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KANSAS FARMERS MARKETS GO HIGH TECH

Whiting, Kans.—Along with locally-raised fruits and vegetables, shoppers will see wooden tokens and wireless-point-of-sale (WPOS) devices at many Kansas farmers markets this spring.

Because of the WPOS devices, eleven Kansas farmers markets now accept Vision Cards, the Electronic Benefits Transfer (EBT) method for the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) also known as the Food Assistance Program in Kansas. Only two Kansas farmers markets accepted the Vision Cards in 2008.

The central wireless-point-of-sale system used by the Kansas Farmers Market EBT Project allows all eligible vendors in a multi-vendor farmers market to sell food products to Vision cardholders without each vendor being separately authorized by the USDA Food and Nutrition Service.

“Kansas farmers want to feed Kansans. With the launch of nine new farmers market EBT programs, we are coming closer to the goal of providing access to locally raised agricultural products for all Kansans receiving Food Assistance,” said Mercedes Taylor-Puckett, Farmers Market Project Coordinator for the Kansas Rural Center.

Consumers who receive Food Assistance benefits, as well as debit cardholders, can swipe their cards on the WPOS device at the market information booth. Vision Cardholders receive \$1 wooden tokens that can be used as cash for most types of food at the market. Tokens can also be used to buy seeds or plants that produce food such as tomato transplants or potted herbs. Most participating markets also accept debit cards. Debit cardholders received \$5 tokens that can be used as cash within the market with no restrictions.

In the late '90s, states received a federal mandate to transition from paper Food Stamps to EBT cards. Lacking the equipment and infrastructure necessary to process these debit-like cards, Kansas farmers markets were unable to accept Vision Cards therefore Food Assistance beneficiaries had limited access to locally raised food.

The 2006 Kansas Farmers Market EBT Demonstration Project launched pilot programs in Lawrence and Wichita providing the markets with the necessary WPOS devices, wood tokens and additional administrative and technical support. Between 2006 and 2008, the Downtown Lawrence and the Kansas Grown Farmers Markets processed more than \$22,877 on their WPOS devices with one-quarter of the total coming from Vision Card transactions.

“Our market has accepted EBT for over three years now, and it has helped our farmers by expanding our access to community members of every income level, while allowing all in Lawrence access to fresh, local and healthy foods. We look forward to the expanded role of EBT at markets across the state,” Tom Buller, Coordinator of the Downtown Lawrence Farmers' Market, said.

The American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 provides a 13.6 percent increase in the monthly SNAP benefit for recipients, or roughly \$80 per family, per month. In 2009, expenditures by the Kansas Department of Social and Rehabilitation Services (SRS) for Food Assistance will increase to more than \$233.4 million annually. USDA estimates that for every five dollars spent through SNAP, \$9.20 of local economic activity is generated.

SNAP provides a basic safety net to millions of people in the United States, and approximately 187,000 people in Kansas, amounting to more than \$205 million in benefits across the state. The goal of SNAP is alleviating hunger and malnutrition by permitting low-income households to obtain a more nutritious diet through normal channels of trade.

“Without farmers market EBT programming, Kansas' direct marketers of locally raised fruits, vegetables, meats and dairy products are unable to tap into this significant source of sales,” Taylor-Puckett said.

Farmers markets are often less expensive than supermarkets, especially when produce is compared by weight rather than unit. In one study comparing farmers market and supermarket produce prices, the researchers found that the supermarket food weighed significantly less, because the bunches were smaller or the vegetables were wilted.

“When you consider the extra nutritional benefits of just-picked produce, farmers markets usually offer the best value for the money,” says Lynn Byczynski, the editor and publisher of [*Growing for Market*](#).

The 2009 Kansas Farmers Market EBT Expansion Project added nine markets to the program and increased the percentage of Kansas farmers markets with EBT capacity to 14 percent. Six of these markets are located in five of the ten most populous Kansas counties ranging from 55,000 to 483,000 residents. The remaining markets are located in counties with populations between 8,000 and 36,000. The nine counties with EBT markets are home to 44 percent of the state's food assistance recipients and account for 47 percent of Kansas SRS food assistance expenditures.

As of the end of Fiscal Year 2008, [USDA's Food and Nutrition Service](#) reports 753 farmers markets were authorized to accept SNAP benefits nationwide, a 34 percent increase from FY 2007. While the percentage of redemptions is very little, the amount of

funds going to small farmers has increased from about \$1 million in 2007 to \$2.7 million in 2008. Over 250 Farmers' Markets were operating a scrip or token system nationwide.

The Kansas Farmers Market EBT Project, a collaboration between the Kansas Department of SRS and the Kansas Rural Center, is designed to expand access to fresh and local food in Kansas' farmers markets, primarily for low-income households receiving food assistance on Vision EBT cards.

Approximately 88,000 people receive more than \$101 million in benefits within the ten Kansas counties with EBT-capable farmers markets. Eligibility for food assistance is based on household size and monthly income. Income eligibility guidelines are based on 130 percent of the federal poverty level. The maximum gross monthly income for a family of four is \$2,297.

Current estimates indicate that only 65 percent of Kansans who may be eligible are participating in the program. Individuals who believe they may be eligible to receive food assistance benefits should contact their local SRS office or call 1-888-369-4747 to request an application. Applications are also available at www.srskansas.org.

Look for the "Use Your Vision Card Here" banner at farmers markets in these Kansas counties:

Anderson:

Garnett Farmers Market, Thursday: 4:30 to 7 p.m. in downtown Garnett at 4th Ave and Main St, *Vision Card only*

Atchison:

Atchison Farmers Market, Saturday: 8 a.m. to noon and Wednesday: 2:30 to 5:30 p.m. in downtown Atchison between 4th & 6th on Main St, *Vision and Debit Cards*

Butler:

Central Park Farmers Market, Wednesday: 3:30 to 6:30 p.m. in Andover's Central Park, *Vision and Debit Cards*

Douglas:

Downtown Lawrence Farmers Market, Saturday: 7 to 11 a.m. at 824 New Hampshire Ave and Tuesday and Thursday: 4 to 6 p.m. at 1020 Vermont St, *Vision and Debit Cards*

Leavenworth:

Leavenworth Farmers Market, Saturday: 7 to 10:30 a.m. at Esplanade and Delaware, Wednesday: 3 to 6 p.m. at 4th & Cherokee, *Vision and Debit Cards*

Lyon:

Emporia Farmers Market, Saturday: 8-11 a.m. and Wednesday: 5 to 7 p.m. at 7th Ave. & Merchant St., *Vision and Debit Cards*

Marion:

Hillsboro Farmers Market, Thursday: 5 to 7 p.m. in downtown Hillsboro at corner of Jefferson and Grand, *Vision Card only*

Saline:

Salina Farmers Market, Saturday: 7 to 11 a.m. at 460 South Ohio, *Vision and Debit Cards*

Sedgwick:

Kansas Grown Farmers Market, Saturday: 7 a.m. to noon; and Wednesday: 3 to 7 p.m. at 21st & Ridge , Tuesday: 3:00- 7:00 p.m. at 8141 East 21st, *Vision and Debit Cards*

Old Town Farmers Market, Saturday: 7 a.m. to noon at 1st and Mosley, *Vision and Debit Cards*

Wyandotte:

KCK Green Market, Saturday: 8 to 11 a.m. and Wednesday: 8 to 11 a.m. at 6th and Taurome, *Vision and Debit Cards*

For more information about the Kansas Farmers Market EBT Expansion Project contact: Mercedes Taylor-Puckett, Project Coordinator (785) 840-6202, ksfarmersmarkets@gmail.com For information on the more than 75 farmers market in Kansas, visit: www.ksfarmersmarkets.com

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FY 2008 Food Assistance Information by County:

Anderson: 664 participants and \$665,355 annually

Atchison: 1,566 participants and \$1,763,079 annually

Butler: 3,366 participants and \$3,556,851 annually

Douglas: 5,309 participants and \$6,115,048 annually

Leavenworth: 3,992 participants and \$4,439,366 annually

Lyon: 2,921 participants and \$3,181,433 annually

Marion: 420 participants and \$397,787 annually

Saline: 3,765 participants and \$3,974,908 annually

Sedgwick: 46,287 participants and \$54,156,152 annually

Wyandotte: 19,379 participants and \$22,776,710 annually