

REPORTING

Food Stamp Locavorism

Posted Thursday, June 23, 2011 in [Reporting](#) by [Kara Cusolito](#)



SOURCE: Kara Cusolito

Plant and seed purchases have been allowed under SNAP benefits for 38 years.

About 44.5 million Americans receive food stamp benefits, and despite common perception, they aren't only honored at the supermarket.

Food stamps, the colloquial term for the federal Supplemental Nutritional Assistance Program (SNAP), can also be spent at farmers markets, on CSAs and on seeds and plant starts.

Though about one in eight Americans are dependent on SNAP benefits, many recipients may not be aware what these federal-given dollars can buy, according to a study conducted last year by the Community Food Security Coalition and the National Farmers Market Coalition.

This year, Daniel Bowman Simon created SNAP Gardens, an organization that seeks to raise awareness that SNAP benefits can buy you a garden, where you'll grow much of the produce you'll need. Simon says that though SNAP benefits have permitted plant and seed purchases since 1973, it's still largely unknown to recipients.

That study by the Community Food Security Coalition and the National Farmers Market Coalition revealed much the same. It found that though farmers markets are experiencing a resurgence, they often have limited or uneven staffing that cannot always support EBT transactions, and also that electronic terminals can also be prohibitively expensive for many markets. Additionally, the study found, SNAP shoppers are often not aware of farmers markets or the fact that they accept EBT

benefits, or they may consciously avoid markets because of inconvenient hours, language barriers, or the perception that prices are higher there than at the supermarket.

Bowman Simon says it seems strange that there is such lack of awareness of an element of SNAP that has been around for so long.

“All we can do now is raise awareness of the choice that people can make in 2011,” he says.

He said he's been working with the USDA to make connections and encourage a more holistic awareness of food, policy, and growing. Local and homegrown foods are becoming more visible, he says, what with Michelle Obama's White House garden. Community gardens are becoming more popular, and CSAs are on the rise.

“It's super important that people who might want to garden, but do not have the cash to get started, know that if they have SNAP, their benefits can at least get them started, even with a plant or two,” he says. “This is a great opportunity for people to create access to affordable fresh healthy food by growing it themselves, often in places where other options are lacking.”

Kara Cusolito is a staff writer with Campus Progress. You can e-mail her at kara.cusolito@gmail.com.

Real-time updating is **enabled**.

Comments for this page are closed.

Showing 1 comment

Sort by newest first ▾



Daniel

Thanks for the great story Kara. Please visit www.SNAPgardens.org to get involved. Also, the referenced study by the Community Food Security Coalition and the National Farmers Market Coalition, Real Food, Real Choice: Connecting SNAP Recipients with Farmers Markets can be found here: <http://www.foodsecurity.org/pu...>

06/26/2011 02:48 PM

Like

✉ [Subscribe by email](#)  [RSS](#)

blog comments powered by [DISQUS](#)