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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:**  
Aug. 8, 2018

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### **Michigan responds to maintain Bridge Card transactions at farmers markets as one provider ends service**

LANSING, Mich. – State, local and federal agencies are working to ensure that public food assistance clients can continue to use their Bridge Cards at farmers markets and farm stands after one provider that processes these transactions at a number of locations announced ending those services.

The vendor, Novo Dia Group of Texas, now expects to continue offering its Mobile Market+ applications at farmers markets until Feb. 28, 2019 – seven months later than the originally announced July 31, 2018, ending date.

The Michigan Department of Health and Human Services (MDHHS), Michigan Farmers Market Association (MIFMA) and Fair Food Network said that with the additional time, any potential lapses in the ability of farmers markets to accept food assistance Bridge Cards should be minimized or eliminated for most or all farmers markets.

It was announced last month that Novo Dia Group, a major provider of mobile Electronic Benefit Transfer (EBT) technology at farmers markets and farm stands, would discontinue those services. This left many markets and local, state, and national agencies that work with those markets needing to act to find alternative methods for processing EBT payments.

“It is a top priority of the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services that food assistance clients continue to have the opportunity to buy healthy food for their families at farmers markets around the state,” said Nancy Vreibel, MDHHS chief deputy director. “We are committed to working with our partners – including the U.S. Department of Agriculture Food and Nutrition Services – to lessen the effects of this change by making state-funded Bridge Card transaction equipment available to these markets. It’s great news that we now have until February to do so.”

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In an effort to avoid a lapse in the purchasing ability of food assistance clients at farmers markets and farm stands, the National Association of Farmers Market Nutrition Programs announced that it would help support Novo Dia Group's operation through Aug. 31. On July 27, the State of New York in partnership with the New York Farmers Market Federation announced a six-month agreement with the Novo Dia Group to continue operating nationwide without any service disruption through February 2019.

This support, while temporary, provides markets and farm stands additional time to transition to new equipment. An estimated 50 of the more than 160 Michigan farmers markets that accept Bridge Cards for food assistance purchases use the Novo Dia Mobile Market+ application. About 35 farmers and farm stands use this technology for their individual businesses.

"Although this unfortunate situation is one that we want to ensure does not impact farmers markets again in the future, it is important to note that this issue does not affect all farmers markets and farm stands in Michigan accepting SNAP Bridge Cards," said Amanda Shreve, executive director at MIFMA. "We are working diligently with affected markets to transition them to alternate equipment and service as quickly as possible."

In 2017 at least 47,000 SNAP transactions were processed at Michigan farmers markets, totaling at least \$600,000 in sales. This allowed thousands of Michigan families to access healthy food and benefitted local farmers who sell their products at farmers markets. Less than 20 percent of these sales and transactions were processed with Mobile Market+ equipment.

"This situation underscores the importance of exploring new and improved ways for farmers and markets to reliably access equipment that processes food assistance benefits," said Shreve. "This is an issue MIFMA has been working to improve since its inception in 2006."

Access to this equipment made significant progress in Michigan last year when the state Legislature committed state funding for free wireless point-of-sale devices for markets and farmers accepting SNAP Bridge Cards. These devices and service are provided by Conduent, Inc., and Merchant Source, Inc., through a contract with MDHHS. Markets and farmers utilizing this equipment should contact MIFMA as soon as possible, if they have not done so already, at 517-432-3381 to discuss alternative options.

Many markets and farm stands, including Eastern Market in Detroit, the Flint Farmers Market will not be impacted by this issue as they have either already transitioned to the free wireless point-of-sale service contracted through MDHHS or process Bridge Card transactions with other providers. To find a farmers market that accepts Bridge Cards, visit the Find a Farmers Market feature at [www.mifma.org/findafarmersmarket](http://www.mifma.org/findafarmersmarket).

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