

Utilizing Technology to Improve Program Efficiency

WIC FMNP

The WIC Farmers' Market Nutrition Program (FMNP), established in 1992, enhances WIC's mission by connecting WIC participants with fresh, locally-grown produce for families, fostering both nutritional well-being and community development!¹ FMNP provides annual benefits during the farmers' market season, which can be used to purchase fresh fruits, vegetables, and herbs from authorized farmers, farmers' markets, and roadside stands.¹

Increasing Access to Healthy Foods Through Farmers' Markets Initiative

As part of a three-year initiative, the National WIC Association published the [Farmers' Market Nutrition Program \(FMNP\) Landscape Scan Report](#) which examines the implementation of FMNP, electronic FMNP (eFMNP), and Cash Value Benefit (CVB) programs across the nation, focusing on key facilitators and barriers to success. These insights shaped the strategies shared in this Case Study to strengthen FMNP efficiency.

State Innovations to Expand WIC FMNP Access and Redemption: Lessons from Washington and New Mexico

To improve access to WIC FMNP, reduce barriers to FMNP benefit redemption, and lower operational costs, State WIC programs have embraced innovative technologies tailored to the unique needs of their farmers' markets, farmers, and participants. By implementing tools such as QR codes, mobile apps, cellphones, tablets, and hotspots, these states have addressed barriers faced by farmers and participants in rural or underserved areas, enhanced the efficiency of benefit redemption, and reduced the financial burden on local vendors. This Case Study illustrates farmer and participant-centered strategic technology investments made in Washington State and New Mexico that have improved program effectiveness while supporting broader food access goals.

Washington State's Use of QR Codes for Improved eFMNP Redemption

Washington State implements the WIC FMNP through the Washington State Department of Health. They accept e-solutions for WIC FMNP redemption. They also allow CVB redemption at farmers' markets; thereby increasing the



purchasing power of families; allowing them to access additional fresh fruits and vegetables.

In today's high-tech society, it is taken for granted that most people have smart phones, access to reliable internet, and can quickly and easily download apps on these phones. However, this is not always true and can cause a barrier to accessing eFMNP benefits. This is because when a state transitions to eFMNP, it is assumed that participants will download the eFMNP application onto their smart phones that can be scanned to transact the purchase. However, if the participant does not have a smart phone or access to reliable internet at the farmers' market, they are unable to access their FMNP benefits this way. Therefore, having a QR code affixed on a physical card allows the participant to access their benefits without a smart phone or internet connection.

Following Washington's transition to eWIC*, transitioning to eFMNP benefits was a logical next step for staff members. Using the same Management Information System (MIS) and vendor infrastructure that supports eWIC, FMNP benefits

*eWIC is an electronic issuance system for WIC. Benefits are automatically added onto a card, similar to a debit card.

¹Food and Nutrition Service. Overview. Accessed March 18, 2025. <https://www.fns.usda.gov/fmnp/overview>

were made available via QR codes both embedded in a mobile app and physically printed on participant eWIC cards.

Although Washington State chose to print the QR code on the eWIC card, this is not the only way to provide participants with a physical copy of the QR code. The QR codes can be printed on paper for the participant to keep or they can be printed on a sticker that is affixed to the eWIC card. These QR codes offer a valuable alternative for participants without smartphones or those who don't use the app. This approach allows participants to redeem benefits by presenting the physical QR code at farmers' markets, where growers scan the code and enter the transaction amount. Benefits are deducted in real time after the participant enters their PIN. The process is quick, efficient, and inexpensive. Eliminating that barrier was a driving force, as noted by a local WIC staff member,

“...we're excited about the cards having the QR code on them now. That's going to be a huge benefit for participants that don't have a cell phone or don't use the WIC shopper app.”

Staff members intentionally chose this QR code system (available on the card or the app) to avoid requiring farmers to invest in an additional payment device, especially since many vendors attend multiple markets across the state weekly. While reflecting on the reasons why their staff chose to utilize QR codes, one State Agency staff member shared,

“...we didn't want to push our growers to invest in equipment, or us [State Agency] to pay for equipment.”

Another staff member supported this intention to support farmers stating, “...we have growers that go to five markets a week, and some of them, they go to 45 markets a week. So that means different devices to accept the transaction, because the growers are at different markets at the same time. So, in order to minimize that cost, we thought,

‘Okay, [seemingly] everyone has a phone, so let's go with the QR code.’” In addition to helping improve access for WIC participants with and without smartphones, the QR codes also reduce farmers' cost by enabling them to redeem eFMNP benefits using their personal smartphones, minimizing the need for several devices.



New Mexico's Use of Funding to Address Connectivity Issues

As one of the first FMNP pilot sites, New Mexico implements WIC FMNP through the New Mexico Department of Health. They accept e-solutions for WIC FMNP redemption at farmers' markets.

When New Mexico began implementing the eFMNP, a major concern was how to support participating farmers located at markets in areas with limited or no internet or cell service. In response to feedback from market managers gathered during their annual market training, New Mexico Department of Health (DOH) set out to acquire funding to provide farmers and market managers with tablets and mobile hotspots. In 2022, they were able to acquire state funding to purchase and distribute these devices. If you are interested in how they acquired this funding, read the case study entitled, '[Utilizing External Funding for FMNP](#).' However, hotspot performance was unreliable due to inconsistencies in cellular coverage across the state. Program staff found that the devices would only work in areas covered by specific cellular carriers. Therefore, if they were in an area that was not covered by those carriers (e.g., T-Mobile, Verizon, AT&T), the devices would fail to work, thus negating the purpose of providing the devices.

To remedy this, the staff conducted several field tests using a variety of electronic devices and determined multi-carrier phones as the best and

most efficient option. The DOH provided farmers and market managers with multi-carrier iPhones that were preloaded with the SoliMarket Register app and locked down to prevent unauthorized usage. The phones were also equipped with trackers that allowed program staff to locate the devices. These iPhones were managed by the State's IT department. With multiple carrier flexibility, cell phones can be assigned to the best-performing cell coverage in each market location. One State Agency staff member reflected on the impact of moving to iPhones,

“And so it may just cost just a little bit more, but it is what is needed to make it easier. And so securing this funding has been awesome for us and just being able to equip our farmers and our market managers with better technology.”

While the devices helped farmers gain reliable access to the internet for processing transactions, the in-person support and training provided by program staff also played a large role in implementing the new devices. The program staff provided hands-on technical support at the farmers' markets to help the market managers and farmers set up and use the devices, ensuring a smooth transition to the new electronic benefit processing system, especially when equipment and connectivity varied widely. In-person training allowed FMNP staff to deliver support and education tailored to the individuals. The farmers and market managers were able to ask the program staff specific questions about the electronic device and general questions about FMNP.

This personalized, on-site approach ensured immediate problem-solving and technical support, reduced follow-up issues, and the ability to address multiple training needs in one visit. The proactive training and support helped build confidence and capacity among market managers and farmers. State Agency staff members believe these in-person training sessions are necessary for a smooth transition,

“Even to teach them the program. I mean, anything that is brand new, you've got to be there. Like I've mentioned in our previous conversations, you have to be there for them... You can't expect them to know how to do it.”

One State Agency staff member emphasized that for the tablets and hot spots, online training alone would not have been practical due to the range of devices and cell service providers, which required brand-specific setup guidance.

Conclusion

Implementing technology in FMNP has proven to enhance program accessibility, streamline benefit redemption, and support farmers, market staff, and WIC participants. Washington streamlined access to eFMNP benefits by utilizing a platform that integrates eWIC and eFMNP benefits onto one app. Placing QR codes on participant eWIC cards and in the WIC app increased eFMNP benefit redemption by eliminating costly equipment barriers for farmers and providing access to participants without smartphones. In New Mexico, consistently providing connectivity solutions, and transitioning based on feedback, while providing hands-on training for farmers and market managers, helped to reduce barriers to benefits redemption. These technology-driven solutions improved electronic benefit redemption, by making FMNP more accessible and user-friendly.

