



Low Income Patrons Boost Greenmarket Mission

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A new report finds food stamp use at greenmarkets across the city has more than doubled over the past year.

City Council Speaker Christine Quinn says food stamp spending at local greenmarkets has reached more than \$226,000 -- up from about \$100,000 in 2008.

The dramatic increase is a result of bolstered funding for Electronic Benefit Transfer stations, which allow vendors to scan and accept food stamps.

"If you make fresh food economically affordable and physically available, low income people will eat it in droves," said New York City Coalition Against Hunger Executive Director Joel Berg.

"The success of this program is proof that New Yorkers want to eat healthy, want to feed their family in a healthy nutritious way, we just need to give them the option and the access to healthy food in the neighborhoods where they live and shop," Quinn said.

This past summer, the Department of Health offered \$2 vouchers for every \$5 in food stamps spent at the greenmarkets, allowing that money to go 40 percent further.

Officials say the program is a win-win situation since local farmers get a boost in business while earning new and loyal customers.

"The EBT and food stamps program have been really helpful because from the initiative that after people finish they are still willing to pay their money. To come back and pay for the fresh products," said Greenmarket farmer Janet Rodriguez.

So far, City Council funding has placed the hand scanners in 23 greenmarkets. Quinn says her goal is to have them in every greenmarket before she leaves office.

Officials hope the increase in accessibility will lead to a drop in obesity rates and other health problems.