

Story #2 – SNAP at the Bath Farmers' Market

When Main Street Bath decided to join in the Healthy Maine Streets program, we were already discussing a project that could fit under that umbrella. Main Street Bath (MSB) wanted to help the Bath Farmers' Market be able to accept SNAP (formerly food stamps), in order to promote healthy eating, as well as bring more people downtown during market days. This program is now in the works as our first program as a Healthy Maine Street downtown. MSB is partnering with Mid Coast Hospital's Access Health division, and with the Maine Federation of Farmers' Markets, in a grant procured by Access Health to promote physical activity and nutrition. For the last few years farmers' markets across the nation have been working towards being able to provide local farm fresh foods to low-income residents. MSB saw this as an opportunity for us to help the Bath Farmers' Market provide that for Bath area residents.

MSB completed the forms required by the Food and Nutritional Services (FNS) program, under the USDA, and has at this point received our FNS permit, training materials, and is in the process of getting the wireless terminal required to swipe the SNAP EBT (electronic benefits transfer) cards. Once a terminal and service provider have been procured, we will be ready to hire a SNAP coordinator who will work for MSB as the point of sale person at the market, as well as tracking the SNAP funds for reimbursement to the farmers, and tracking users for grant reporting purposes.

This process has been wrought with hurdles as MSB and Access Health have navigated the federal FNS program. The system is set up to accommodate retail businesses, and although it has been used at farmers' markets around the nation, the process still lacks the right language in dealing with a farmers' market versus a retail grocery store. By having MSB parent this program, the Bath Farmers' Market will be able to accept SNAP, without having had to deal with the application process, which is a huge bonus. The farmers are busy growing food and organizing the market, so having a fiscal agent, such as MSB, act on their behalf with this program, has enabled them to be able to offer food to low-income area residents, when otherwise the process would have been too cumbersome to do.