

# Survey of SNAP Food Providers in Eight Kentucky Counties:

## BUSINESS NEEDS AND COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS

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In 2018 a survey was conducted of stores accepting SNAP electronic benefit transfer (EBT) cards in the Kentucky counties of Bourbon, Boyle, Breathitt, Jackson, Knott, Lincoln, Madison, and Owsley. The survey was a component of research conducted by CEDIK at the University of Kentucky, in conjunction with the Kentucky Grocers and Convenience Store Association to gain a better understanding of local food environments and to learn more about grocery store policies and practices. The reports in this series explore the challenges and practices of stores that accept EBT cards and the implications for local food access in the study area. All the participating counties represent areas of high eligibility for participation in the federal SNAP programs.

Two hundred and sixty surveys were sent by mail with a pre-paid return envelope to the addresses of stores provided by the USDA SNAP website<sup>1</sup> listing stores that accept SNAP EBT cards. Surveys went to one hundred and sixty-eight addresses in the Central Kentucky counties (in dark blue on map above), and fifty-one addresses located in the Eastern counties (in lighter blue). Sixteen percent of the total initial mailing were returned undelivered. Twenty-eight surveys, or twelve percent of the deliverable surveys, were completed and returned. Surveys were completed by the store owners, managers, or a designated representative.

### Store Support and Business Needs

Stores responding to the survey included convenience stores, specialty stores, supermarkets, grocery stores, farmer's markets and supermarkets. In spite of the different types of business, seventy-three percent of the respondents identified **finding and retaining employees** as the most frequently identified

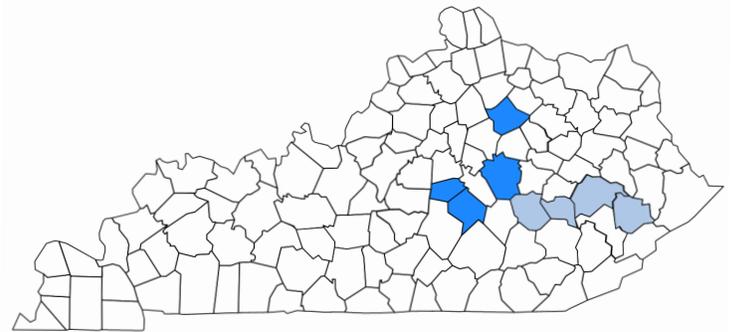


FIGURE 1. KENTUCKY COUNTIES PARTICIPATING IN SURVEY.

Central Kentucky: Bourbon, Boyle, Lincoln, and Madison (darker blue)

Eastern Kentucky: Breathitt, Jackson, Knott and Owsley (lighter blue)

business challenge. Other challenges raised include: **taxes, training employees, and rules, codes and policies** (local, state and/or federal). **Physical space limitations** were noted as a constraint by four stores. Additional significant challenges included the **lack of vendors** offering to deliver, **staying competitive in pricing, finding customers, and funding limitations**.

### Where Stores Find Support

Stores were asked who they reached out for business support. Many stores did not list any organizations, and three wrote they don't go anywhere for support. The most referenced organization stores go to for support is the Kentucky Grocers Association. Associated Wholesale Grocers and the Kentucky Retailers Association were also noted. Additional organizations that respondents listed that provide information or business support included: Distributors (e.g., Laurel Grocery Company), Banks, Community Ventures; KCARD, Farm Bureau, Department of Agriculture, UK Cooperative Extension, Kentucky State University, NRCS, the COOL Program, and other stores.

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.fns.usda.gov/snap/retailerlocator>

## Developing Community Support

Kentucky food providers were asked to identify community programs or organizations that work for increased access to healthy foods and activities. With common goals in mind, the survey sought to learn more about partnership potential between stores and local organizations or programs. Survey respondents identified the following list as entities that also have healthy food access priorities in their counties.

TABLE 1. WHEN STORES HANDLE MORE SNAP BENEFITS.

Type of Program or Organization	Organization
Health programs and information:	Cooperative Extension: both UK and KSU outreach education efforts and programs to improve health, diet, and wellness. (x7)  Health Department: For services and information related to health and healthy eating. (x2)
Healthy meals and information:	Schools: Both for health education, and as a provider of meals. (x2)  Local Hospitals: Organizations committed to providing healthy meals and efforts for supporting health.  Farmers Markets: for providing healthy foods, and sometimes a location to pick up healthy foods information.
Health and fitness:	KORT Physical Therapy YMCA Extreme Fitness
Information providers:	Farm Bureau KCARD WIC USDA

Over half (58%) of food providers left this question blank, while four responded they did not know of community level organizations that are providing food and health information.

## Store Efforts to Engage the Community

Of the survey respondents, 33% reported they host community promotional events at their store. Community promotional events are held to support clubs, churches, festivals, and individuals in the community. Examples of community programs included carriage rides, bake sales, non-GMO day, open houses, cooking demonstrations and customer appreciation days. One facility has space for the community to rent for an event. Hosting events and activities can elevate the visibility of the store, boost sales, increase public interest, and/or be done solely to support other community causes or needs.

Six respondents noted they support health related programming in the store with healthy consumer education programs, healthy shopping assistance programs, and healthy cooking demonstrations. One store provides free recipes, literature, and health magazines for customers. Respondents noted they regularly encourage questions and help with health-related concerns. Another store partners with Cooperative Extension to offer healthy cooking and nutrition demonstrations on site.

Five respondents (three farmers markets and two stores) also noted customer service initiatives to increase access to healthy foods. Examples of healthy eating initiatives included partnering with community organizations, changing operation hours to support shoppers after work or at more convenient times, and by stocking a wider variety of fruits and vegetables.

## Summary

While survey response numbers are small, this report lends important insight business challenges and community connections in sampled counties of central and eastern Kentucky for stores that provide food and

accept EBT cards. The survey responses provide five important insights into the local business environment. First, food providers indicated finding and retaining employees as the most frequently shared business challenge. In addition, food providers noted workforce training, staying competitive with pricing, finding and keeping customers and responding to regulations as challenges to their business. Second, the survey highlights that many food providers were unaware of where to find business support. The Kentucky Grocers and Convenience Stores Association is the most utilized source for support and information. Third, when asked about other community organizations that promote increased access to healthy food, the majority of stores did not respond or identified they were unaware. Cooperative Extension, the health department and schools were the organizations identified most frequently. Finally, when asked about efforts to engage the community, about one in three responding stores host community

promotional events at their store or partner with other community organizations on health-related programming.

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*Note: A series of publications on the Survey of SNAP Food Providers in Eight Kentucky Counties can be found at [cedik.ca.uky.edu/pse-survey](http://cedik.ca.uky.edu/pse-survey)*

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