

May 21, 2013

Dear Mayor, Council Members, Sustainable Food Policy Board, and Other Interested Stakeholders:

In April 2012, the Austin/Travis County Sustainable Food Policy Board recommended the City of Austin research possible grants or other sources of funding to increase the value of SNAP dollars spent locally at farmers markets and other retailers for fresh produce. The attached report expands upon that recommendation. Its purpose is to support the City in building upon local organizations' current efforts to increase access to healthy, local foods through farmers market incentive programs (FMIPs).

We see the City of Austin as being a key source of steady funding and support for FMIPs. Based on our research of best practices, we recommend that \$50,000 – \$75,000 be allocated in the FY 2014 budget cycle to support these programs.

Our report is designed to serve as a resource to the City of Austin as practitioners and policymakers consider how to build upon the early successes of the Sustainable Food Center's Double Dollars Incentive Program (DDIP), Austin's local FMIP. In addition to documenting the characteristics of this program and the challenges and accomplishments it has charted to date, we provide current data on food access, food security, and social opportunity in Austin/Travis County. You will find a series of unique maps that underline a mismatch between the location of EBT-equipped local food retailers and the geography of food insecurity, low social opportunity, and SNAP enrollment in our communities. After developing this context, we synthesize the best practices and challenges that 10 FMIPs across the US—including SFC's DDIP—have experienced implementing their programs. Based on our findings, we identified eight specific recommendations for increasing the value of nutrition assistance dollars spent farmers markets:

Recommendation #1: Increase EBT availability at local food retail locations, especially at farmers markets and farm stands. Consider making EBT mandatory for all farmers markets and farm stands.

Recommendation #2: Expand farmers market incentive programming to all Austin farmers markets and farm stands within the next two years.

Recommendation #3: Administer Austin's FMIP through a single nonprofit umbrella organization.

Recommendation #4: Establish a single point of contact at the City of Austin or Travis County to provide SNAP assistance to farmers markets and the FMIP umbrella organization.

Recommendation #5: Provide funding for farmers market incentive programs at Austin farmers markets on a multi-year basis from diverse sources, including the City of Austin.

Recommendation #6: Provide funding for both FMIP administrative costs as well as the cost of the financial incentive to be provided to nutrition assistance customers.

Recommendation #7: Provide EBT training and technical support to farmers markets.

Recommendation #8: Advertise Austin's FMIP through other public and private programs that reach SNAP participants.

We hope that this report underscores the importance of the SFPB's original recommendation and provides a starting point for moving forward on it. Please let us know if we can do anything to support City Council Members, city staff, and other interested stakeholders in addressing this important issue.

Sincerely,

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