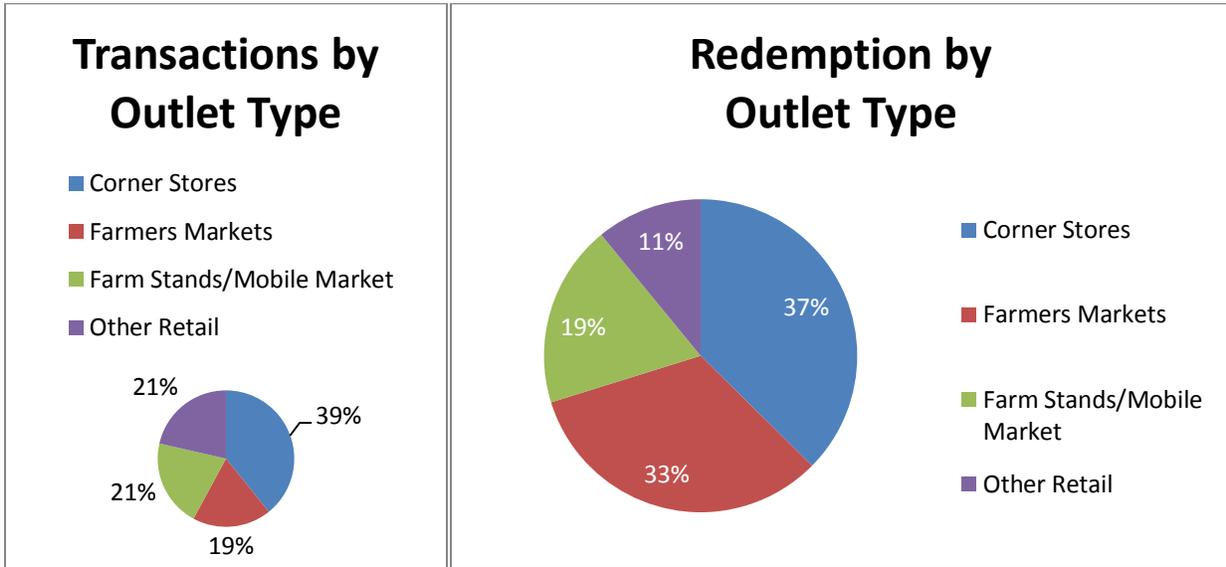
Corner stores – small, inner cities stores selling sundry goods – account for the majority of FFB transactions and redemptions across all participating outlet types. The second highest outlet type for redemptions is producer-only farmers markets. Farmers markets include both those that offer market-wide EBT systems and issue tokens customers use as cash, as well as those at which individual vendors provide a discount to shoppers at the point of sale. The disparity between the transaction and redemption graphs are caused due to shoppers receiving tokens at the Easton Public Market (“other retail”) and then spending them at a farmers’ market. These charts indicate that shoppers may be purchasing non-local food items with their EBT cards at the Public Market, but waiting to buy fresh produce until the farmers market is open.

¹ Economists estimate that, in a weak economy, every SNAP dollar that households redeem expands the economy by about \$1.70. (Alan S. Blinder and Mark Zandi, “The Financial Crisis: Lessons for the Next One,” Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, October 15, 2015, <https://www.cbpp.org/research/economy/the-financial-crisis-lessons-for-the-next-one>.)



Graph 1. Transaction by Outlet Type.

Graph 2. Fresh Food Bucks Redemption by Outlet Type.



Corner Stores

Fresh Food Bucks was expanded to a total of six corner stores in 2018, but only one – Jayden Grocery & Deli – participated in the program for the entire year. Corner stores participating in the program in 2018 included:

- *Allentown*: Jayden Grocery & Deli (802 S. 8th St.) and Hersh’s Market (129 S. 17th St.)
- *Bethlehem*: RJ’s Grocery (836 E. 5th St.) and RJ’s Mini Mart (418 E. 4th St.)
- *Easton*: 12th Street Market & Deli (1201 Bushkill St.) and Easton Corner Market (359 Northampton St.)

Corner store transactions increased by 63.5% in 2018 and incentives issued increased by nearly as much 61%. Corner stores accounted for 37% of all Fresh Food Bucks incentives issued in 2018 and 42% of total sales.

Table 2. Corner store incentive use over time and 2018 total sales comparison.

	2017	2018	% Increase
Number of Transactions	768	1,256	63.5%
Total EBT Sales	\$9,552.77	\$17,954.35	88%
Total Fresh Food Bucks Sales	\$5,628.52	\$9,071.87	61%
Total Sales	\$15,181.29	\$27,026.82	78%
\$EBT/Transaction	\$12.44	\$14.29	--
\$FFB/Transaction	\$7.33	\$7.22	--



Corner stores purchased \$5,561.42 worth of locally grown fruits and vegetables in 2018, up 48% from 2017. These purchases reflect a minimum of 4,819 pounds of local food purchased, compared to 2,379 pounds in 2017. However, these numbers do not reflect items sold by unit price rather than weight (such as berries, cabbages and watermelons).

In 2018, there were 624 unique customers using Fresh Food Bucks at corner stores in Allentown, Bethlehem and Easton. Of those customers, 34% used the program at least twice during the year and 18% were “regular customers,” visiting the stores three times or more to purchase fresh, local produce with the Fresh Food Bucks program. Nearly 7% of customers visited stores more than five times during the year. Allentown had the highest percentage of “regular” customers overall at 21%, followed by Easton (15%) and Bethlehem (14%).

Table 3. Unique and repeat customers at corner stores participating in Fresh Food Bucks.

	Unique Customers	Repeat Customers	% Repeat	Regular Customers (3+)	% Regular Customers
Allentown	370	136	37	78	21
Bethlehem	201	61	30	29	14
Easton	53	13	25	8	15
TOTAL	624	210	34	115	18

Significantly, Jayden Grocery & Deli in Allentown had the highest number of regular customers using FFB; this store was the only corner store offering the program for the full year in 2018, as well as in 2017. These data highlight the importance of continuous program operation to change eating and shopping habits among community members. In addition, the store owner and staff at Jayden said they actively encourage shoppers to utilize the program. Local products are displayed near the checkout counter to allow staff to assist shoppers with FFB purchases during checkout.

The corner stores in Easton were among the lowest numbers of FFB users. The 12th Street Market & Deli stopped participating in the program in October 2018; Easton Corner Market is located in proximity to several other outlets that offer FFB (most notably, the Easton Public Market and Easton Farmers Market, which both have high usage rates of FFB). In Bethlehem, the program was only offered from August through October at both stores.

Kellyn Partnership

Kellyn has allowed us a unique opportunity to provide incentives in many low-income/low-food access areas, especially in Northampton County. Kellyn operates the Eat Real Food Mobile Market, which operated at 11 different sites throughout the county from June through early November 2018. Mobile market sites include, but are not limited to, elementary schools, community centers and senior housing. In addition to fresh, local produce, the mobile market also offers pantry staples and non-local produce items, as well as consumer education that pairs with their school programming. In 2018, 15% of all FFB



transactions occurred at the mobile market, representing 12% of all FFB incentives redeemed during the season.

Kellyn also serves as the wholesale distributor for the corner stores. Without Kellyn's ability to source wholesale produce from local growers and distribute to the stores, the FFB Corner Store program would not be possible. With the corner stores, Kellyn was directly and indirectly responsible for 54% of all FFB transaction in the Lehigh Valley in 2018, accounting for 49% of all incentives redeemed.

FFB Advisory Board

The Fresh Food Bucks Advisory Board is:

- Allison Czapp – Director, Buy Fresh Buy Local of the Greater Lehigh Valley
- Ellen Underwood – Outreach Coordinator, Buy Fresh Buy Local of the Greater Lehigh Valley
- Eric Ruth – Co-founder/CFO, Kellyn Foundation
- Dr. Meagan Grega – Co-founder/Chief Medical Officer, Kellyn Foundation
- Dr. Cathy Coyne – Director of Health Advocacy and Policy, Lehigh Valley Health Network
- Hilda Rivera – Program Coordinator, LVHN Department of Community Health
- Dagny Danga-Storm, RD – Nutritionist, St. Luke's University Health Network
- Todd Nemura – Community Health Liaison Manager, St. Luke's University Health Network
- Priscilla Rosado – Assistant Director, Food Access, United Way-Greater Lehigh Valley