

# Grant Aims To Boost Use Of Food Stamps At Farmers Markets

### Federal Program Would Help Establish Wireless Technology To Facilitate Use Of Benefits

BY MEGHANN MYERS  
Medill News Service

WASHINGTON — Farmers markets are a popular source of reasonably priced fresh produce, but across the country many accept only cash or checks — a big problem for low-income shoppers using food stamps. The U.S. Department of Agriculture is trying to change that.

Agriculture Deputy Secretary Kathleen Merrigan this week announced a \$4 million grant for states to help implement wireless technology that will allow more farmers markets to accept Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program benefits, or food stamps.

Markets need wireless Internet or land-line connections in order to accept payments from customers using government benefits, a system known as Electronic Benefits Transfer. The system isn't always available for outdoor markets in parks or parking lots, and small markets often can't afford to set up the technology.

Two years ago, Jeff Dabbelt of Lexington Farmers Market in Lexington, Ky., set up a machine on his own to accept EBT payments. "I had to convince my directors that it was going to be worth the additional cost," he said.

Last year, the market brought in \$14,000 from EBT cards, Dabbelt said.

"There can be some inherent business that comes to your table just by the machine being there," he said.

Although he had to go through bureaucratic channels to set up the machine, he was happy to learn that the federal government will offer some assistance to smaller markets. Currently, of 7,100 USDA-registered farmers markets nationwide, 1,500 accept EBT cards, according to government figures. The use of the cards at farmers markets has quadrupled since 2008.

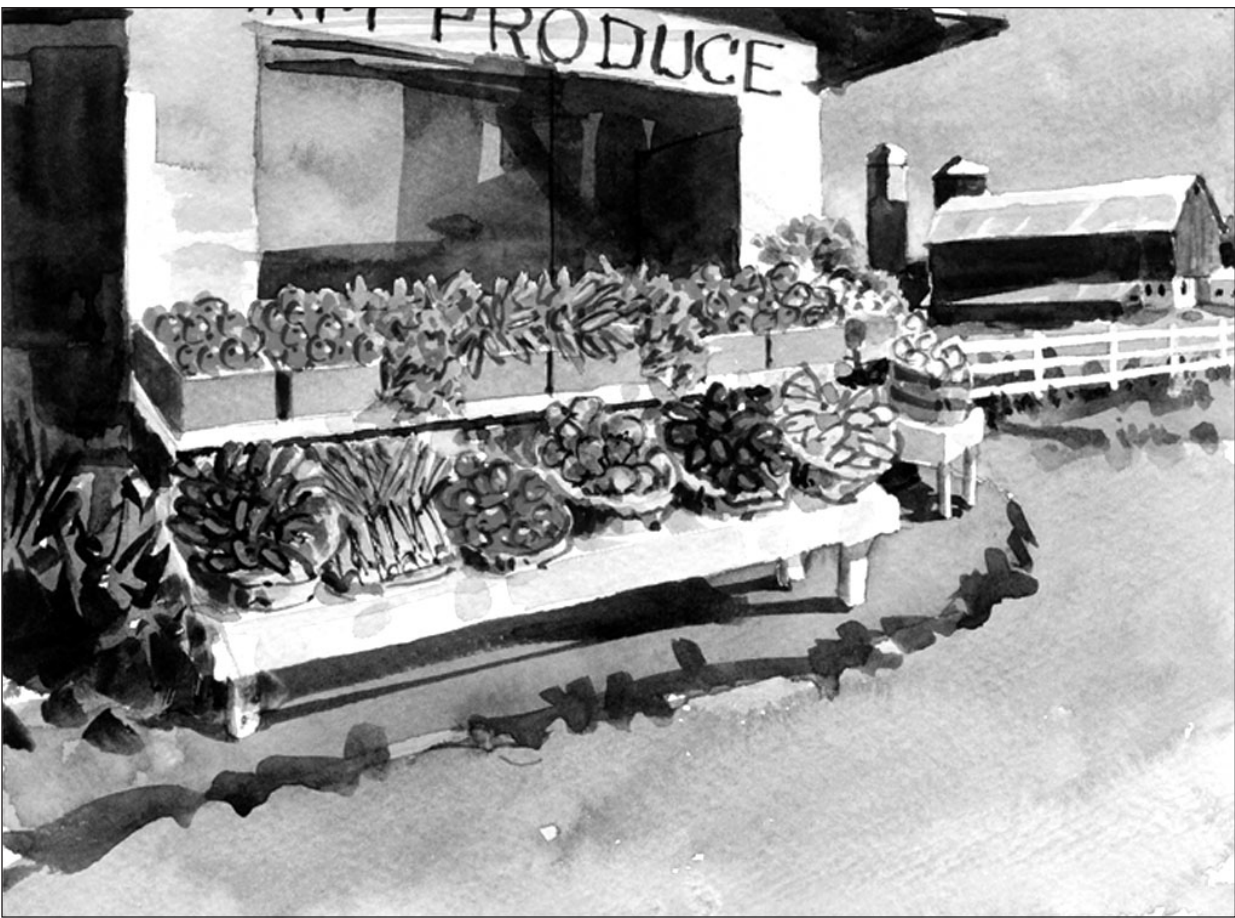
"I'm all about it," Dabbelt said. "It's almost a necessity, if not outright 100 percent necessary."

"That assistance would be invaluable all across the country," he said.

Health experts say a lack of affordable healthy food in low-income communities is directly related to high levels of obesity.

"The retail food environment is not the same in every neighborhood," Brian Smedley of the Health Policy Institute at the Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies said this week at a Centers for Disease Control and Prevention obesity summit.

While recent studies have found that poor urban neighborhoods don't lack grocery stores and supermarkets, some ex-



METRO GRAPHICS

perts say that finding fresh, affordable produce remains a challenge in these areas. According to a federal study released during the CDC's "Weight of the Nation" summit, the lack of access to healthy foods directly contributes to high U.S. obesity rates.

"As the trends show, people have a very tough time achieving healthy weights when inactive lifestyles are the norm and inexpensive, high-calorie foods and drinks are readily available 24 hours a day," said former Agriculture Secretary Dan Glickman, the chair of the committee that produced the report.

Some cities have taken the matter of improving food environments for low-income residents into their own hands. In 2006, Cleveland city council member Joe Cimperman discovered that only half of his city's farmers markets accepted food stamps, a practice that he described as "very sinful."

He and his colleagues passed legislation mandating that any markets that use public land, including sidewalks and

streets, accept EBT payments.

"Today, every single farmers market in the city of Cleveland does," Cimperman said.

Erin Gillespie, a representative for Florida's Department of Children and Families, which administers the state's food stamps program, pointed out an additional benefit of federal funding for farmers markets.

"Obviously, some of these farmers markets are small and probably don't have a lot of income to spend on technology to accept EBT cards," Gillespie said. "It will help them stay in business, and for people who need the assistance, it would give them access to healthy food that they may not have access to."

The Medill News Service is a Washington program of the Medill School of Journalism at Northwestern University.

## Opinion Parasite Outlook Is Buggy

BY RITA BRHEL  
P&D Correspondent

The bugs are out en masse! I can still enjoy the evenings without fleeing from clouds of mosquitoes, and I haven't yet seen any grasshoppers, but I've noticed that just about every other summertime insect and other creeper-crawler is out and about. One of my daughters has had three tick bites already this year.



Rita  
BRHEL

So, I was wondering, will this early spring mean a bigger parasite load among grazing livestock? Because, last year, which was a normal year for internal parasites, cost me a ewe that had survived at least one really wormy year. Plus, I'd really like to not overstock my pastures and am still trying to figure out that balance between a profitable stocking rate and being at risk of major parasite problems that comes with too any animals on too small of a pasture. I'd like to increase my herd, but not on a year that is forecast to be bad for parasites.

Well, I did some investigating, and it turns out that while this year's unusually early spring certainly did promote increased activity among external parasites like flies and ticks, it was rather in terms of extending their season than in sheer numbers. And the conditions for external parasites don't really have any impact on internal parasites, which rely on pasture conditions more than anything. Parasitic worms like warm, wet years and while there have been periods of warmer, more humid weather, this spring has been rather dry in many areas.

Mike Hildreth, a parasitologist with South Dakota State University, said it also depends on the worm species. Roundworms are excellent at overwintering in pastures, digging down into the soil to escape the frigid elements. They would overwinter whether or not it was a mild winter and early spring or not. But the barberpole worm, now here, there might actually be some difference — though likely slight.

The barberpole worm overwinters mostly inside the animal, so if a farmer deworms in the fall, the only way this worm species can overwinter is in the soil, and so far, they're not very good at it. But because this winter was milder than usual and this spring was nicer than usual, more worms will have overwintered. So, in theory, those producers who thought they had a good start to worm control this spring by deworming in the fall don't have any headway.

But still, Hildreth said, it's nothing for anyone to get excited about. All livestock are susceptible to worms. In fact, some livestock specialists say that rather than aiming to get rid of worms all together, producers should be aiming to keep worm numbers under a certain threshold. All animals will have worms, but control just the ones that get too wormy. A big reason for this advice is that internal parasites are notorious for becoming resistant to the dewormers meant to control them.

Alright, enough worm talk. Go back to eating your breakfast now.

## Sorghum Seed Is In Short Supply

BROOKINGS — South Dakota livestock and crop producers interested in planting sorghum and other annual warm season grasses this spring may face supply shortages, says Justin Fruechte, forage and cover crop specialist for Millborn Seeds, Brookings.

"More than 90 percent of all sorghum seed is grown in the Texas Panhandle. Seed supplies are down by approximately 60 percent due to severe drought conditions the area faced during the 2011 growing season," said Fruechte, who works with livestock producers to improve their forage acres and increase their grazing season.

Demand for sorghum has increased in recent years due to many factors, Fruechte says.

"Many growers are starting to double crop. Warm season annuals work well to plant after oats, hay or barley," said Fruechte.

Growers won't be disappointed with yields, Jarrod Cook, a sales representative with Richardson Seeds, one of the largest suppliers of sorghum seed in the world.

"Today's sorghum hybrids are not what they were even five years ago. They are more drought tolerant, more salt tolerant and more palatable than ever," Cook said.

As one of the few seed companies in the world to specialize in sorghum hybrids, the Texas seed company has spent almost 60 years improving the hybrids of sorghum Sudangrass, forage sorghums, grain sorghum and pearl millet through genetic selection in their in-house lab.

Cook highlights the Brown Mid-Rib (BMR) trait forage sorghum. The BMR sorghum was bred to only contain a small amount of lignin. Because lignin is not digestible, the BMR sorghum is an extremely palatable forage option for livestock producers. "When this trait was first discovered, the plants had problems with lodging — because lignin helps them stand upright. Through genetic selection we now have BMR hybrids that are just as stout and strong as non-BMR hybrids."

Looking ahead to the 2012 growing season, Cook says growing conditions are already looking up. "We're already off to a better start. We're seeing lower temperatures and have seen rain in some areas," he says.

## Aster Leafhoppers Seen In Fields, Gardens

BROOKINGS — Aster leafhoppers have been spotted in wheat and alfalfa fields this spring due to the warmer than normal weather, says Ada Szczepaniec, SDSU Extension Entomologist and Assistant Professor.

"Aster leafhoppers (*Macrostelus quadrilineatus*) are popping up, literally, in large numbers in the eastern part of the state," Szczepaniec said, of the small insects, about an eighth of an inch in size. "We've seen uncommonly high numbers of these leafhoppers on wheat and alfalfa recently."

Named for the fact that they jump when disturbed, leafhoppers usually migrate from the southern states into South Dakota in June and July, however because of this spring's warmer than average weather, the insect is visiting South Dakota fields

earlier this year. Szczepaniec says it will take time and research before treatment recommendations can be made for wheat.

"Because the timing of when these insects arrive in the state, doesn't usually coincide with the wheat crop, we need more research before we can recommend what, if anything, should be done," Szczepaniec said.

In alfalfa fields, Szczepaniec says that although increased numbers of leafhoppers have been seen in alfalfa fields, there is no need to spray. "Aster leafhoppers do not do the same kind of damage to alfalfa as potato leafhoppers, so no need to spray alfalfa to control aster leafhoppers," she said.

Szczepaniec adds that farmers need to scout all fields for insects earlier this year. "All crops

should definitely be scouted sooner than usual, because a lot of insects are already active owing to the warmer than normal temperatures."

The presence of high Aster leafhopper populations is something South Dakota gardeners will also want to be aware of, because of the impact they have on Aster yellows disease, says Buyung Hadi, SDSU Pesticide Education and Urban Entomology Coordinator.

"Aster leafhopper is the vector of Aster yellows, a disease caused by phytoplasma fairly common on flowers and vegetables including marigolds, daisies, coneflowers, and carrots," Hadi said.

The typical symptoms of Aster yellows are bushy growth, deformation of flowers and leaf yellowing.

Hadi says that high Aster leafhopper populations do not always mean that there will be an increase of Aster yellows.

"The proportion of Aster leafhoppers carrying the disease-causing agent is critical in determining whether a significant increase of Aster yellows is expected," Hadi said.

Even if there is an increased presence of Aster yellows in gardens this growing season, Hadi says intensive management against Aster leafhopper is not feasible in home gardens.

To learn more about insects' impact on fields this growing season and keep informed on research-based treatment recommendations, visit [iGrow.org/agronomy](http://iGrow.org/agronomy).

## Applications Sought For Grants To Provide Broadband Service To Remote Communities

WASHINGTON — Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack has announced that USDA is accepting applications through the Community Connect Broadband program for grants to provide broadband service to residents of remote, rural communities.

"Ensuring that all Americans have access to reliable broadband is a key part of the Obama Administration's effort to help create jobs and expand economic opportunities in rural areas," Vilsack said. "These grants not only are critical for businesses and residents, they also help first responders, educators and health care professionals by providing them with access to broadband service."

Community Connect grants are made available to the most

rural, unserved and economically challenged areas. The funds are used to build broadband infrastructure. Awardees are also required to establish community centers that offer free public access to broadband.

Information on available funding and application requirements are published on page 26241 of the May 3, 2012, Federal Register. More information on Community Connect Grants <[http://www.rurdev.usda.gov/utp\\_commconnect.html](http://www.rurdev.usda.gov/utp_commconnect.html)>, including the application guide, can be viewed from the USDA Rural Development website.

For more information in Nebraska contact Andre Boening at 402-652-3446 or [andre.boening@wdc.usda.gov](mailto:andre.boening@wdc.usda.gov).

## ‘Empowering Farm Women’ Topic Of NFU Conference

WASHINGTON — Most businesses would struggle to survive if they lost half of their management team overnight. Yet for thousands of families, an illness or injury to one spouse can leave the other feeling lost and frustrated.

Based on the well-respected "Annie's Project" education program, a conference for farm and rural women is being organized by National Farmers Union (NFU). The event, set for June 21-23, will provide participants with tools and information to confidently manage risks in their farm or ranch operations.

"Since the days of homesteading, women have been the cornerstones of family farm agriculture," said NFU President Roger Johnson. "Yet, too many women have not had the opportunity to gain an understanding of or experience in farm risk management."

A variety of trained instructors will teach family farm finances, budgeting and cash flow, cooperatives, marketing, farm transfer and estate planning, business plan-

ning, leadership assessment and skills, generational issues, and action planning.

The conference will be held at the NFU Education Center at Bailey, Colo. Those interested in participating are urged to register early as capacity is limited. Full payment must accompany registration and be postmarked by May 18. More information and registration details are available at [www.nfu.org/education](http://www.nfu.org/education).

"Annie's Project" also helps women find new ways to balance the demands of family, community and professionalism within the agricultural community. The conference is sponsored by Farm Credit, CoBank, FUI Foundation and the NFU Foundation.

National Farmers Union has been working since 1902 to protect and enhance the economic well-being and quality of life for family farmers, ranchers and rural communities through advocating grassroots-driven policy positions adopted by its membership.

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