

# Survey of SNAP Food Providers in Eight Kentucky Counties

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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.

## Food providers offering EBT: A Snapshot of Store Demographics

The highest percentage of responding EBT food providers identified themselves as convenience stores [Figure 2]. The second largest percentage of returned surveys were from entities identifying themselves as "Other" type of store, which included farmers markets, a butcher shop, farms, a super center and country markets. Fourteen

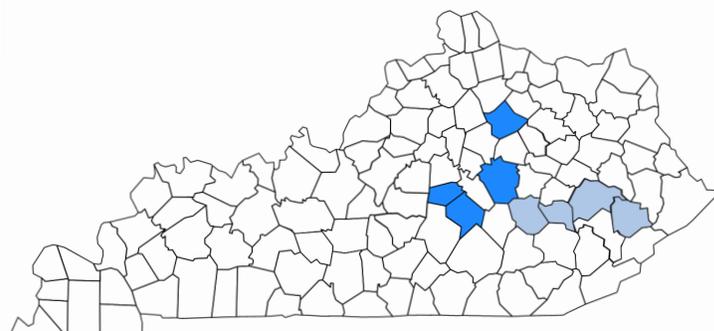


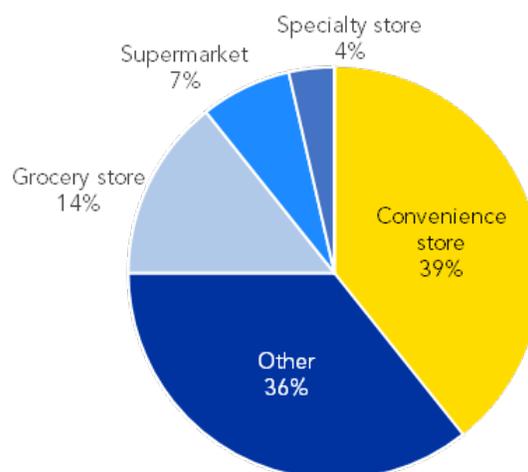
FIGURE 1. KENTUCKY COUNTIES PARTICIPATING IN SURVEY.

Central Kentucky: Bourbon, Boyle, Lincoln, and Madison (darker blue)  
Eastern Kentucky: Breathitt, Jackson, Knott and Owsley (lighter blue)

percent of the responses were from businesses that referred to themselves as grocery stores, and seven percent identified as supermarkets.

When asked to identify type of ownership, sixty-eight percent of the respondents self-identified as local, independently owned grocers, and 18% self-identified as a regional or national chain of stores. Eleven percent identified ownership type as "other" (e.g., a not-for-profit, and a local, independently owned chain of stores).

FIGURE 2. RESPONSES BY TYPE OF STORE.



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

## Why Food Providers Offer EBT

When asked why stores elect to participate in the EBT program, store managers reported that it served the customer and is a good business decision. The most frequent narrative response was “Service to our customers” and “To serve our community.” One respondent wrote “To allow for lower income patrons to purchase healthy foods.” In addition to customer service, the second most frequent response related to best business practices. Managers noted the demand for the service requires a responsive business with one respondent noting, “That’s very simple, SNAP equals sales and that is how to run a business.”

Nearly all respondents (96%) indicated they plan to continue participating in the SNAP program.

## When Do EBT Cards Get Used?

The survey sought information on when the stores typically get the most SNAP benefit use [Table 1]. One half of the surveyed stores indicated there tended to be peak times of SNAP benefit use.

TABLE 1. WHEN STORES HANDLE MORE SNAP BENEFITS.

(N=14)	Percent of responses
First of the month	43%
When benefits arrive	21%
First half of the month	14%
Middle of the month	7%
Odd days of the month	7%
In conjunction with additional store promotion	7%

The use of cards by store may reflect shopping patterns of customers but is likely heavily influenced by when recipients receive their benefits. The distribution schedule for SNAP benefits in Kentucky is determined through an equation based on the social security number of the head of household recipient on odd days through the first 19 days of the month<sup>2</sup>.

<sup>2</sup> <http://chfs.ky.gov/dcbs/dfs/foodstampsebt.htm>

## Summary

While survey response numbers are small, this report lends important insight into SNAP benefit providers in sampled counties of central and eastern Kentucky. Of the types of stores responding to the survey, convenience stores were the dominant type of respondent with “other” stores being the second highest rated store type. The majority of respondents identified themselves as local, independently owned grocers. Stores identified customer support and supporting their community as key reasons for accepting EBT cards. In addition, benefit use in stores tends to be predominantly in the first half of each month which aligns with the state benefits distribution schedule.

SNAP participation remains a business decision and important customer service option for food providers who responded to the 2018 Grocer’s Survey in Central and Eastern Kentucky. Beyond a business decision, participation with the EBT program increases food access and affordability for a high percentage of the population in these counties and is a vital resource to support the health and nutrition in this food vulnerable area.

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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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