



WIRELESS EBT PROJECT

February 2015 Newsletter



From the Editor – Tracy Penick

Month	EBT Transactions	Debit/Credit Transactions	Total Transactions	EBT Sales	Debit/Credit Sales	Total Sales
January	31	299	330	\$1,340.73	\$14,917.92	\$16,258.65
Total for Year	31	299	330	\$1,340.73	\$14,917.92	\$16,258.65

January 2015 Facts:

Total sales for January this year were slightly higher than January 2014 (\$16,258.65 compared to \$16,221.99). The number of EBT transactions were lower in 2015 than in 2014 (31 compared to 58). For January 2015, there were a total of 330 wireless transactions compared to 453 in 2014.

In January 2015, there were 188,407 Food Assistance/EBT families in Iowa. \$43,529,309 in benefits were issued in January to these families.

Here are other interesting facts regarding January sales:

There were 20 farmers who were active in January and 8 of those had EBT sales. The farmers with the highest EBT transactions were:

- ❖ Grossman Meats (10) Preston
- ❖ Iowa Food Coop (9) Des Moines
- ❖ Oak Hill Acres (5) Atalissa
- ❖ Blooming Acres Farm (2) Fairfield
- ❖ Coyote Run Farm (2) Lacona
- ❖ Allen’s Grove Greenhouse (1) Donahue
- ❖ Hollow Maple Farm (1) Bennett
- ❖ JoKir’s Wild (1) Gilmore City

Congratulations go out to Grossman Meats for having the highest amount of EBT transactions and to Iowa Food Coop for having the highest amount in EBT sales. Great job to both!

Help Us Recruit New Farmers!

It is that time of year where we need to begin recruiting new farmers for the Wireless EBT Project. Do you know of any farmers that would benefit by being a part of the Wireless EBT Project? If so, please let Tracy know so she can reach out to them.

Iowa Fruit & Vegetable Growers Annual Conference

Tracy had the pleasure to host a booth at the Iowa Fruit & Vegetable Growers Conference on January 29 & 30. I was once again impressed at the involvement of the farmers that participate in the Wireless EBT

Project. Three of our farmers serve as members on the Iowa Fruit & Vegetable Growers board of directors. One of our farmers hosted a booth for his business. And two of our farmers held workshops, Matt Russell (Coyote Run Farm) talked about Local Food and Iowa and Gary Huber (Iowa Food Coop) talked about Local Food Co-ops. It is always great to catch up with all of you and see what DHS can do to help to further this project!



Matt Russell – Coyote Run Farm

Results from Farmers Annual Survey

Out of 129 farmers that participated in the Wireless EBT Project in 2014, 59 farmers completed the annual survey this year. 45 farmers completed the survey online and 14 sent in a hard copy to DHS. Thanks so much to those that took the time to complete this survey. This information is compiled and shared with our federal partners, others states and non-profit groups.

Listed below is the wireless sales history for 2014.

	\$0 -	\$501 -	\$1001 -	\$3001 -	\$5,001 -	\$10,001 -	\$20,001 -	\$60,001 -	\$75,001 or greater \$
	\$500	\$1,000	\$3,000	\$5,000	\$10,000	\$20,000	\$60,000	\$75,000	
# of farmers with this amt of sales	32	21	24	4	19	13	11	2	3

What benefit do you receive by being a part of the Wireless EBT Project?

- Able to provide fresh healthy food for those who could not afford otherwise.
- Benefit of having access to a machine and more ways for people to pay for products.
- EBT customers that we would not see without it.
- Increased sales.
- More new customers each year.
- I wouldn't be able to afford it if it weren't for the program.

What is the one thing about the Wireless EBT Project that you would like changed?

- Machine to not go to sleep.
- Cost of transactions.
- More publicity and encouragement to use the service and attend markets to use them.
- Not having to send the machines back unless we drop out of the program.
- Better connectivity.
- It all works for me! You guys are awesome! Thanks so much for all of your HARD work in coordinating this program. It's an important and beneficial project!

Were your EBT sales higher or lower in 2013?

- Higher – 68%
- Lower – 32%

Overall, EBT sales were down in 2013. What could DHS do to help promote EBT to Food Assistance clients?

- Education of where they can use their EBT and the benefits of buying fresh and local food.
- Marketing the CSA member option.
- I think the program is well promoted.
- More publicity.
- This is a question we have thought about many times. You have provided us with signs and ways to promote. It seems EBT customers just don't use farmers markets much. Or the technology has not worked when they did try to use cards.

Were your Credit and Debit sales higher or lower than in 2013?

- Higher – 88%
- Lower – 12%

What problems did you experience this year?

- Machine would not work – 32%
- Billed incorrectly on monthly statement – 10%
- Poor customer service with Total Merchant Services (TMS) – 2%
- Poor customer service with TSYS – 2%
- None – 40%
- Other – 14%
 - Had to fill out TMS questionnaire multiple times.
 - It was definitely a problem for us trying to return our machine this year.
 - Couldn't always get wireless connection.
 - Would not close out. Took 3 hours on the phone to fix it.

How many months out of the year do you use your wireless machine?

- 3 months – 4%
- 4 months – 5%
- 5 months – 16%
- 6 months – 42%
- 7 months – 4%
- 8 months – 11%
- 9 months – 1.5%
- 11 months – 1.5%
- 12 months – 15%

How do you promote to your clients that you accept EBT, debit and credit?

- The signs are great! We have at least 4 signs we put up at every market.
- Advertise with flyers and road signs and word of mouth.
- Facebook, website, work of mouth, brochures.
- Signs and word of mouth.
- Newspaper & flyers.

What items do you sell?

- Vegetables – 25%

- Fruit – 18%
- Baked Goods – 10%
- Meat – 3%
- Eggs – 11%
- Jam/Jellies – 10%
- Honey – 11%
- Other – 12%
 - Flowers
 - Noodles
 - Popcorn
 - Bedding plants & flowers
 - Cheese
 - Herbs
 - Salsa & guacamole

Where do you sell your products?

- Farmers Markets – 66%
- On the farm sales – 25%
- Road side stand – 8%
- Other – 1%
 - CSA's
 - Craft shows
 - Customer pre-order
 - Mobile trucks
 - Weekend shows

Do you read the monthly newsletter?

- Yes – 96%
- No – 4%

If you answered No to question 11, please explain why?

- I actually didn't read them until the season was over. I am super busy during the season.

Do you put up the signs that DHS provided you at every market you attend?

- Yes – 93%
- No – 7%

If you answered No to questions 13, please explain why?

- I only have 1 machine and do 2 markets on Saturday during the same time frame.
- We only have one machine, but attend multiple markets at the same time.

Please tell us what you think would improve the Wireless EBT Project for the 2015 season?

- More participating vendors at our market.
- Educate clientele.
- Communication to the EBT card holders we welcome the use of the card, and I always thank them and ask them to come back again.
- Better EBT connect ability (fewer dead zones). This is unpredictable and frustrating when we have the signage that we can use EBT cards but then have to tell customers that it isn't working.
- Encourage farmers' market managers to advertise EBT benefits are accepted there.

- We are pleased with the project. Can't think of any changes to make. Thank you for the opportunity to participate!

If you are interested in reading the entire report, contact Tracy.

Changes to your contact information?

It is very important that DHS has your current e-mail addresses and your correct phone numbers. Tracy sends out a lot of important information and if DHS does not have your current information you could be missing out on important information. Please make sure that if you change your e-mail address or you drop or pick up a new phone number that you share that information with Tracy.

Paper for your wireless machine

Just a reminder that DHS supplies the paper rolls for your wireless machines. It is imperative that you use thermal paper or it could ruin your machine. Please do not use any other type of paper in your wireless machine other than the paper that DHS supplies. If you are running low on paper, please give Tracy a call.

Reminders:

1. **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. **Hot foods and hot drinks (cocoa, coffee, and tea) cannot be purchased with SNAP EBT benefits.**
5. **If your Nurit machine quits working, you need to call TMS Tech Support at 1-888-848-6825. This is the phone number on the side of your machine. If you can't get the problem solved, please give Tracy a call.**
6. **If your VeriFone machine quits working, you will need to call Jason Butts at 402-574-7086 or Chris Shanahan at 402-574-7016. If you can't get the problem solved, please give Tracy a call.**
7. **Call Tracy if you need any supplies such as paper rolls, power cords, or battery.**
8. **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.**
9. **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.**

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 515-281-4935.**
- **What you can sell to EBT customers, or being authorized to accept EBT? Call USDA/FNS at 877-823-4369.**
- **Food Assistance eligibility? Call Kari Lind at 515-281-7000.**
- **Supplies – call Tracy Penick at (515) 281-4935.**