

Boosting SNAP benefits for fresh food

Fundraising campaign supports farmers markets — and shoppers

BY MATT MARTINEZ

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GREAT BARRINGTON — As summer approaches and farmers once again prop up stands of fresh goods and produce, a local nonprofit is working to make them more accessible for SNAP recipients.

Berkshire Agricultural Ventures, a Great Barrington-based organization that supports local farms, is hosting a fundraising drive, the “Market Match Fund Campaign,” throughout the month of April as it enters the third year of its Market Match Program.

The program matches purchases at farmers markets paid for by the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, or SNAP, up to \$30 — effectively doubling the money recipients can spend on fresh food.

“Shopping local is important to people, and because of the match, it makes it a good choice for people who have very limited incomes, right?” said Ciana Barnaba, community relations and resource development manager for Berkshire Agricultural Ventures. “Five dollars becomes 10 dollars, and so on.”

The organization hopes to raise \$30,000 by the end of the month for the program — a goal that Barnaba sees as attainable.

An anonymous donor is matching the first \$10,000 donated to the organization, she said, and they are fast approaching that mark in contributions from individuals and corporate partners.

But that’s just the start of the fundraising process. The organization needs \$175,000 to run the program sustainably in 2024, Barnaba said. That factors in the roughly 4,000 customers who use the program currently, the expenses of operating the program and outreach efforts to make more people aware that it’s an option.

That includes efforts to overcome language and transportation barriers, Barnaba said.

She added that only 10 percent of the \$175,000 ask would go toward program expenses.

“The rest of it is going right out the door,” she said.

The organization will be accepting donations all throughout the summer to support the effort, she said.

To date, the program has supported more than 8,400 SNAP transactions at 10 farmers markets in Berkshire County, Dutchess County in New York and Litchfield County in Connecticut. The cumulative total for the sales is about \$380,000 over the past two years — meaning the program has provided about \$190,000 in support.

This year also marked the first time the program supported winter farmers markets, Barnaba said, which aren't included yet in the cumulative total. She said the winter data would likely put the cumulative revenue for farmers above \$400,000.

The program is spread throughout the county, but has been especially impactful for the largest cities in the Berkshires. Last year, Pittsfield and North Adams were responsible for the most SNAP purchases at local farmers markets; residents in each city spent between \$25,000 and \$30,000 over the course of the season, Barnaba said.

Prospective donors can visit the Berkshire Agricultural Ventures website [berkshireagventures.com/ support](http://berkshireagventures.com/support) to learn more.

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The Pittsfield Farmers Market, shown in 2021, is one of 10 local markets supported by the Berkshire Agricultural Ventures Market Match Program that gives an extra benefit to SNAP recipients buying produce. STEPHANIE ZOLLSHAN — THE BERKSHIRE EAGLE

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