

Willow Cordes-Eklund
Belfast Farmers Market
LD 568

Hello

My name is Willow Cordes-Eklund. I am both a SNAP recipient and I work at the Belfast farmers market on Fridays. I have had the honor and the privilege to work the Belfast market over the last three years and have shopped there for over 7 years.

I can speak from both the perspective of a recipient of Harvest bucks and as the point person who distributes them to many other costumers. This program has shifted how and were I spend my SNAP money. Because shopping locally at the Belfast market now means I, at one point, could DOUBLE my benefits and now get 50%more spending capacity I eat fresh local food supporting my community. there is no other program I could imagine that so directly improved the quality of me and my sons lives. Food is medicine and is the first step in growing a healthy resilient body.

As the BFM EBT/info table worker I have heard countless other recipients of SNAP say similar things. Even when the program went from doubling to supplying 50% what was spent they were all so grateful for the program. Families and individuals are able to buy seedlings in the spring and summer to grow their own gardens! Teaching their children how to garden and prepare veggies from their own homes would not be available to as many people if not for this program! Canning and preserving the seasons bounty from all the Harvest bucks saved up over the less abundant growing season of winter.

A few were disappointed that the amount was cut in half but NO ONE expressed anger or an "I am owed this" kind of attitude. We have 20 - 60 SNAP customers a week at our market every week and everyone of those customers says that the farmers market system of Harvest bucks is more user friendly then the coop version, they all remark at how without this they might not be able to justify the higher prices of local food, organic food and in many opinions a higher quality and better product then what they would get at the grocery store.

I also have seen how the Harvest bucks Program has crossed cultural borders, there are the hippie coop showers and there are Reny's shopper but at the farmers market I see people from all across the social culture spectrum. and I think that is because the program is just that important at making food affordable. but also because this allows shoppers the CHOICE of where and how they spend their government subsidies. They can choose to keep the money in our local community supporting the hard working farmers in our area and not pigeon holed into shopping only at the large grocery chains or gas stations which accept SNAP. Even amazon accepts SNAP. So the fact that Farmers markets are supported to accept SNAP and also increase the benefits by offering Harvest Bucks. well its invaluable. ,
thank you for you time