



Mission: Promote a sustainable food system that is equitable, profitable, resilient, and health-promoting in the County of San Luis Obispo.

Vision Statement: San Luis Obispo has a thriving, sustainable, and local food economy, and every resident has access to fresh, nutritious food without compromising the ability of the system to meet the needs of future generations.

Meeting Minutes

Monday, November 18, 2019

9:00am – 10:30am

UCCE Auditorium

2156 Sierra Way, San Luis Obispo

Present: Jeff Wade, Amelia Rutiz, Andrea Keisler, Harlee Clark, Kelly Hong, Cameron Gonzalez, Shelby Wild, Robyn Gable, Emily Calk, Allison Lovell, Amy DeLisio, Emilie McClintic, Juliane McAdam, Stephanie Teaford, Kayla Rutland, Rosa Vargas, Jeff Nielsen, Leo Ontiveros, Kylie Hensley, Veronica Macias, Fernanda Lucas, Shanaya Pudurijee, Melissa Danehey, Roxanne Sanders, Mallory Duarte

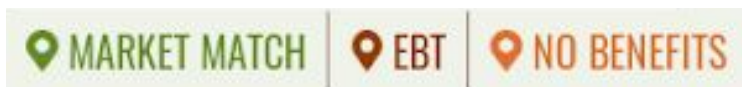
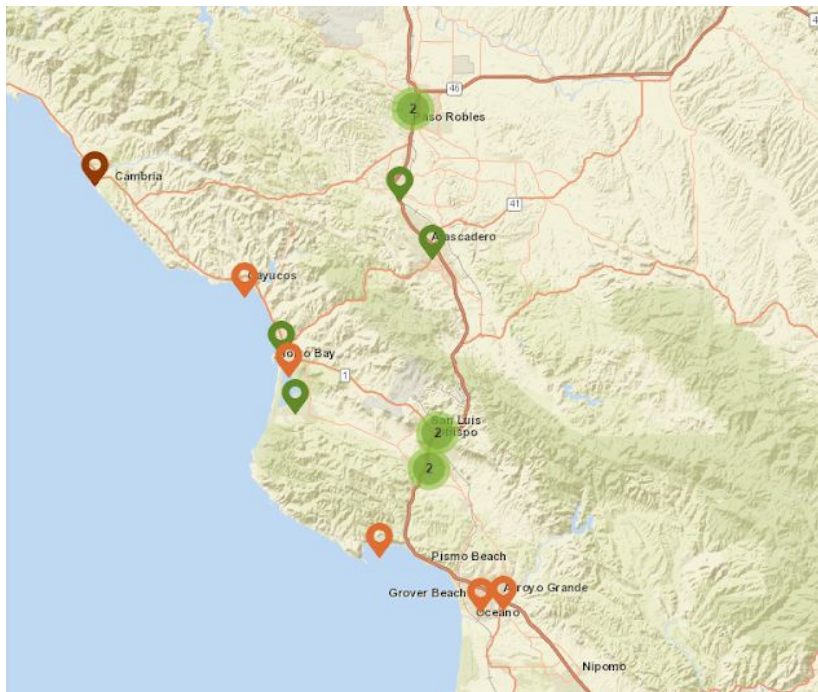
I. Introductions & Announcements

- The Food System Coalition organizes quarterly meetings open to the public.
- The next meeting will focus on the Food Systems Atlas: San Luis Obispo County, a report created by Cal Poly professor and FSC steering committee member Ellen Burke that examines local patterns of food production and consumption. The report is available for download at: www.slofoodsystem.org/food-system-resources
- The coalition is looking for volunteers to join our steering committee. Email slofoodsystem@gmail.com to learn more and apply.
- Contact Jeff Wade of Slow Money SLO (jeff@slowmoneyslo.org) if you are interested in joining a google group to network with small farmers in the county.

II. EBT at Farmers Market Work Group: Efforts, Progress, Next Steps (Shannon Klisch, UCCE)

EBT is an underutilized benefit in our community. The goal of the EBT at Farmers Market Work Group of the Food System Coalition is to increase the number of farmers markets that accept EBT and increase participation in EBT at these markets to increase equitable access to healthy foods and support local farmers. Market Match is a program that provides shoppers who use EBT at farmers markets a matching dollar amount, usually up to \$10 per visit.

The Ecology Center's Farmers' Market Finder maps farmers markets that accept EBT and offer Market Match: <https://ecologycenter.org/fmfinder/>. The website is updated every 30-90 days. At the time this presentation was prepared, in SLO County there are 13 year round markets, 8 of which accept EBT, and 6 of which offer Market Match. No farmers markets in South County accept EBT or offer Market Match, although these markets participate in other benefit programs, such as WIC and the Senior Farmers' Market Nutrition Program.



The EBT at Farmers Market Work Group is composed of farmers, market managers, Public Health staff, public housing organizations, the Food Bank, and the UCCE.

In January 2019, the work group started data gathering through a literature review and facilitating focus groups to collect data about barriers to accessing EBT at farmers markets. Then the work group began their planning efforts. The Department of Social Services (DSS) provided funds for CalFresh outreach, which helped to pay for staffing and promotional materials. In August 2019, the work group paid for a bus ad, promoted National Farmers Market week, and received KSBY coverage of Market Match. During this time period, the participation rates in EBT and Market Match at farmers markets increased and the number of new EBT recipients also increased. Promotional materials are available here: <https://www.healslo.com/market-match/>

Since 2017, EBT at farmers markets in SLO County has brought \$124,000 to local markets through over 3,9000 transactions at an average of \$30 per transaction with over 400 new customers.

The next steps for the work group are to identify more community partners as they ramp up for summer, think of fundraising ideas to support administrative costs to accept EBT at farmers markets, and to plan and promote to continue increasing CalFresh participation and bring local attention to how EBT at farmers markets promotes food security, health, and economic vitality.

III. Panel Discussion: Increasing Access at Farmers' Markets

1. *Bob Ross, North County Farmers Markets*

<https://northcountyfarmersmarkets.com/tokens>

Bob Ross administers the grant that funds the EBT Market Match program for North County Farmers Markets and is also a farmer who sells at the markets.

In 2013, the North County Farmers Markets started accepting CalFresh benefits. From 2013, 2015, they offered \$10 match for EBT funded by market fees. In 2016, they stopped offering matching but then were encouraged to apply for a grant from the Ecology Center to offer \$10 for fruits and vegetables, which they received. In August 2016, they increased their match to \$15. They briefly offered \$20 match when they had extra funds.

Bob shared lessons learned about offering market match:

- A manager's assistant is needed to manage the EBT/Market Match at the market.
- Simultaneously running an ATM program (via the Square app) that also uses tokens is beneficial because it captures customers who don't have cash, removes the stigma of waiting in a line for CalFresh benefits, and is easier for restaurants and wineries.

- The positives are the community benefit, increase in sales, and some revenue from ATM fees.
- The complicated factors are the cost to staff the EBT/ATM desk, the token tracking, and the system to redeem tokens from vendors. (In some counties, DSS runs the EBT desk, or a 3rd party operator.)

2. *Miguel Diaz, UC Cooperative Extension*

Miguel is a community health specialist who educates about the importance of nutrition and physical activity. He organized the focus groups for the EBT at Farmers Market Work Group to identify barriers and facilitators for low income individuals to access farmers markets and answer the question "Why don't eligible people participate?" The focus group participants were current EBT users or holders, SLO County residents, Spanish-speaking, and over 18 years of age. They were asked about their general shopping habits, farmers market experiences, and their interpretation of a farmers market promotional flyer. The focus group participants identified the following barriers to participation:

- They have difficulty signing up for CalFresh at the local DSS office because they feel scared off and useless based on interactions with staff.
- They have a lack of awareness of how Market Match works because of an unfamiliarity with farmers markets and a lack of advertising. They need guidance at the markets.
- Location and timing are barriers, although there is a desire to buy at the markets because the produce is more fresh.
- There is not enough variety and a lack of culturally relevant foods.
- They fear choosing an item and not being able to pay for it.
- The flyer needs to better explain market match, clearly list the markets, and include what people can and can't buy.

Based on this feedback, Miguel and the work group identified the following actions to take:

- Increase outreach to Spanish-speaking community members to make them feel welcome. Organize community social events at markets and encourage vendors that offer more culturally relevant foods.
- Increase resources to know what services are available.

3. *Amy DeLisio, Public Health Institute Center for Wellness and Nutrition*

Amy works in coalition building from a statewide perspective to increase equitable access at farmers markets. She specializes in education, trainings, advocacy, and evaluation.

USDA food and nutrition benefit programs play a vital role in accessibility and affordability of food in low income communities. Farmers markets are often a

more feasible option than grocery stores in food deserts because of the low start up costs.

The [CA State Nutrition Action Councils](#) (SNAC) work to address systemic issues across local, state, and federal agencies. In 2019 they conducted a Farmers Market Initiative to promote utilization of Market Match and other nutrition benefit programs such as CalFresh, WIC, and Senior Farmers Market Nutrition Program (FMNP) vouchers. At 19 farmers markets in 6 counties - Fresno, Tulare, Riverside, San Bernardino, San Joaquin, and Stanislaus - they evaluated SNAP-Ed indicators, conducted shopper intercept surveys, focus interviews, and monitored Market Match participation data. At three of the markets, CalFresh Healthy Living Food Navigators were on site to engage with shoppers and provide guidance about how to use EBT and market match and nutrition education.

Shopper surveys at farmers markets and food bank distribution sites indicated the drivers of participation are fresher produce, the friendly atmosphere, and EBT and Market Match programs. The barriers to participation were extreme weather (the surveys were during the summer), out of the way location, and lack of variety rather than being a "one stop shop". The on-site navigators helped shoppers to understand the benefit programs and how to use the produce.

Focus interviews with market managers indicated a need for face-to-face interactions with shoppers to explain the benefit programs. Having an on-site navigator increased the number of EBT and Market Match transactions.

The recommendations from the SNAC Farmers Market Initiative are to maintain and grow the campaign, engage partners early and often, and to refine the on-site navigator program.

Discussion

Q: Is the SNAC study going to result in funding for on-site navigators at farmers markets?

A: Not yet. CalFresh Healthy Living is a potential funding source for on-site navigators and Market Match/EBT administration in the future. In the meantime, is it possible for local agencies to co-fund a position to share staffing costs?

Q: Were the SNAC on-site navigators at the markets bilingual?

A: Yes, English and Spanish. Some markets needed other languages as well.

Idea: To make farmers markets more welcoming to Hispanic communities, plan classes at markets, invite Hispanic businesses and traditional musicians to participate.

Idea: Seniors newly qualify for CalFresh benefits that can be combined with Senior FMNP vouchers and Market Match. Organizing field trips to markets as a social activity can encourage participation.

Q: Can EBT and Market Match be used for CSA boxes? (CSA boxes could be especially appropriate for limited mobility participants.)

A: The transaction mechanism would need to be figured out. The Market Match program is specifically for fruits and vegetables purchased at farmers markets... perhaps the CSA boxes could be packed at the markets. The EBT at Farmers Market Work Group will explore further.

Idea: In 2016 the City of LA passed a policy requiring all farmers markets to accept EBT and held an event to help managers figure out their system. Could SLO jurisdictions pass a similar ordinance?

Issue: Farmers are dropping WIC benefits because they are changing to EBT format this year, potentially affecting the capacity of farmers to accept the benefits. Individual farmers might need to register. Can markets provide vouchers to particular farms? Discuss at eWIC in April.

Reflection: A DSS staff person is disappointed to hear that their customer service is lacking and will take this message back to her team.

Q: Why don't South County farmers markets accept EBT/MM? How to address the supply and demand in south county?

Q: How to promote EBT/MM to seniors? Where can they find information? Are there options for seniors who have limited mobility and don't use the internet to enroll in CalFresh? Can there be a flyer specific to seniors? Does 211 have information about EBT?

Q: Can Market Match benefits be distributed through the EBT card?

A: The state has a RFP out to pilot a program like this. Stay tuned.

Q: Why isn't the nutrition benefit program more simple and streamlined?

A: The 4-5 different nutrition benefit programs are accessed in different ways. Different market managers use different tokens. Customers are confused about why they can't use their tokens at all of the markets.

Next meeting: February 2020, look for details in our next newsletter