

EBT processing equipment changing at market

Sara Hardy Downtown Farmers Market expects no interruption in service

BY ALEXA ZOELLNER azoellner@record-eagle.com Aug 19, 2018



TRAVERSE CITY — There are people that start their shopping by swiping their Bridge Cards at the Seeds House every Wednesday and Saturday at the Sara Hardy Downtown Farmers Market.

There, staff pulls money off the card and gives customers coins they can use to buy from various vendors that accept Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program payments, said Maya Grant, an assistant at the Seeds House.

“(The program is used) 20-plus times a day, so pretty consistently,” Grant said.

SNAP is a federal program that offers nutrition assistance to eligible, low-income individuals and families and provides economic benefits to communities, according to the United States Department of Agriculture’s Food and Nutrition Service website. It’s the largest program in the domestic hunger safety net. Program benefits are distributed via an electronic benefit transfer (EBT) card, known as a Bridge Card in Michigan.

“I think it’s great, getting people to eat fresh food,” said Eli Brown, a vendor from Interwater Farms, Williamsburg.

“You get a double-whammy: helping people have an easier method to eat quality food and nutrition and supporting local farmers at the same time.”

Karen Westmaas, a vendor from Westmaas Farms, McBain, said she sees the coins used every market day.

The Sara Hardy market processed \$11,700 in EBT last year, said Nick Viox, communications and project manager for the Traverse City Downtown Development Authority. They did so using the Mobile Market+ app by Novo Dia Group Inc., Texas.

The market is one of 160 in the state that accepts SNAP and among about 50 that have been using the Mobile Market+ app to do so, according to Joe Lesausky, food access manager for the Michigan Farmers Market Association.

Novo Dia originally had announced that services for the app would end on July 31.

That deadline was extended to Aug. 31 with help from the National Association of Farmers Market Nutrition Programs.

There shouldn’t be any interruption in service for Bridge Card users at the Sara Hardy market because of the extensions, Viox noted. They are waiting for new EBT processing equipment from CardConnect LLC, Pennsylvania.

“You read the articles and it sounds very stressful, but Nick said he has known for a while and has prepped a new program for us to switch into,” Grant said. “So we’re going to have new training on that soon.”