ADVOCACY IN ACTION

CHARACTER PACKET

FARMERS MARKET OWNER

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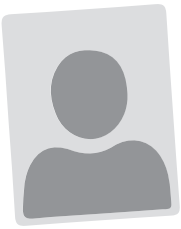
MAZON | A Jewish Response To Hunger



FARMERS MARKET OWNER

BACKGROUND

You have been a produce farmer for 20 years, have had a booth at a farmer's market in the capital city for 10 years, and for the last two years have been helping to run the market as an unpaid volunteer. You support the idea of the social safety net in the abstract, but you have also heard second- and third-hand stories from other farmers' markets about food stamp users driving away business. You do not currently have an EBT booth at your market.

POSITION ON THE BILL

You're conflicted. You believe in this bill on a personal level, and you understand that it could potentially bring you more business, but you are also worried that having more SNAP users at the farmers' market will be bad for business or drive other customers away. You can make your own decision whether or not to endorse the bill based on the people you meet and talk with during the exercise.

- If you decide to support the bill, then you will also support Amendment 1 and can decide whether or not to actively advocate for it.
- Amendments 2 and 3 don't concern you.

RELATIONSHIP TO OTHER ACTORS

- You as a business owner, you have a friendly relationship with the Chamber of Commerce, though you are not a member.
- You're friendly with the farmer's market shopper.
- You have a relationship with End Hunger Now, who you are currently working with to set up an EBT booth at your market.
- You do not have a relationship with any of the Senators.

ADDITIONAL GOALS

- Try to gauge whether the bill will be good or bad for your business, and balance that with your own perspective on what is the right thing to do.

STATE OF CALISSOURI SENATE

Eighty-Ninth Session **S.B. No. 47**

TITLE OF BILL:

Healthy Eating, Here at Home

BE IT ENACTED BY LEGISLATURE OF THE STATE OF CALISSOURI

SECTION 1: BILL DETAILS

SNAP recipients are able to receive dollar for dollar matching vouchers for SNAP benefits they spend at farmers markets, up to $10 per week. There is no cap on the number of vouchers farmers markets may give out.

Farmers market EBT booths will have tokens that SNAP recipients may exchange for EBT dollars.

Farmers markets will keep logs of how many people use the tokens, and will apply for reimbursement at the end of each month. They may also apply for grants to advertise the voucher program and to pay for the extra administrative cost of running the program.

Only people already on SNAP can participate in this program.

The program will be run by End Hunger Now, who will be responsible for administration, outreach, and evaluation.

SECTION 2: FUNDING

The program will receive annual funding of $500,000 from the Calissouri's budget. This funding goes to a non-profit (End Hunger Now), who will run the program. The money may be spent on:

- Directly reimbursing farmers markets for vouchers.
- Advertising/outreach and administration (additional staffing, bookkeeping, etc.) grants.

The money may NOT be spent on:

- Helping farmers markets to set up booths that except EBT cards (credit cards on which SNAP money is loaded).
- Administration of farmers market EBT booths not directly related to the vouchers program.

The funding is guaranteed for two years, after which End Hunger Now and the State legislature will evaluate the program and determine if it is successful and worth continuing to fund.

SECTION 3: POTENTIAL AMENDMENTS

Amendment 1: Double the yearly funding, and raise the voucher amount to $25 / week.

Amendment 2: Instead of a set $500,000 yearly sum, pay for the bill through 5% sales tax increase (which is calculated by the Calissouri State Budget Office to yield about the same amount of revenue).

Amendment 3: Reinstate work requirements: Unemployed adults without children may only stay on SNAP for 3 months at a time unless they find work.

SNAP BACKGROUNDER

WHAT IS SNAP?

The **Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program** (SNAP), formerly known food stamps, is a government program that helps low income Americans to purchase healthy food. SNAP recipients receive a monthly stipend loaded onto an Electronic Benefits Transfer (EBT) card, which looks like a credit card and can be used at most grocery stores as well as some convenience stores and farmers markets.

SNAP is a federal program, but it is run by states. It is an entitlement program, meaning that any household that is eligible for the program is entitled to receive benefits, and states are not allowed to turn anybody away because they run out of money. Anybody who meets the eligibility requirements is able to access SNAP.

SNAP participants do not fit one single profile, but many of the people who benefit from SNAP are

- Working part-time or low wage jobs
- Unemployed
- Receiving welfare or other public assistance
- Elderly or disabled
- homeless

The size of the benefit depends on each family's income as well as other factors. In 2016 the average monthly benefit for a family of four was $471, which translates to $1.31 per meal per person. SNAP benefits are meant to supplement, rather than replace families' meal budgets.

ELIGIBILITY

Eligibility requirements vary by state, but in general households below 130% the federal poverty line ($31,980 per year for a family of four in 2016) are eligible to receive SNAP based on their income. Certain expenses, such as childcare payments and medical expenses, are subtracted when determining income. Households must also pass a resource test, meaning that the value of their eligible assets must be below a certain amount, which in most states is around $2250, or $3250 for households with a disabled or elderly family member. Home lot values, SSI and TANF (cash based government assistance programs) benefits, and most pension plans do not count as eligible assets.

Certain SNAP users must comply with work requirements in order to continue to receive benefits. Childless, able-bodied adults who are able to work receive SNAP for a maximum of 3 months in a 36 month period unless they (1) are working at least 20 hours a week, (2) are at least a half-time student, or (3) are enrolled in a job training program. During the Great Recession, when unemployment was high, many states obtained waivers to get rid of the work requirement. In recent years many of those states are deciding to reinstate work requirements.

(Http://Www.Waynetimes.Com)

BREAKING/FEATURED (HTTP://WWW.WAYNETIMES.COM/CATEGORY/NEWS/)

One store owner fed up with Food Stamp abuse

WayneTimes.com (http://www.waynetimes.com/author/waynetimes/) | DECEMBER 12, 2014

(https://www.facebook.com/sharer/sharer.php?u=http:/

(https://twitter.com/intent/tweet?text=One%20store%20owner%20fed%20up%20with%20Food%

(https://plus.google.com/share?url=http://www.

View the Video (http://www.waynetimes.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/12/IMG_1431.mov)

Newark Save-A-Lot store owner, Mike Breen, has seen his share of food stamp abuse over the years, but an incident on Monday (12/8) was the straw that broke the camel's back.

A man entered the store with an accomplice, and using his EBT (Electronic Benefit Transfer) card, purchased five cases of water. He then exited the store and on the side of the store building began emptying the bottles, one by one.

The man intended to empty the bottles of water that cost taxpayers a total of $18.35, then take the empty bottles back into the store and cash them in for the 5¢ per bottle deposit.

In this case the man would have netted a total of $6 for his efforts.

The EBT card program is an electronic system that allows State Welfare Departments to issue benefits via a magnetically-encoded payment card. Common benefits provided (in the United States) via EBT are typically of two general categories: food and cash benefits.

Food benefits are federally authorized benefits that can be used only to purchase food and non-alcoholic beverages.

According to Eric Breen, the EBT cards can only be used for food products – no paper, or soap products. Unfortunately, EBT card abusers work the system in order to garner a bit of extra cash, all too often for tobacco, alcohol in stores, or illegal drugs on the streets.

Mike Breen was steamed when seeing EBT users legally use their benefits for non-nutritional items such as snacks and sugared drinks, but the bottle emptying that has been going on for years pushed him over the edge. He recalled one man coming in for 10 cases of water, only to return later with bags of empty water bottles in tow.

With video camera in hand, Mike confronted the man, later identified as Alex Jones, age 21, of Willow Avenue in Newark and told him – in very colorful language – to leave the property.

Breen refused to let Jones back in the store to cash in the bottles he already had emptied. Police were called and Jones and his accomplice were seen leaving the area, carrying cases of water away to the Wegman's store – where they successfully cashed in the empty bottles.

"It was epic, watching these two guys walking down the street carrying the cases of water," recalled Mike.
Jones could have been charged with Food Stamp Abuse under the law, but local courts

are reluctant to come down hard on small-time EBT card abusers. Records show Jones is unemployed.

Wayne County Department of Social Services (DSS) representative Mary Lippert, had heard of empty bottle deposit fraud, and along with other state DSS workers, has rallied for the practice to be covered by the Misuse of Food Stamps law.

Though Jones was not criminally charged by police for the blatant Misuse of Food Stamps, that did not prevent him from being given the choice of an arrest, or signing an agreement disqualifying and suspending himself from the Food Stamp and Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Programs for a period of 12 months.
Wayne County has suspended EBT cards in the past on several occasions, but is sending a strong message to EBT card abusers that they intend to crack down even harder.

Lippert said Wayne County is now instituting a “Fair Hearing Process” in order to get intentional EBT card abusers taken to task.

First time offenders will lose their EBT card for food stamp use for a 6-month period, second time offenders for a year, and a third strike means a lifetime ban from receiving food stamp benefits.
If you have information regarding Public Assistance Fraud, please contact the Sheriff’s Office by calling 315.946.9711 or email tip@co.wayne.ny.us.

Nutrition Benefits a Mixed Bag for Markets

> About 50 Texas farmers markets take SNAP benefits, WIC benefits or both. The programs are not well utilized, but proponents say it's important to provide as many healthy food options as possible for Texans who use nutrition benefits.

BY AUDREY WHITE MARCH 28, 2013 6 AM

Tiger Whitehead and his children Logic and Domnick, who used SNAP and the the Sustainable Food Center Farmer's Market double dollars coupons, shopping at the Farmer's Market at 2835 East MLK Blvd. in Austin on March 19, 2013. Spencer Selvidge

Using wooden tokens, Ellen Ray pays for carrots, parsnips and broccoli at the Austin Sustainable Food Center's farmers market in Sunset Valley. Ray, a participant in the

federally funded Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, is grateful that the market allows customers to buy its fresh produce with SNAP benefits.

“I was overwhelmingly enthusiastic when I found out they took SNAP,” Ray said, eyeing jam at one stand. “It’s an enabler to do something I already love.”

SNAP, which is operated in Texas by the state’s Health and Human Services Commission, has provided grants and other support to states including Texas to make it easier for farmers markets to accept benefits as currency. Another federally funded program that helps low-income Texans buy groceries, the Texas Women, Infants and Children program, launched a two-year pilot program in December 2011 to allow farmers markets to accept WIC customers.

While the number of farmers markets offering SNAP is growing, WIC participation has struggled to gain traction. State officials and legislators say increasing access to fresh food will improve Texans' health and quality of life, and farmers markets are on the front lines of bringing local, healthy food to Texans.

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Thanks in part to a pilot program in 2010-11 that allowed farmers markets to get SNAP card machines for free from HHSC, the number of Texas farmers markets and market associations offering SNAP has jumped from three to 49 since 2008. The machines can cost up to $1,200. The commission paid the $45 monthly fee for one year under the pilot, after which the markets had to pick up that fee. The pilot cost more than $26,000, according to HHSC spokeswoman Linda Edwards Gockel.

In 2012, 48 of the markets and associations saw a total average of $3,920 per month in SNAP sales. One market is not included in the average because of exceptionally high sales, Edwards Gockel said. The funds, staff and technology needed to operate SNAP benefits aren't feasible for some markets. During the original pilot, 14 markets withdrew citing these reasons.

Suzanne Santos, the farmers market director for the Austin Sustainable Food Center, said a person’s income shouldn’t prevent his or her family from enjoying the fresh products sold at the center’s four Central Texas farmers markets. They have accepted SNAP for eight years and signed on to the WIC pilot right away, Santos said.

“The fact that [benefit users] are purchasing at farmers markets and getting things that are direct from farms means the likelihood that they’ll eat that fruit or vegetable is higher and

it's a good use of those benefit dollars," Santos said. "Our argument is it tastes great, it's ecologically friendly and it's good for the local economy."

And accepting SNAP is good business for her group — in 2012, customers spent about $27,000 SNAP dollars at the center's markets.

The Austin Sustainable Food Center attracts more benefits customers to farmers markets by using outside grants to fund the Double Dollar Incentive Program, which allows the market to match the number of SNAP or WIC dollars a customer spends, Santos said.

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Edwards Gockel said the commission appreciates federal efforts to help get benefit users to farmers markets "because we want to see Texans eat healthier."

So far, the WIC pilot program has had a hard time attracting customers, said John Hannemann, who helps manage the WIC program for the Department of State Health Services.

The state used more than half a million dollars in federal American Recovery and Reinvestment Act funds to develop and design the system to allow farmers markets to accept WIC and equip markets with the technology. After more than a year, WIC participants have spent just over $3,000 in WIC dollars at farmers markets. WIC transactions peaked in June with about $475 spent that month.

WIC only allots $6 to $10 in fruits and vegetables per month per woman and child, and "if you're going to a place where that's all you can buy, it takes away some of the allure of going there," Hannemann said.

The WIC pilot program is in place in five Texas cities, and Hannemann said it is not likely it will expand to more markets after the pilot program ends, though they may add another city this year. Markets that already offer WIC could keep doing so after the pilot.

The San Antonio Farmer's Market Association was on the pilot originally, but Juan Gonzalez, the association's president, said the program was too complicated and they stopped using it after a couple of months.

Helping a WIC customer took farmers much longer than a non-WIC customer because the farmers had to input each item and its cost separately. Sometimes it took so long that other customers would leave to buy produce from another farmer instead, Gonzalez said.

"I couldn't add that burden to the farmers. They're already fighting the weather and lack of water," Gonzalez said. "Now we're going to have to tell them to take additional time to sell under the WIC program?"

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His markets still take SNAP, which he said is a good source of revenue.

Rachel Cooper, a senior policy analyst with the Center for Public Policy Priorities, said it doesn't make sense to bolster farmers market benefit programs when so many grocery stores and public schools aren't offering enough healthy produce.

Although farmers markets are "a good thing, their reach will always be limited," Cooper said. "From my perspective, if we're going to spend limited dollars in trying to improve things, we should be focusing on where more people are likely to go, which is supermarkets and corner stores, and making sure they have access and can use their benefits those places and get affordable, nutritious food."

The limited hours and locations of farmers markets, not to mention higher prices, mean they are not a viable shopping option for people on benefits who work long hours and have limited transportation, Cooper said.

But state Rep. Eddie Rodriguez, D-Austin, said farmers markets play a critical role in increasing access to healthy food for all Texans, a primary goal of the Farm to Table Caucus, which he founded last year. As the number of farmers markets in Texas grows and more Texans learn about the benefits of buying there, he expects the number of customers to grow, he said in an email.

"We simply have to increase access to healthy food," Rodriguez said. "It's tough to get funding for anything new right now, so in the meantime the caucus would like to make sure we aren't adding more barriers to entry. We also have to make sure outdated laws aren't getting in the way."

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