



EBT WIRELESS PROJECT

November 09 Newsletter



DHS

From the Editor – Jan Walters

Total Transactions	EBT Transactions	Total Sales on Wireless
2008 Total: 27,701	4257 (15.4% of total)	\$724,703
2009 Totals:		
January 09 265	17 (6.4%)	\$14,678
February 291	42 (14.4%)	\$23,494
March 382	39 (10.2%)	\$26,075
April 579	44 (7.6%)	\$28,492
May 4134	448 (10.8%)	\$145,541
June 3897	715 (18.3%)	\$92,723
July 4299	1217 (28.3%)	\$74,445
August 5168	1541 (29.8%)	\$89,825
September 4934	1242 (25.2%)	\$103,249
October 5057	539 (10.6%)	\$130,453

Many of you have heard about the budget situation in state government. At this point, for state fiscal year 2010 (ends June 30, 2010), the Wireless Project is still in the budget. Providing food assistance and access to nutritious, locally grown food for low income Iowans is a very important service. DHS staff would like to thank you for your assistance and cooperation in these trying times. You perform a valuable service for all Iowans. State agencies will be re-examining the budget for fiscal year 2011, which begins July 1, 2010. Be assured that we will keep you updated to any changes in the Wireless Project. If you have any questions on the budget, feel free to contact Jan or Tracy at any time.

October Facts:

Year to date sales for 2009 are \$729,105 compared to \$613,379 a year ago. This is an increase of 19%. Even better, you have already surpassed last year's sales for the entire calendar year. Congratulations! **Year to date EBT sales are \$59,060 compared to \$40,369 from a year ago. This is an increase of 46.3%.** The number of EBT transactions at farmers markets has also increased dramatically. As of October 31, 2009, there have been 5853 EBT transactions compared to 4172 last year. This is a 40% increase. In October, the average EBT purchase amount was for \$13.24. The average commercial purchase (debit, credit card) was for \$27.29.

In October 2009, there were 148,976 Food Assistance/EBT families in Iowa. \$41.9 million in benefits were issued in October to these families.

Here are other interesting facts regarding October sales:

There were 143 farmers/producers who were active during October. There were 81 who had EBT sales. The farmers who had 20 or more EBT transactions in October were:

- Hoffman Produce
- Country Market
- Log Cabin Produce
- Nostalgia Farm

For the fourth consecutive month, congratulations to Tammy Donovan/Country Market for having the highest number of EBT transactions and the greatest amount of EBT sales. Country Market is located in the Sioux City area. Great job!

Mother Nature Shocks Farmers Markets – October 10th

The Community Food Security Conference began Saturday, October 10th. Jan met several attendees from the conference at the market for an 8AM tour of the market and Iowa's Wireless Project. Everyone was surprised to see heavy snow falling in the Des Moines area. One of the attendees, who drove over from Omaha, had to pull off the interstate due to snow. Jan brought extra gloves, ear muffs and coats to the market. One of the women from West Virginia had only a light windbreaker with her. Kim Lyons, from Florida, was bundled from head to toe. (See picture below) With the cold weather and wind, several vendors chose to stay home that day. At 8:30 AM, the hardy customers attending the market dashed from vendor to vendor to get what they needed. Our group was able to visit with Larry Cleverley, Dean & Judy Henry and Tom Cory. After ninety minutes, our toes and noses were frozen and we hurried to Java Joe's for hot cocoa. Thanks Mother Nature! ☺



Fresh veggies (or frozen veggies?)



Snow covered petunias



Kim Lyons – Florida visitor

Hot Food/Drinks

Now that there is a fall chill in the air (and snow), many shoppers want to purchase hot cocoa, hot cider and hot coffee at the farmers markets to help stay warm. **Remember, EBT cards cannot be used to purchase hot foods or hot drinks at farmers markets.** You can lose the certification with FNS by accepting EBT as payment for hot coffee and hot cocoa. If you are no longer a FNS retailer, you will not be able to participate in the EBT Wireless Project.

Farmer Survey

Every farmer should have received the annual survey form. Thanks to those of you who have already returned the survey. Remember to mail or fax (515-281-7791) your survey by November 30th. Our mailing address is: Iowa Dept. Human Services, Hoover State Office Bldg., 1305 E. Walnut St., Des Moines, IA 50319 Attn: Tracy Penick.

Upcoming Events

Farm Bureau Annual Conference – Des Moines Convention Center December 2nd & 3rd, 2009. Due to budget limitations, DHS will not have a booth at this conference.

IA Fruit & Vegetable Growers Conference – January 29th & 30th

Customer Survey Results for 2009

The customer survey response so far is phenomenal! **Just a reminder, please put the cards in the sack of any customer, especially those who use a plastic card for payment.** We've had many responses from customers who paid with cash. The comments are interesting, but we really want feedback from those who are using plastic (EBT, debit or credit). If you need more cards, contact Tracy. Here are the results so far:

- Why do you like to shop at farmers markets? (Top reasons in descending order)
 - Good/fresh food (118)
 - Fresh Produce (93)
 - Buy locally grown/made items (59)
 - Support local farmers (40)
 - It's Fun/relaxed atmosphere/music (19)

- How often do you shop at farmers markets?
 - Every week – 54%
 - Every 2 weeks – 13%
 - Once or twice a month – 11%
 - More than once a week – 9%
 - As much as I can – 3%
 - 3 out of 4 weeks – 3%
 - Not often - 3%
 - Other - 4%

- What markets do you shop at? (Top 5 responses thus far)
 - Davenport (Northpark & Freight House) – 73
 - Iowa City/Coralville - 54
 - Des Moines (Downtown, Drake, Valley Junction) - 34
 - Cedar Rapids – 21
 - Burlington - 15

- What did you buy today at the market? (Top 7 in descending order)
 - Fresh produce - 221
 - Baked goods – 144
 - Honey/Jam & jelly – 38
 - Flowers – 31
 - Vegetable plants/fruit trees/bushes - 30
 - Meat – 28
 - Eggs - 10

- What would you like to buy but can't find at the market? (in descending order)
 - More Fruit – 10
 - Eggs - 8
 - More meat vendors - 4
 - Parsnips – 3
 - Sweet corn - 3
 - Cheese - 3
 - Lots of other things, such as (goat milk, fresh juice, shrimp, eggplant, arts & crafts, etc)

- If a year round market was in your area, would you shop at it during the winter months? (Apparently, the question should have specified 'an indoor' year round market. Many customers are assuming that its outside and no produce will be available.)
 - Yes – 76%
 - No – 15%
 - No answer – 6%
 - Depends or already have indoor year-round market – 3%

- What services could the market offer or provide that would make you shop there more often? (in descending order)
 - Restrooms - 59
 - Hand washing stations -48
 - Canning/freezing classes - 31
 - Chairs/sitting areas to relax & eat goodies – 7
 - Others (incl. shade, more variety, music, cooking demos, garbage cans, etc) - 23

- How did you pay for your items today?
 - Cash –61%
 - Credit – 13%
 - Debit – 11%
 - EBT – 12%
 - Other (senior checks/checks) – 3%

Additional comments from customers:

- Davenport EBT customer – I really like this market. Lots of choices.

- Urbandale – Really love to buy organic; it's my first choice.
- IA City – I don't use EBT, but have friends who do. I think it's great that they can use this at farmers markets. I like to support local businesses.
- IA City – Cindy Cary from Salon is great.
- It is very nice. I love coming to the market.

Cost of Wireless Equipment

Just a reminder: If you have rental device or a 'free' wireless device and closing down for the season, be sure to get the device mailed back to TMS timely. Otherwise, you could be charged \$750 for the cost of the device. TMS will assume that you are keeping the machine.

If you lose the wireless device, there is a \$750 replacement cost. Total Merchant Services will deduct this amount from your checking account. If the device is stolen, be sure to contact your insurance agent to see if a claim can be filed. Insurance may pay for all or part of the replacement costs.

Helpful Hints!

All address, phone number or bank account changes need to be reported as soon as possible. If you move or change phone numbers, we want the correct contact information to appear on the receipts from your wireless POS. TMS can help you perform a download so the correct information appears on the receipt.

If you change banks accounts, there is a \$20 fee that you will have to pay. TMS charges this fee, but it is crucial to have your sales deposited into the correct account.

Help DHS Maintain Equipment/Signs

When a farmer no longer wishes to participate in the Wireless Project or DHS cancels the account, it is very important to return all state equipment to DHS. Several farmer accounts were cancelled this fall. We have been dismayed by the condition of the equipment that is returned. Some farmers have not thoroughly read the instructions sent by DHS. As a result, some state owned equipment was mailed to TMS, which we are not able to recover. A couple of farmers have lost or thrown away the signs that we provided.

With the lack of funds to purchase new signs and batteries, we have to keep our equipment in good condition. There will be many new farmers signing up for the project next spring. We want to be able to give them basic equipment such as signs and an extra battery. **We need your help.** Don't store your signs outdoors or in vehicles during the heat of the summer. Keep track of your extra battery. DHS paid for this battery, which costs approximately \$90. Follow the instructions closely when you shut down for the season or permanently. If you have questions about where to send equipment please call Tracy or Jan. With your help, we will have enough equipment to help other new farmers.

Reminders:

1. Since we have so many new farmers, remember that you cannot ring up a sale for another vendor. You could lose your Food Stamp certification and be terminated from the Wireless Project.
2. Since you are paying for the commercial transaction fees, be sure to keep track of what you are paying so you can use those expenses as a tax deduction.
3. You cannot set a minimum purchase amount. If an EBT household wishes to purchase \$.50 in onions, you do need to process the transaction. Same for any debit or credit transaction.
4. If your machine quits working, be sure to call Jan or Tracy right away! Or if need help during the weekend, you can call the 888 phone number on the side of your machine.
5. Let us know if you need any supplies such as paper rolls, power cords, or battery.
6. The second battery that we provide to you was purchased by DHS. If you ever need to return your wireless machine, be sure to keep one battery, carrying case and signs.
7. **Charge your batteries before market.** You should always have a charged battery, ready to go for market. If a battery is not holding a charge, contact Tracy for a replacement.
10. Please make sure to keep the original box that your machine came in as it contains the Sim card, which is needed to identify your machine if you have to call TMS.

Help Desk

We are here to help you!

When you have questions about:

- **Participating in the Wireless project or reimbursement questions? Call Tracy Penick at 515-281-5545 or Jan Walters at 515-281-3588.**
- **What you can sell to EBT customers, or being authorized to accept EBT? Call FNS at 515-284-4035.**
- **Food Assistance eligibility? Call Char Hansen at 515-281-6820.**