It is gratifying to read that the author of the letter observed improvements to overall sales and electronic benefit transfer (EBT) redemption during similar work conducted at Penn State College of Medicine in 2010. In subsequent interactions at our farmers’ markets, we also observed a comparable trend in vendors conducting point-of-sale transactions through smart phones and tablet devices.

A study under way in our group at Arizona State University involves using tablet technology to gather ethnographic information about the farmers’ market experience. During the data collection phase of this project, vendors often asked if we were working on the implementation of smart phones and tablets as point-of-sale options for vendors. Vendors who were already using such devices also shared similar observations as mentioned in the letter including increased transactional flexibility, broader access for customers, and greater independence from farmers’ market managers. These observations, however, were anecdotal.

Such suggestions prompted an investigation by our research team into the possibility of implementing mobile card readers for EBT transactions at farmers’ markets. Although several companies that provide mobile card readers, such as ROAMpay, were enthusiastic about the project, both the US Department of Agriculture and JP Morgan Chase told us it would not be possible at this time citing “processing” limitations, and that no plans were in place to explore the possibility. This appears to be a similar response to your inquiry.

As of the writing of this letter, the newest iteration of the Farm Bill has yet to be passed into law. The Agriculture Reform, Food and Jobs Act of 2012, however, includes statements that call for the development of technology to assist in the improvement and expansion of farmers’ markets.1 One would hope this initiative would be expanded through future legislation to keep up with technology that allows greater vendor and customer control of purchases using Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP). As vendors in general appear to gravitate toward this point-of-sale technology and the inherent ubiquity of smart phones and tablet devices,

we agree that this would be the next logical step for research in this area.

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Reference