



The Council of the City of New York

USE YOUR FOOD STAMPS FOR FRESH AFFORDABLE FOOD AT THE GREENMARKET



A Staff Report To:

City Council Speaker Christine C. Quinn

November 2008

Introduction

It is well documented that a diet rich in fresh fruits and vegetables improves overall health and reduces the rates of obesity and diet related diseases. A recent study by the Department of City Planning found that approximately 3 million New Yorkers live in neighborhoods with high rates of diet related diseases and limited access to fresh food. The areas with the highest need include Central and East Harlem and Washington Heights in Manhattan; Bushwick, Bedford Stuyvesant, East New York and Sunset Park in Brooklyn; Corona, Jamaica and Far Rockaway in Queens; areas of the South Bronx, Williamsbridge/Wakefield and portions of Pelham Parkway in the Bronx; and St. George and Stapleton in Staten Island.¹

The negative health outcomes related to the lack of access to healthy foods can be addressed in a variety of ways including increasing the number of supermarkets, greencarts, and farmers markets in these neighborhoods. The Council is pursuing initiatives all of these fronts. This report focuses on farmers markets as a means for increasing access to fresh food for food stamp recipients or EBT (Electronic Benefits Transfer) users.

Background on the Initiative

In 2000, food stamps switched from paper slips to electronic benefits cards (EBT). Since then, New Yorkers have had limited opportunities to use food stamps to access fresh, locally grown produce at farmers' markets because the farmers did not have the technology to accept the cards. As the number of greenmarkets increased across the City – especially in less affluent communities – this lack of technology created a gap between the local residents and their ability to purchase local produce.

As part of the Fiscal Year 2007 budget, the first under Speaker Christine Quinn, the Council, in conjunction with the Center on the Environment for New York City, began an initiative to close this gap. This initiative has continued through each budget year and farmers market season since. Starting in Fiscal Year 2008, funding for outreach to inform New Yorkers of

¹ <http://home2.nyc.gov/html/dcp/html/supermarket/presentation.shtml>

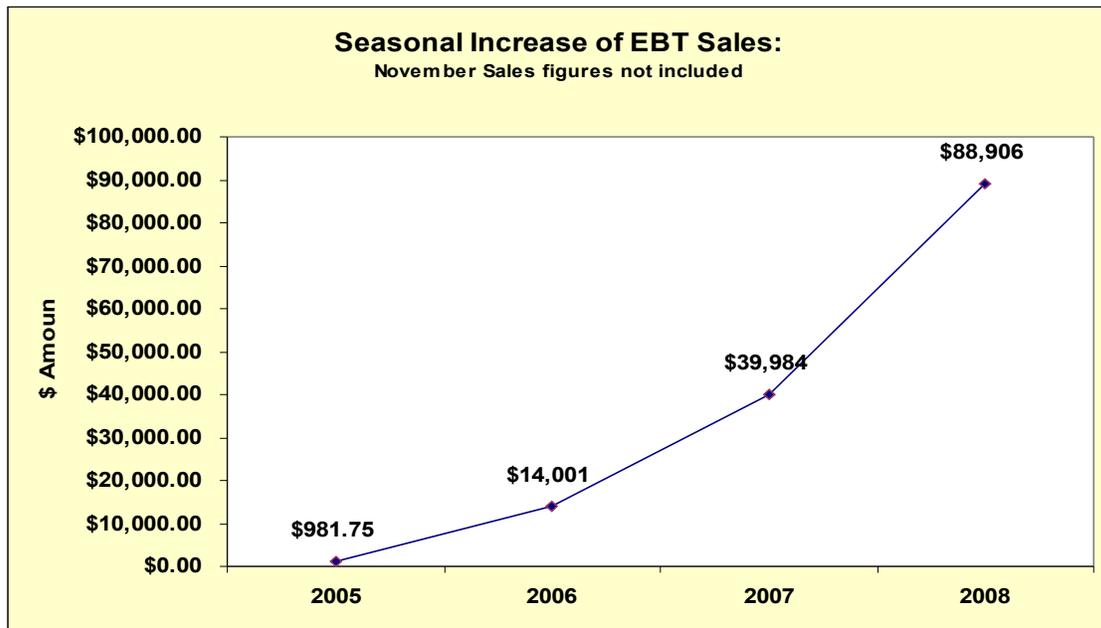
the opportunity to use EBT at Greenmarkets was made a part of the initiative. City Council funding allotments for the EBT Greenmarkets Initiative are as follows:

- FY '07 = \$81K
- FY '08 = \$195K
- FY '09 = \$270K

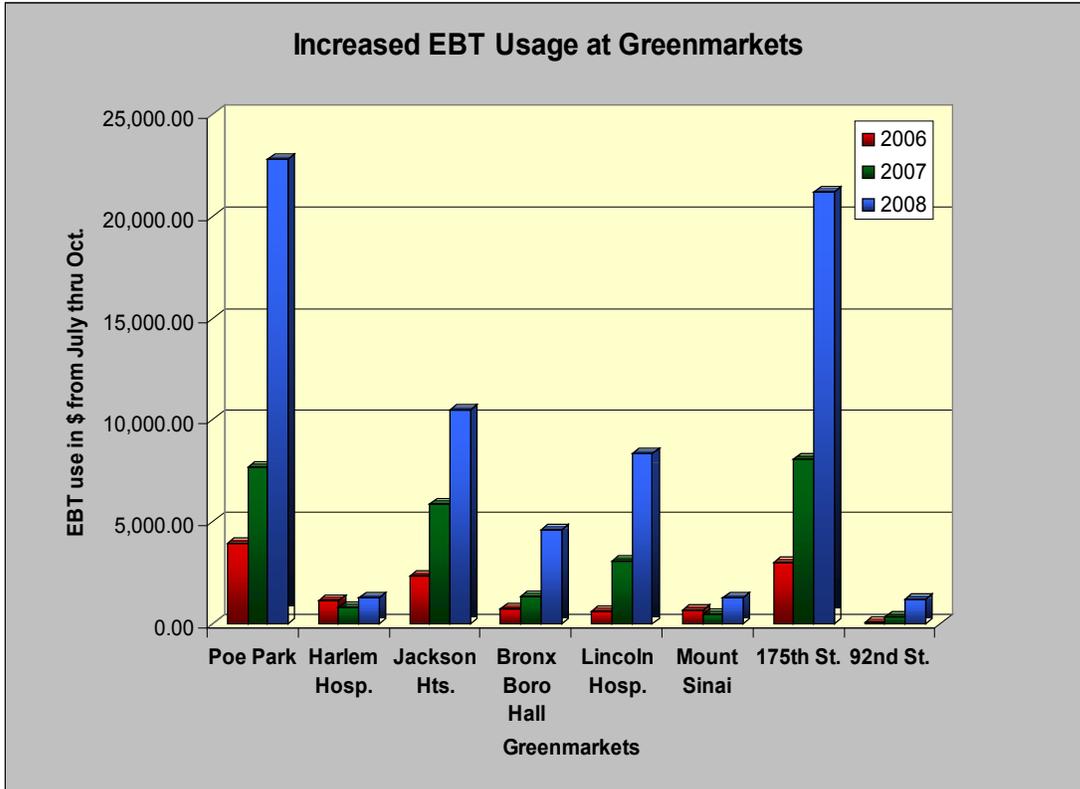
Increased EBT Sales

As funding for this initiative has increased throughout Speaker Quinn's term so has the dollar amount of EBT sales in the Greenmarkets. The benefits of this are two fold – increased fruit and vegetable purchases by food stamp users and additional sales income for local farmers.

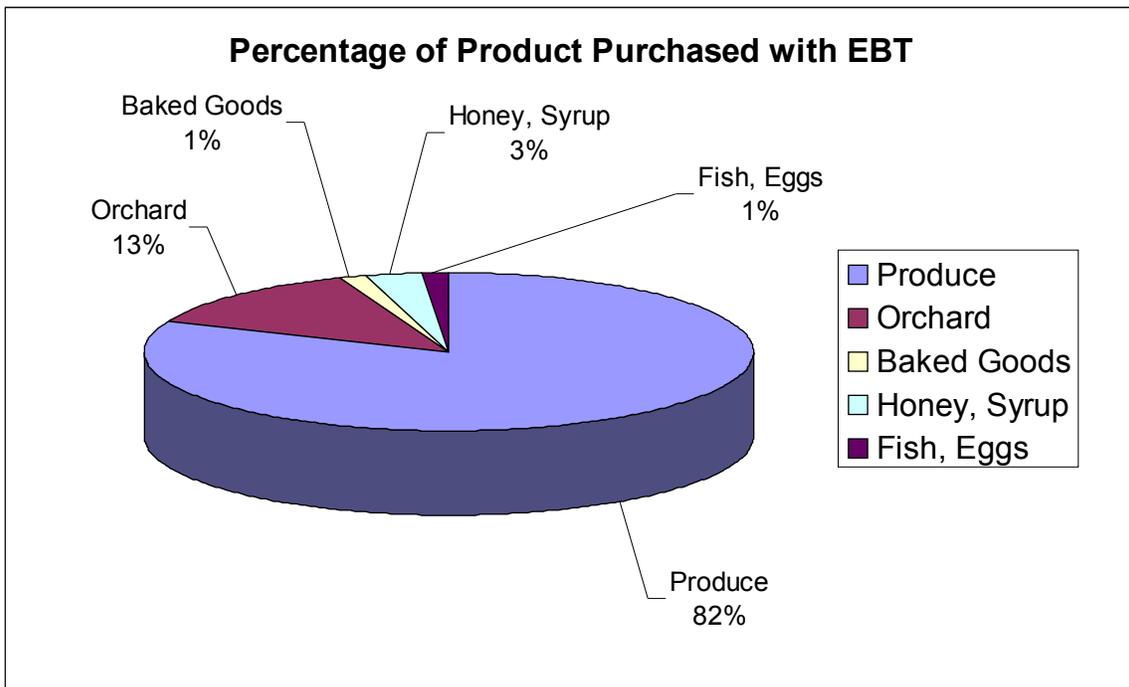
The following chart shows the overall increase in the amount of food stamp dollars spent at Greenmarkets throughout the season Citywide from 2005 to 2008. Because this season is not yet over, the chart does not include November sales numbers.



The chart below shows the increase in food stamp sales each year by individual market.



The following chart shows the typical product type breakdown for EBT purchases at Greenmarkets.



In addition to funding from this Council initiative, the program for increasing EBT use at Greenmarkets has benefitted from a \$66,000 USDA-FMPP grant and the Department of Health and Mental Hygiene's EBT incentive component of its Health Bucks program. This season, for every \$5 spent by an EBT user at a Greenmarket within a designated area, they received a \$2 Health Bucks coupon to be used for fruits and vegetables at the Greenmarket.

Conclusion

This initiative has demonstrable results of increased purchases of fresh produce. It also shows increased income for local farmers and the local economy. It is therefore supportive of the Speaker's goal of ensuring that all Greenmarkets are able to accept EBT payments.

In addition to support for the mobile EBT terminals and outreach, the USDA should be encouraged to change its regulations in order to provide free mobile EBT terminals to farmers markets as they currently do for fixed location stores that may or may not sell fresh food.