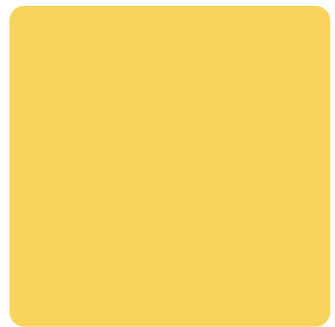


Eat Well, Be Well Evaluation Report

2026



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Executive Summary



The Eat Well, Be Well program's planning, implementation, and execution was a **resounding success**.



The goal of Eat Well, Be Well was to make purchasing fresh produce **more affordable** while also **promoting healthy eating**.



By earning a 50-cent reimbursement for each \$1 they spent on fresh produce, SNAP users received **\$10 million in incentives** over the course of the program to buy additional food.



Over 106,000 Rhode Island households benefitted from Eat Well, Be Well.



This program was **highlighted by a highly successful** public-private partnership that operates seamlessly with millions of produce transactions statewide.



There were **36 Eat Well, Be Well Retailer locations** across Rhode Island, including all Stop & Shop and Walmart locations.



73% of all households used the program, and **over 60%** used it regularly.



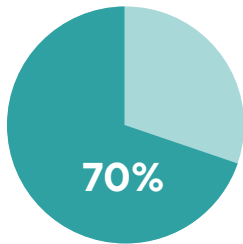
SNAP users earned approximately **\$5.17 per grocery trip** when using Eat Well, Be Well.

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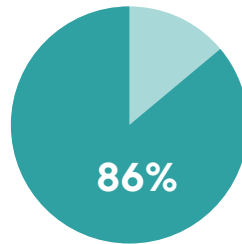
Keep this program going because we need to eat healthier and people are struggling. This program is positive all the way around.

— Eat Well, Be Well participant

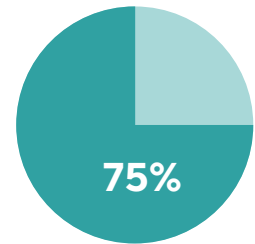
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70% of users said they ate more fruits and vegetables because of the program



86% of users said they would be likely to recommend the program to a friend



75% of users reported a positive experience

70%

of parents said it helped their kids eat more fruits and vegetables

61%

of users reported that the program helped them save money in their monthly budget

Money Saved Using Eat Well, Be Well Was Spent On:



More groceries **(88%)**



Bills **(17%)**



Transportation **(6%)**

Program Overview

In January 2024, the Rhode Island Department of Human Services (DHS) launched Eat Well, Be Well. Eat Well, Be Well is the nation's first retail SNAP incentive program administered by a state SNAP agency that is available in grocery stores statewide. This pilot program automatically provides financial incentives to all SNAP users when they buy fresh fruits and vegetables. Once earned, the incentive is added to a user's general EBT funds and can be used on SNAP-eligible items at any retailer. This pilot program was created after several years of community, expert, and retailer input.

Eat Well Be Well's goal is to increase access to healthy foods by making fresh fruits and vegetables more affordable for SNAP users in retail grocery stores.



Figure 1. Rhode Island ratio of SNAP caseload by municipality with EWBW retailer locations as of December 2025

Hunger and Food Insecurity in Rhode Island

Food insecurity, defined as the inability to consistently afford or access food, is high among Rhode Islanders. In 2025, nearly 34% of households in RI reported difficulty affording adequate food. Food insecurity continues to increase in RI; rates have risen by 9% since 2020. This issue disproportionately affects minority populations in the state; 50% of Black households and 58% of Latino households in RI are food insecure, compared to 27% of White households.¹



¹ RI Community Food Bank "2025 Status Report on Hunger in Rhode Island". Published January 2026.
https://rifoodbank.org/wp-content/uploads/2026/01/2025-Status-Report_Digital_FINAL-1.pdf

How Does Eat Well, Be Well Work for SNAP Users?

The Eat Well, Be Well pilot program is currently active at 36 grocery stores, including all Walmart (9) and Stop & Shop (26) locations in Rhode Island, as well as the West African Superstore, a local retailer in Providence (Figure 1). All SNAP users in Rhode Island (over 140,000 people) are automatically included in this program; they do not have to sign up. They earn incentives automatically when they purchase fresh produce at participating grocery stores.

SNAP users are issued a 50-cent reimbursement for each dollar they spend on fresh produce at participating stores (Figure 2). This incentive is automatically applied to their EBT card after checkout, and users can earn up to \$25 per month using this program.

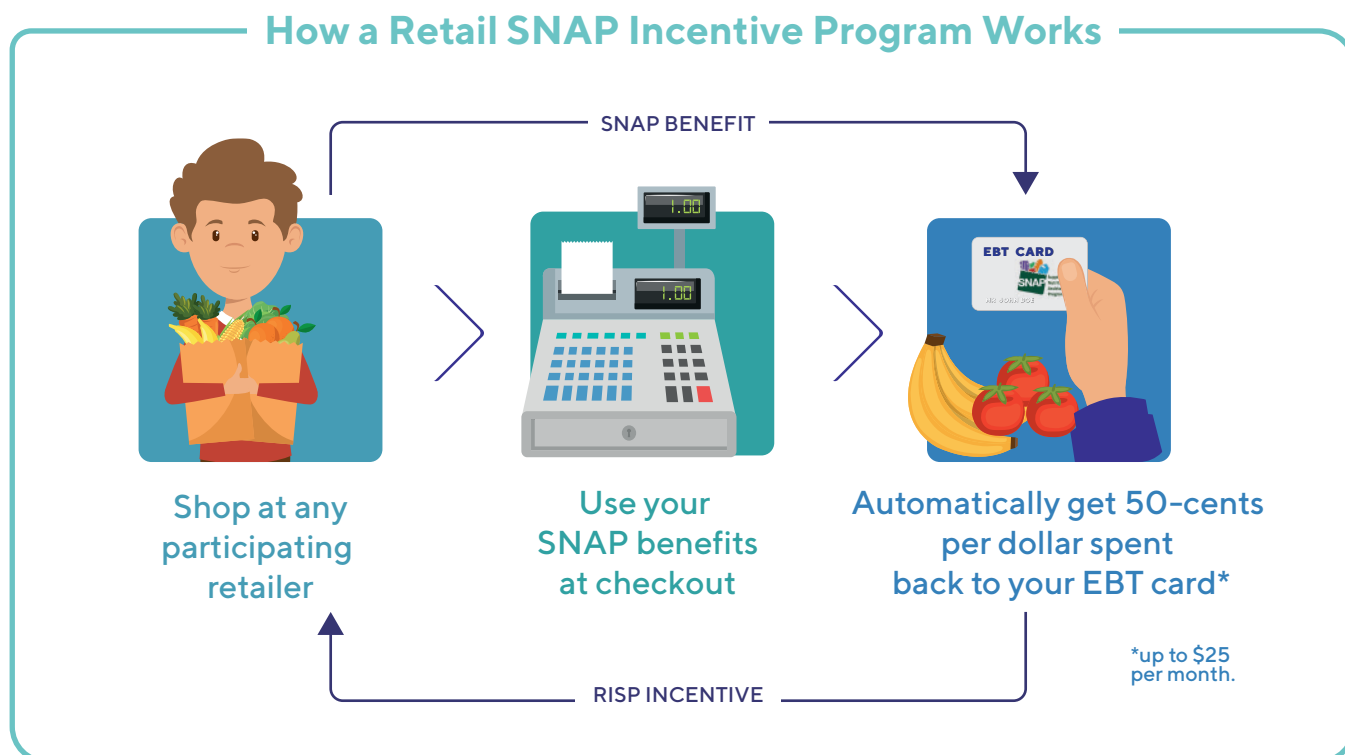


Figure 2. An example of how a general Retail SNAP Incentive Program (RSIP) works..

How was Eat Well, Be Well Funded?

Eat Well, Be Well was funded in 2022 with an \$11.5 million appropriation from the RI legislature with funds from the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) to design, implement, and evaluate the program. Eat Well, Be Well is a pilot program that will continue until these funds are fully expended.

This program is a collaboration with the Rhode Island Department of Human Services, Walmart, and Stop & Shop. All grocery retailers were invited to participate in the program, but only Walmart and Stop & Shop opted to participate. These retailers invested significant company time and resources to build out novel technology infrastructure to implement the program. The Rhode Island Public Health Institute provided technical assistance to design the program and oversee evaluation efforts.

Eat Well, Be Well Timeline:



Evaluating Eat Well, Be Well

Eat Well, Be Well is the first program of its kind in the country. The Rhode Island Public Health Institute (RIPHI) was contracted to evaluate the pilot program's impact and to present lessons learned. The evaluation assessed the impact of Eat Well, Be Well on SNAP users, retailers, and other cross-sector partners. RIPHI particularly focused on the program's impact on purchasing behaviors, food and nutrition security, and financial wellbeing. RIPHI prioritized elevating community voices, eliciting thousands of SNAP users' feedback and opinions about their experiences with Eat Well, Be Well.

A comprehensive, mixed-methods evaluation of Eat Well, Be Well was conducted. RIPHI began the evaluation in September of 2023, prior to the program's launch, and concluded collecting data in December of 2025. An outline of the methods and data collected during this evaluation is presented in Table 1. All community-based data was collected in both English and Spanish.

Table 1. Methods Used to Evaluate the Eat Well, Be Well Program.

Evaluation Component	Dates	Location or Source	Data Collected	Evaluation Goal and Description
In-Store Program Implementation Surveys	September to November 2023 (prior to program launch) June to August 2024 (5 months after program launch)	Surveys were conducted in all (26) Stop & Shop locations across Rhode Island	1. Customer surveys including demographic information, experience with SNAP, food security, and shopping behaviors. 2. Food Frequency Questionnaire (VioScreen) completed with a subset of participants	Conducted 1,439 surveys with customers who had purchased groceries in stores, 688 with SNAP users, and 751 with non-SNAP users to compare the groups and understand preliminary experiences with EWBW among RI shoppers
Communications Campaign Analytics	January to April 2024	Source: Marketing Company	Impressions, clicks, and overall engagement with ads, including display banners, digital screens, paid social media, and community posters	Analysis of the success of the communications campaign
Independent Retailer Needs Assessment	March to April 2024	Small retailers in Providence, Pawtucket, and Central Falls	1. Interest in offering EWBW at store location 2. Identified potential barriers to implementing the EWBW program	Conducted 20 interviews with local independent retailers
Focus Groups	February to March 2025	In person and on Zoom	1. Users' experience with EWBW 2. Program impact on purchase and consumption of fresh fruits and vegetables 3. Recommendations for improving the program	Conducted 7 guided focus groups with 37 SNAP users
Program Participant Survey	March 2025	Surveys conducted online; recruitment via mailer campaign in collaboration with DHS	1. Survey including demographic information, experience with SNAP, food security and shopping behaviors 2. EWBW impact on purchasing behaviors and produce consumption 3. Program awareness	Conducted survey with 2,026 SNAP users to assess program impact and awareness
Retailer Purchasing Data	January 2024 to April 2025	Source: Retail partners	Daily store-level purchasing data, including fruit and vegetable sales across five states	Provided comparisons for purchasing data between Rhode Island and other states where EWBW is not active
State EBT Purchasing Data	January 2024 to December 2025	Source: RI DHS	EWBW transactions, including number of SNAP users who utilized the program and total incentive amount earned	Provided insight into program utilization and uptake among SNAP users

Evaluation Results

Evaluation Reach:

Over 10,000 Rhode Islanders were approached to take a survey in person at grocery stores. All 144,000 SNAP users received letters with an opportunity to participate in a survey about their experience; the first 2,000 participants participated in the survey. We conducted seven focus groups and interviewed numerous groups of stakeholders such as retailers, legislators, DHS employees, and community leaders.

Responding to Community Need for Healthy Eating Programs:

SNAP users in Rhode Island are among the most vulnerable individuals in the state. In surveys prior to the launch of the program, approximately 70% of SNAP users reported their benefits did not give them enough money to feed their family each month. In the same survey, 73% of SNAP users reported low food security (financial inability to access food) compared to 21% non-SNAP survey participants. These data highlight the need for efforts to enhance food and nutrition security for SNAP users, such as the Eat Well, Be Well program.

Table 2. Food and nutrition security status of Non-SNAP and SNAP survey participants measured in the summer of 2024.

Food & Nutrition Security Measures (SNAP vs. Non-SNAP Participants)

USDA Food Security Screener	Non-SNAP Participants (N=350)	SNAP Participants (N=350)
High/Marginal Food Security	79%	27%
Low Food Security	14%	33%
Very Low Food Security	7%	40%
Nutrition Security Measure^{bc}		
Adequate Nutrition Security	91%	55%
Low Nutrition Security	9%	45%

a USDA Six Item Short Form Food Security Module, Updated May 2024.

b Center for Nutrition and Health Impact (formerly Gretchen Swanson Center): Nutrition Security Scale (4-Item), n.d.

c Nutrition security differs from "Food Security" in that it focuses on a person's financial ability to get healthy and nutritious food.

Success of Program Implementation:

The Eat Well, Be Well program's planning, implementation, and execution was a resounding success. After a year of groundwork to develop the required in-store technology for Eat Well, Be Well, the program ran smoothly once active. There were minimal requests for additional technical assistance from retailers, nor other programmatic issues that required DHS intervention. SNAP users reported that Eat Well, Be Well was easy to use and they highlighted the automatic nature of the program as a key feature in its overall success.



Program Awareness:

Program awareness of Eat Well, Be Well was initially low among SNAP users; only 52% reported some level of awareness of the Eat Well, Be Well program in the summer 2024. After a mail campaign to educate and survey SNAP users around six months later, that number rose to 71%. Despite overall awareness increasing over time, many survey respondents didn't fully understand how the program works. For example, less than half of respondents (47%) knew which items would earn them incentives, 57% knew what they could buy with the money they earned from the program, and 40% knew the maximum amount (\$25) they could earn each month.



Focus group participants highlighted that they had never seen program advertisements, echoing results from surveys. One participant stated, *"I'm kind of surprised that it's not more of a household name to people. If I hadn't stopped and done the survey about the program [in the store], I would never have known it existed."*

Among people who did know about Eat Well, Be Well, most learned about it directly from letters sent out by DHS, with 68% of respondents learning about the program this way. Only 2% of people reported learning about it on social media or through flyers, banners, or other physical advertisements, which were the main methods used during the marketing campaign.

Program Impact on Healthy Eating:

Eat Well, Be Well had a significant impact, enhancing access to produce and food security among SNAP users who knew about the program.

61%

of SNAP users who earned Eat Well, Be Well incentives reported that this helped them save money in their overall monthly budget.

88%

of these users indicated that they spent this money to buy more groceries for their families.

70%

of people surveyed noted the program helped them eat more fruits and vegetables.

Eating more fruits and vegetables has been linked to improved health outcomes, particularly lower rates of chronic diseases like heart disease and cancer. Increasing fruit and vegetable consumption among SNAP users not only helps reduce hunger, but improves the long-term health of this population.²

Large households (families of four or more people) spent almost twice as much on Eat Well, Be Well eligible items as individuals.

70% of people with children in their households stated that Eat Well, Be Well helped the children in their home eat more fruits and vegetables per month.

² Aune D, Giovannucci E, Boffetta P, et al. Fruit and vegetable intake and the risk of cardiovascular disease, total cancer and all-cause mortality-a systematic review and dose-response meta-analysis of prospective studies. *Int J Epidemiol*. 2017;46(3):1029-1056. doi:10.1093/ije/dyw319

Table 3. Demographic overview of respondents to the Eat Well, Be Well evaluation survey conducted in March 2025.

Total Survey Respondents	N=2026	Health Insurance	
Average Age in Years (Range)	47.8 (19-101)	Insured	96%
Gender		Insurance Type	
Female	73%	Private/Employer	4%
Male	25%	Medicare	43%
Race		Medicaid	57%
Black/African-American	12%	Chronic Conditions	
White/Caucasian	70%	Pre-Diabetes	15%
Other	15%	Diabetes	15%
Ethnicity		Hypertension	30%
Hispanic	24%	High Cholesterol	27%
Household Size		Heart Disease	8%
1	36%	Obesity/Overweight	23%
2	19%	HIV/AIDS	1%
>3	30%	Cancer	5%
Households With Children (<18 years of age)	33%	Difficulty Accessing Food Needed to Manage Chronic Conditions	
Poverty Level (% of FPL)		Difficult	41%
<100%	65%	Neutral	24%
100%-200%	23%	Easy	33%

Community Support for Eat Well, Be Well

Overall, the program had a largely positive impact and a wide reach across the state, touching most SNAP users (73% of households). A main challenge the program faced was that while all retailers were offered an opportunity to participate, many retailers who serve the largest number of SNAP users on a regular basis chose not to join the pilot. Despite consistently reporting positive experiences with the program, many users were unable to shop at Walmart or Stop & Shop because of transportation barriers or, occasionally, high cost of groceries and produce at these retailers relative to other retailers.

A consistent theme in the evaluation, among both surveys and focus groups, was that SNAP users who knew about Eat Well, Be Well emphatically supported it. The overwhelming majority (75%) of survey participants aware of Eat Well, Be Well reported an overall positive experience with the program; 86% stated they would be likely to recommend the program to others. When asked to describe the impact of the program, one SNAP user stated:



The program in itself is a blessing. I mean, it really is, because people out there are really struggling. Come the second, third week of the month, I'm already dipping into my bank account to feed my kids, you know. This program is a blessing.

— Eat Well, Be Well participant



Over half (55%) of SNAP users who participated in focus groups expressed interest in participating in further advocacy to sustain the program, showcasing support and the importance of the program for Rhode Islanders.

SNAP Users' Recommendations for Enhancing Eat Well, Be Well

SNAP users were eager to provide recommendations for improving this program. One of the most common pieces of feedback was about program expansion. 94% of participants wanted the program to be offered at other stores, with Market Basket, PriceRite, and Aldi being most frequently requested. This recommendation was emphasized during focus groups as SNAP users reported that the two main participating grocery stores presented challenges including prices and store location. Many respondents reported that transportation barriers kept them from regularly using the program at Stop & Shop and Walmart. In addition to expanding Eat Well, Be Well to other stores, survey participants expressed a desire to expand what products are eligible for purchase in the program. Notably, 77% of participants expressed a desire for canned/frozen produce products to be included in the program.

Many users also expressed a desire to raise the program's monthly incentive limit (\$25 per household). Many respondents, both in focus groups and surveys, noted that the current amount of \$25 was helpful for persons living independently and older adults in particular. However, families with children noted that larger incentives would boost their produce purchases. When asked how much they would be willing to spend on fresh produce per month, survey participants reported on average they would spend \$150 per month to receive an increased \$75 incentive.

“

The program definitely resonated with me. Buying fresh fruits and vegetables with the incentive also made me more conscious of meal planning. When you buy something you have to figure out a way to really put them in your diet, so the program made me a lot healthier.

— Eat Well, Be Well participant

”

“

I feel a lot healthier because of the program. Apples are \$2.50 a pound, which I wouldn't even look at before. Now I think, "Well, half that price? I can afford it!"

— Eat Well, Be Well participant

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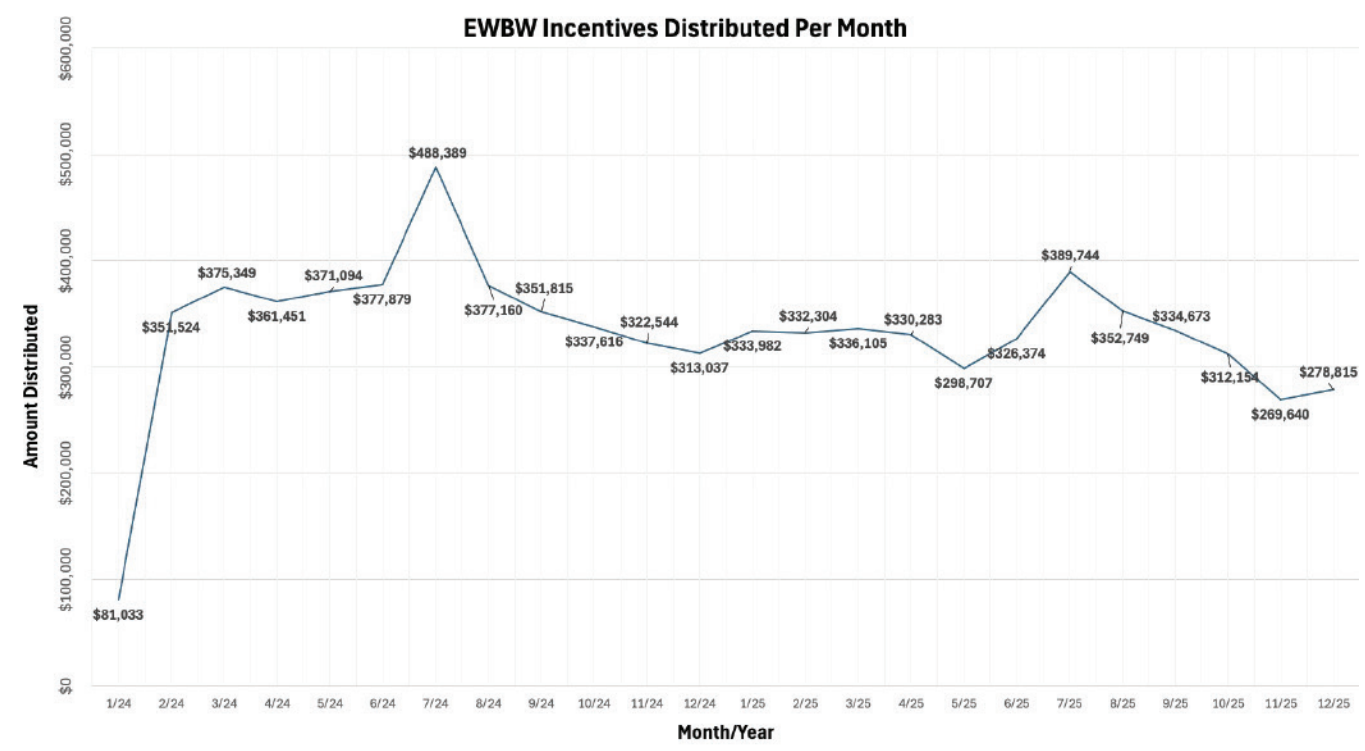
Overall Utilization of Eat Well, Be Well

During the first 18 months of the program, 145,283 households in Rhode Island were eligible to receive Eat Well, Be Well SNAP incentives (this includes any registered SNAP household or a household participating in Rhode Island's SUN Bucks program, formerly known as Summer EBT). Of these, **106,195 households (73%) utilized the Eat Well, Be Well program**. Approximately 61% of SNAP households used the program regularly (defined here as using Eat Well, Be Well at least three times).

Every time SNAP users shopped at an Eat Well, Be Well-participating grocery store, they earned an average of \$5.17 back to their EBT accounts.

In total, over **\$10 million in Eat Well, Be Well incentives have been issued to SNAP users across Rhode Island**. The average monthly incentive spend for the entire Eat Well, Be Well time frame was approximately \$325,000 per month. In July 2024, incentive earnings were much higher than average (\$487,883) as a result of increased EBT participation from Rhode Island's SUN Bucks program. This is an annual outlier to the trend in costs.

Figure 3. The amount (in dollars) of Eat Well, Be Well incentives distributed to SNAP users by month from January 2024–December 2025.

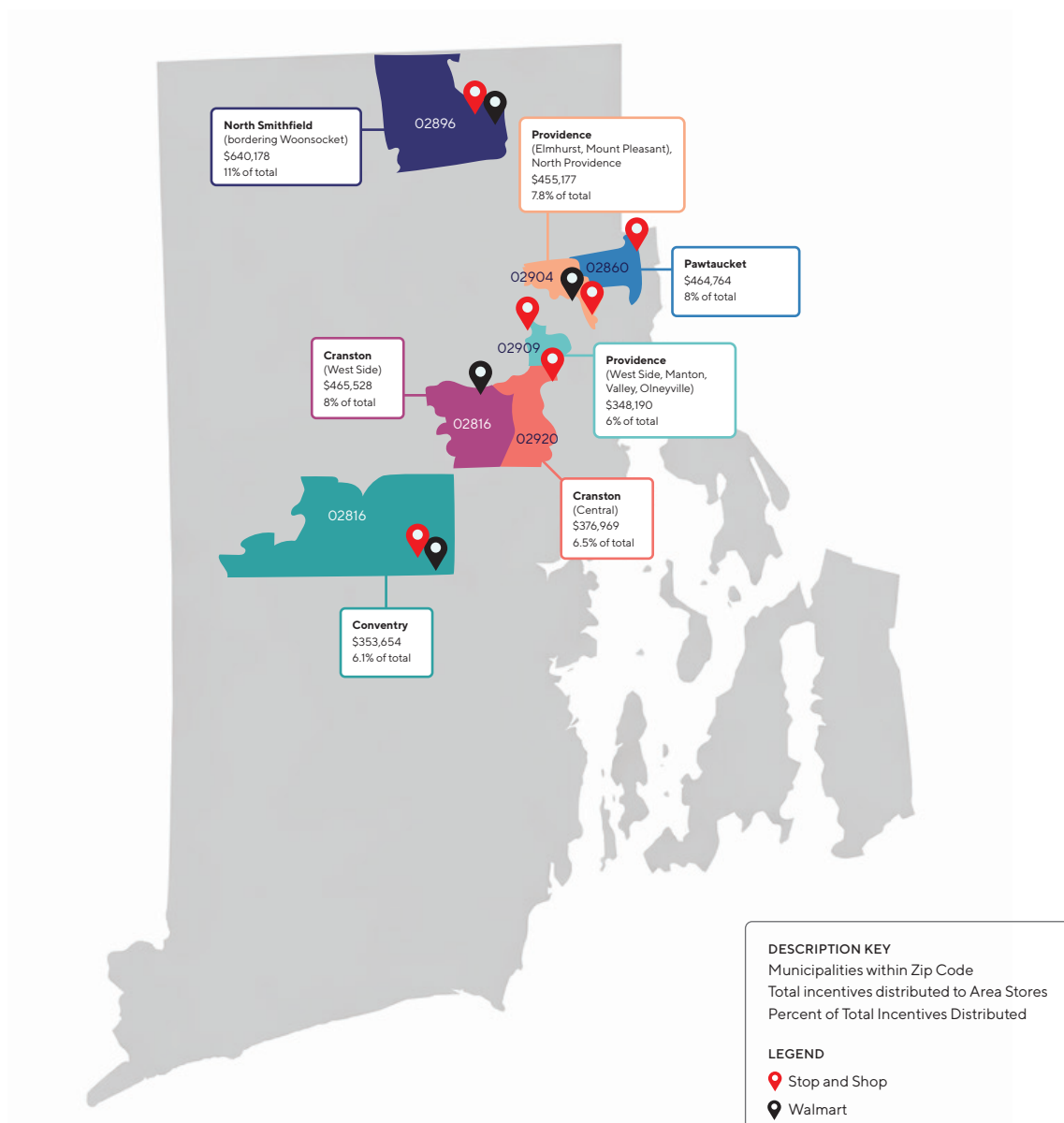


Geographically, the areas that earned the highest total incentives were stores located in North Smithfield, Cranston, Providence, Pawtucket, and Coventry. The North Smithfield area (Zip Code 02896) accounted for the most incentives distributed by a significant margin (Table 4). This area directly borders the city of Woonsocket and has both a Walmart Supercenter and a Stop & Shop in close proximity to each other. These two factors contributed to the high utilization in the area.





Figure 4. Map of geographic areas (by Zip Code) that received over 5% of the total Eat Well, Be Well incentives distributed between January 2024 and June 2025.



Impact of Eat Well, Be Well on Retailer Sales

A highlight of Eat Well, Be Well's implementation was the successful public-private collaboration between the RI DHS and grocery retailers. In order to offer the program in their stores, retailers invested funds into the development and integration of novel technology required for program implementation. Lessons learned from the application of this technology could be shared with SNAP incentive programs nationwide.

Retail partners benefited from increased sales from participating in the program. One retailer's stores saw an increase in fruit and vegetable sales in Rhode Island during the program compared to the neighboring states of Connecticut and Massachusetts. From the launch of the program, monthly fruit and vegetable sales at this retailer were \$656,000 higher than expected if Eat Well, Be Well did not exist in RI. This highlights how SNAP incentives provide an outsized impact by stimulating additional economic and retailer sales.

Independent Retailer Feedback about Eat Well, Be Well

We solicited feedback from small, independent retailers about their willingness to join the program.

Approximately half (45%) were aware of Eat Well, Be Well, **but many (85%)** reported that the cost of upgrading their technology systems would present obstacles for them to join the program. Nevertheless, 65% of stores were willing to make changes to their purchasing systems to accommodate the program if those changes were subsidized, with many anecdotally expressing enthusiasm for the program and its potential impact on their community and business.

In August of 2025, one small-scale retailer, the West African Superstore, was onboarded to the pilot, which allowed their customers to earn incentives. This demonstrated the feasibility of engaging independent retailers with this program. This process was made possible through block grant funding provided by the Rhode Island Department of Health that offset costs associated with technology upgrades necessary to implement Eat Well, Be Well.



Policy Recommendations for Eat Well, Be Well

EWBW Program Changes

- 1** Add additional retailers, with a focus on grocery store chains that users perceive as more affordable, including Market Basket, PriceRite, Aldi, and small retailers, where many SNAP users shop.
 - a. Particular emphasis should be placed on geographic locations with higher concentrations of SNAP users to **combat transportation barriers**.
- 2** Enhance communications and include **culturally tailored marketing** to reach SNAP users with a particular focus on Hispanic and other minority populations.
 - a. Incorporate feedback from community members who use SNAP, including suggestions like advertising directly in stores, communications that clearly state program details, and campaigns with a broader reach would be beneficial.
- 3** Expand program-eligible items to include frozen and canned fruits and vegetables in addition to fresh produce.

Funding

- 4** Identify a sustainable revenue stream for continuing the program.
 - a. Non-state funding sources will be key in sustainably funding the program. Federal funding resources, such as the Gus Schumacher Nutrition Incentive Program (GusNIP), are viable options when they are available.
 - b. If sustainable revenue streams are not identified, the program's scope could be narrowed to focus on people for which EWBW had the biggest impact, such as the elderly, and families with children.
 - c. While EWBW is currently universally active for SNAP users, moving to an opt-in system would conserve costs and reserve program funds for persons who need the program most.
- 5** Share the impact of Eat Well, Be Well with stakeholders outside of Rhode Island. DHS and the legislature should share successes with the US Department of Agriculture to advocate for federal appropriations for programs like EWBW. The findings from EWBW have national implications that support expanding retail SNAP incentive programs.

Future Areas of Evaluation Interest

- 6** Evaluate the potential costs and benefits of raising the incentive cap, with cap amounts tiered by household size.
- 7** Evaluate the end of the pilot program to understand its impact on SNAP users.

Lessons Learned

Key Takeaways

-  Eat Well Be Well was very popular among SNAP users
-  SNAP incentives encourage people to purchase and consume more fruits and vegetables.
-  Program awareness was initially low; marketing messages did not reach or appeal to SNAP users. However, awareness increased to **at least 71% of people** over time, with additional communications led by DHS.
-  EWBW increased the purchasing capacity of SNAP households; larger households spent more on fruits and vegetables than smaller households.
-  The public-private partnership at the center of Eat Well Be Well was feasible and crucial to successfully scaling SNAP incentives in RI. This helped enhance access to healthy foods for thousands of people living in poverty.
-  This program enhanced grocery sales for retailers and has economic impact beyond produce sales.
-  Eat Well Be Well reaches **vulnerable Rhode Islanders** including people of lower socioeconomic status, people of color, and thousands of people who are food insecure.
-  All SNAP users automatically **received EWBW program benefits when purchasing fresh produce**, regardless whether or not they knew about the program. This made it very user-friendly, but it was difficult to track program utilization and growth.

