



BOSTON AREA GLEANERS

Summer 2019 Policy Brief: Healthy Incentives Program

WHAT IS THE PROBLEM?

As of 2016, 1 in 10 families in Massachusetts is food insecure.

- The rising cost of living in the state, combined with the stagnancy of the minimum wage (currently \$12) ensure that food insecurity is a persistent problem.
- The cost of food insecurity, including increased healthcare expenses and loss of productivity during work hours, totals to \$2.4 billion a year.
- Programs such as the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) are designed to assist food insecure families, but often have limited locations and access to fresh fruits and vegetables.

WHO IS AFFECTED?

Food insecurity affects many diverse households.

- Populations of SNAP participants typically correlate with urban populations, and populations of immigrants and ethnic minorities.
- More than half of SNAP participating families have children and elderly or disabled members.
- A third of SNAP participating families are working.

Local farmers are experiencing increased economic challenges.

- Only 14% of Massachusetts farmland is protected from development.
- The threat of urban expansion, combined with a scarcity of young people seeking careers in agriculture, threatens local farms in the state.
- Farmers' markets are also struggling, with competition from more convenient grocery stores and diminishing attendance.

WHAT IS HIP?

The Healthy Incentives Program (HIP) incentivizes SNAP clients to buy fruits and vegetables.

- Produce can be purchased with an EBT card at participating farmers' markets, farm stands, mobile markets, and CSA farm share programs.
- For every dollar amount purchased by SNAP clients in fruits and vegetables, HIP matches it up to a certain, need-based monthly limit determined by the size of the household.
- Monthly incentives begin at \$40 and return directly to the client's EBT card.

HIP IS WIN-WIN-WIN

- Low income and food insecure families have better access to healthy, local fruits and vegetables, which empowers them to develop lifelong healthy habits.
- Local farming businesses have a consistent and enthusiastic base of customers who support sales at farmer's markets.
- Local economies and communities experience positive growth from the experience, including \$1.12 of local economic impact for every dollar spent.



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WHO QUALIFIES?

SNAP clients are automatically enrolled into HIP state-wide and can participate at any registered vendor.

- HIP helps SNAP clients to build long-term healthy habits by bridging the nutrition gap created by food inaccessibility and insecurity.
- SNAP clients who participated in the program have reported significant health benefits for themselves and their families, including relief from chronic pain, and improved cholesterol and blood sugar.
- HIP also encourages conversation and interaction with neighbors regarding their HIP-supported home gardens, and a more informed perspective on local food systems and businesses.

HOW IS IT FUNDED?

Funding began with a \$3.4 million USDA grant, which expanded the healthy Incentives Pilot into the healthy Incentives program.

- The unanticipated popularity of HIP led to its lack of funding and suspension in April 2018.
- Since then, the program has experienced inconsistency and uncertainty about funding sources and its long-term future as part of SNAP.
- HIP received enough funding to begin on May 25, 2019, in time for the summer season. Supporters and advocates of HIP are seeking to pass the senate-proposed \$6.5 million budget in FY20.

ARE THERE FUTURE GOALS?

Supporters, advocates, and SNAP clients have many goals for the long-term future of the program.

- These goals will be better achieved if the proposed \$6.5 million budget is approved. For example:
 - Extending program's duration through the winter months.
 - Increasing participation in HIP by 15%.
 - Establishing stronger ties in communities currently underserved by the program.
- One simulation study found that incentive programs like HIP reduce healthcare costs as clients develop long-term healthy eating patterns--making incentive programs very cost effective.

WHAT CAN YOU DO?

- SNAP Clients:
 - Check for local vendors that display the HIP logo at farmer's markets, farm stands, and CSA programs.
- Farmers and Vendors:
 - Apply to be a SNAP and hip authorized retailer.
- MEFAP Advocates:
 - Contact your legislators in support of the program and the \$6.5 million budget for FY20 in S48 and H145.
 - Keep the conversation going by spreading the word about HIP.



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