



# Fresh Bucks Retail Expansion

## Small Food Retailer Selection Process Overview

March 2021  
City of Seattle

### Table of Contents

<a href="#">I. Background and Introduction</a> .....	2
<a href="#">II. Overview of Selection Process</a> .....	2
<a href="#">III. Eligibility Requirements</a> .....	3
<a href="#">IV. Timeline and Information Sessions</a> .....	5
<a href="#">V. E-Benefit Integration and Startup Resources for Selected Retailers</a> .....	6
<a href="#">VI. Requirements for Selected Retailers</a> .....	7
<a href="#">VII. Interest Form Questions and Site Visit Eligibility</a> .....	9
<b>APPENDIX A: Map and Explanation of Priority Neighborhoods</b> .....	11

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### Interest Form – Due May 14, 2021

The interest form with submission instructions is [available here](#) and due on **May 14 at 11:59 p.m.** Interested retailers are encouraged to review this document before submitting an interest form.

### Questions?

If you have any questions about Fresh Bucks or the selection process, please email Alyssa Patrick at [FreshBucksRetail@seattle.gov](mailto:FreshBucksRetail@seattle.gov) or call 206-256-5501. If you need assistance in a language other than English, please indicate which language when you call and leave a message and we will follow up with an interpreter.



## I. BACKGROUND AND INTRODUCTION

Fresh Bucks is a Seattle-based healthy food program operated by the City of Seattle Office of Sustainability & Environment that helps families and individuals stretch their food budget. As of January 2021, close to 12,000 households are enrolled in the Fresh Bucks voucher program. Participating households receive \$40 a month to purchase **fruits and vegetables** at participating farmers markets, farm stands, and stores.

Fresh Bucks aims to eliminate racial disparities in access to healthy foods for low-income Latinx, Black/African American, American Indian/Alaska Native (AIAN), and Native Hawaiian Pacific Islander (NHPI) communities, as well as immigrants and refugees, particularly those with language barriers, through focused enrollment in Fresh Bucks vouchers. In 2020, 70% of enrollees were from these priority populations.

### Fresh Bucks Retailer Expansion

In 2021, Fresh Bucks is shifting from a paper voucher to an e-benefit system, making it easier for both customers and retailers to use the benefit. As we shift to this new system, the City is also expanding the Fresh Bucks retail network. Fresh Bucks seeks to partner with retailers who create store environments that are welcoming to all cultures, races, and languages, and consistently provide a wide variety of quality fresh produce in neighborhoods where priority populations live and work. Our current retailer network includes one supermarket chain, five small food retailers, and all farmers markets in Seattle. In 2021, we will select **up to three new supermarket chains and/or independently owned grocery stores** and **up to eight small food retailers**. The selection process and interest form in this document is for small food retailers. The selection process and application for supermarkets and grocery stores is [available here](#).

## II. OVERVIEW OF SELECTION PROCESS FOR SMALL FOOD RETAILERS

One of the primary goals of this expansion is to increase the number of small, independent food retailers where customers can use Fresh Bucks, with a focus on retailers that offer culturally specific foods and/or are located in or near neighborhoods with limited access to fresh produce and existing Fresh Bucks retailers (see page 4 for details). We define small food retailers as independently owned establishments where selling groceries is a significant part of the business model and annual revenues as reported to the City of Seattle do not exceed \$2 million. This includes but is not limited to small markets, culturally specific grocers, and farm stands.

### Selection Process

We will select **as many as eight small food retailers** through the following two-step process:

**Step 1: Assessment of Interest Forms.** To apply, small food retailers first complete and submit an interest form [available here](#). A panel of City staff and community partners will review responses to assess eligibility, produce selection, and programmatic relevance (retailer offers culturally relevant foods and/or is located in priority neighborhoods listed on page 4). To best serve a geographically and culturally diverse Fresh Bucks customer base, the review process will include an assessment of retailer needs across the full Fresh Bucks retail network. Our goal is to



give Fresh Bucks customers as many fresh produce access points and culturally relevant options as possible.

**Step 2: Site Visits.** Retailers selected in Step 1 will be invited to participate in site visits. Fresh Bucks staff will visit selected retailers to explain more about the program and assess store readiness and capacity, produce management, and community engagement. Site visits will be conducted in the store contact's preferred language. After site visits, the Fresh Bucks team will make final retailer selections.

The onboarding timeline for selected small food retailers will vary based on level of assistance needed and the contracting and technology integration processes. We aim to have the e-benefit system live in newly selected stores in 2021-2022. Small food retailers that are not selected this year will be notified and their information retained for future selection processes.

### III. ELIGIBILITY REQUIREMENTS

Retailers must meet the following qualifications to be eligible for consideration. In addition, retailers must identify with at least one of the culturally specific grocer categories **OR** serve at least one of the priority neighborhoods listed in the table below.

#### **Required Qualifications**

Retailers must meet **ALL** the following qualifications to be eligible.

- Retailer's annual revenue does not exceed \$2 million dollars as reported in general business and occupation (B&O) taxes to the City of Seattle's Department of Finance and Administrative Services.
- Retailer has a valid City of Seattle business license.
- Retailer has a Taxpayer Identification Number and can submit an IRS W-9 form upon request.
- Retailer consistently maintains an inventory of at least 10 types<sup>1</sup> of fresh produce.
- Retailer has Wi-Fi or mobile data to support the Fresh Bucks processing app.

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<sup>1</sup> Type of produce refers to produce items that are distinct from each other, rather than varieties within one type of produce. For example, apples count as one type of produce even if a store provides several different varieties of apple.



**Priority Neighborhoods and Culturally Specific Grocers**

Table 1: Retailers must identify with at least one of the culturally specific grocer categories <b>OR</b> serve at least one of the priority neighborhoods outlined in this table.	
Priority Culturally Specific Grocers	Priority Neighborhoods
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Asian grocers</li> <li>• East African and/or Halal grocers</li> <li>• Latinx grocers</li> </ul> <p>These culturally specific grocers were identified in a 2020 survey of Fresh Bucks customers and through conversations with community organizations that partner with Fresh Bucks.</p> <p><i>*Note: Any of the grocers listed here that also meet the required qualifications are eligible, even if they are not located in a priority neighborhood.</i></p>	<p><b>Priority 1 Neighborhoods:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• South Park, Delridge, High Point, Georgetown</li> <li>• Bitter Lake, Haller Lake, Lake City</li> <li>• International District, Beacon Hill, Central District, and Belltown</li> </ul> <p><b>Priority 2 Neighborhoods:</b> Race and Social Equity Index (RSE) high priority neighborhoods (see map in Appendix A)</p> <p><i>Priority 1 Neighborhoods</i> are areas where Fresh Bucks customers are likely to live that have limited access to fresh produce and/or Fresh Bucks retailers.</p> <p><i>Priority 2 Neighborhoods</i> are those identified by the City of Seattle’s <a href="#">RSE Index</a> as areas where a high proportion of residents are low income and impacted by health and other race-based disparities. Preference will be given to retailers in <i>Priority 1 Neighborhoods</i>. See Appendix A for the RSE map and more neighborhood details.</p> <p><i>* Note: Any small food retailers located in or near one of these areas that also meet the other required qualifications are eligible, even if they do not identify as a priority culturally specific grocer.</i></p>



## IV. Timeline and Information Sessions

The following provides an overview of the selection timeline, where to submit interest forms, and registration for information sessions.

**Table 2: Selection Timeline**

Activity	Dates
<p><b>Virtual information sessions</b></p> <p>Information sessions are an opportunity for retailers to ask questions about Fresh Bucks and the selection process. More information and links to registration are below.</p>	<p>Wednesday, April 8, 2021 at 1:00 p.m.</p> <p>Thursday, April 29, 2021 at 3:00 p.m.</p>
<p><b>Interest form due</b></p> <p>Interest forms are <a href="#">available here</a> and must be submitted by 11:59 p.m. Forms can be submitted online or by phone at 206-256-5503.</p>	<p><b>Friday, May 14, 2021 at 11:59 p.m.</b></p>
<p><b>Site visits and assessment</b></p> <p>A panel of City staff and community partners will review interest forms to identify retailers to move to the site visit stage of the selection process. During site visits, we will provide more information about the Fresh Bucks program and assess store readiness and capacity to implement the program, produce management, and community engagement. Site visits will be conducted in the store contact's preferred language.</p>	<p>June - July</p>
<p><b>Review of site assessments and selection</b></p> <p>The Fresh Bucks team will review site visit assessments and prioritize retailers for selection.</p>	<p>July</p>
<p><b>Retailers selected and notified</b></p> <p>Selected stores will be notified about selection in late summer. Stores that are not selected in 2021 will be kept on a list and updated about future selection processes.</p>	<p>August</p>
<p><b>Partner onboarding</b></p> <p>The onboarding process includes assessing start-up assistance and capacity needs for each store, negotiating and signing a contract, setting up the e-benefit system at the store, and staff training.</p>	<p>Onboarding will begin in early fall of 2021. Timelines will vary by store based on level of assistance needed and the contracting and technology integration processes.</p>



## Information Sessions

Interested retailers are encouraged to participate in one of two information sessions offered by Fresh Bucks staff. Information sessions provide retailers the opportunity to ask questions and hear an overview of the retail partner opportunity and selection process.

The sessions will take place virtually, with the option to join online or via phone. Language interpretation and other accommodations are available upon request. Retailers are encouraged to register using the links below at least a week prior to each event to allow time to arrange necessary accommodations.

### Session Dates and Times

Please [register here](#) for one of the two sessions below. If you need language or other accommodations, please plan to register by the dates indicated below.

- **Thursday, April 8, 2021 from 1:00 – 2:00 p.m.** | Please register by April 5, 2021 if you need accommodations.
- **Thursday, April 29, 2021 from 3:00 – 4:00 p.m.** | Please register by April 22, 2021 if you need accommodations.

## V. E-Benefit Integration and Start-Up Resources for Selected Retailers

With the new e-benefit system, Fresh Bucks customers will receive their monthly benefits on a debit card and/or mobile app. Fresh Bucks small food retailers will use a tablet or mobile-based Fresh Bucks app to process Fresh Bucks transactions. Below is more information about technology integration, associated costs, and assistance the City will provide to selected retailers.

**Table 3: Technology, Fees, and Assistance Available**

E-Benefit Technology	Technology Integration Fees	Assistance Available
<p><b>Mobile App</b> The e-benefit vendor, Solutran, provides a tablet-based digital app that is separate from the store’s existing point of sale (POS) system and cash registers.</p>	<p>The e-benefit technology requires annual license and transactions fees. The City of Seattle offers financial support to help small retailers cover these costs. For example, the City will cover:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Annual license fees for up to 5 unique users per license.</li> <li>• Transaction fees up to \$500/vendor/year (which is around 3,333 transactions/year).</li> </ul>	<p>In addition to the fee waivers listed in the “fees” column, the City of Seattle provides the following assistance:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To help with the start-up costs of program implementation, the City will pay retailers a service fee not to exceed <b>\$3,500 per year for two years.</b></li> <li>• City of Seattle Fresh Bucks staff serve as liaisons between retailers and the</li> </ul>



	<p>Retailers will be responsible for license and transaction fees that exceed these limits. Costs will vary by store, so the City will provide a more detailed estimate to selected partners as part of the onboarding process. Stores will also need to have tablet(s) and/or mobile device(s) at each checkout stand to process the e-benefit.</p>	<p>e-benefit vendor during the onboarding process and will provide training to store staff.</p>
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## VI. Requirements for Selected Retailers

Retailers that are selected to become a Fresh Bucks partner through this process will contract with the City of Seattle and the e-benefit vendor to accept and receive reimbursement for Fresh Bucks customer spending. Retailers will need to participate in an annual renewal process. Our goal is to continue contracts with retail partners that meet annual renewal criteria to maintain familiar access points for Fresh Bucks customers year over year.

**Selected retailers** must meet the following requirements:

- Provide the City and e-benefit vendor with Taxpayer Identification Number, an IRS W-9 form and insurance information upon request, as well as any other documentation the e-benefit vendor requires to set up reimbursement.
- Cover costs associated with technology integration that are outside of the fee waivers and capacity funds the City of Seattle provides (described in in the table 3).
- Create and maintain a welcoming environment and positive shopping experience for people using Fresh Bucks, including friendly and knowledgeable cashier staff and signage as needed.
- Use Fresh Bucks brand, logo, and marketing material in accordance with City of Seattle guidelines. Any materials created by the retailer that includes the Fresh Bucks logo must be developed in partnership with and approved by the City of Seattle.
- Ensure store managers, cashiers and customer service representatives receive initial and ongoing training on how to use the e-benefit system, process Fresh Bucks transactions, and help Fresh Bucks customers use their benefits. This includes participating in City-provided trainings and providing training for new staff.
- Monitor Fresh Bucks transactions to ensure only eligible items (fruits and vegetables) are purchased with Fresh Bucks benefits.
- Follow and monitor all program policies and inform City of Seattle of issues to allow for program improvements.

As part of this agreement, **City of Seattle** will provide:



- Initial training and materials for retailer staff about processing the e-benefit and helping customers with their transactions. This will include orientation and train-the-trainer sessions, as well as training materials translated in relevant languages.
- Service fees not to exceed \$3,500 per year for two years, for start-up costs associated with program implementation.
- License fee waivers for up to five unique users and transaction fee waivers up to \$500 per vendor, per year (which equates to about 3,333 transactions per vendor, per year).
- Designed marketing materials to help retailers promote use of Fresh Bucks.
- Ongoing technical assistance to ensure e-benefit implementation is successful.





## VII. Interest Form Questions and Site Visit Eligibility

A panel of City staff and community partners will review interest forms to assess retailer eligibility and consider how the mix of interested retailers meets the needs and preferences of Fresh Bucks customers. The interest form questions are outlined below with information on how they will be used to assess eligibility and prioritize retailers for site visits. The review process will also include an assessment of gaps across the full Fresh Bucks retail network, taking into consideration how the mix of stores will provide Fresh Bucks customers with as many fresh produce access points and culturally relevant options as possible.

Interest Form Question	Purpose/Assessment Criteria
Name of retailer: Primary contact: Contact title: Contact phone number: Secondary phone number (optional): Contact preferred language: Contact email (optional):	Retailer identification information will be used to contact selected stores to set up site visits and determine language access needs.
Please give us the address(es) of retailer location(s):	Retailer address(es) will be used to assess whether they are in or near (within 0.25 miles) a <i>Priority 1 or Priority 2 Neighborhood</i> (see map in Appendix A or the table on page 4).  To be eligible, retailers must identify with at least one of the culturally specific grocer categories <b>OR</b> serve at least one of the priority neighborhoods.  Retailer address and location will also be used to assess proximity to public transit stops. Retailers accessible by transit will be prioritized.
Do you have a valid City of Seattle business license? Please provide the number of the license.	Business licenses will be used to confirm the retailer is registered with the City. To be eligible, stores must have a City of Seattle business license.
Do you have Wi-Fi that can be accessed on a tablet or mobile phone in your store to process the Fresh Bucks benefit?	Access to Wi-Fi or a reliable mobile connection is needed to process Fresh Bucks transactions.  To be eligible, stores must have Wi-Fi and/or a reliable mobile connection.

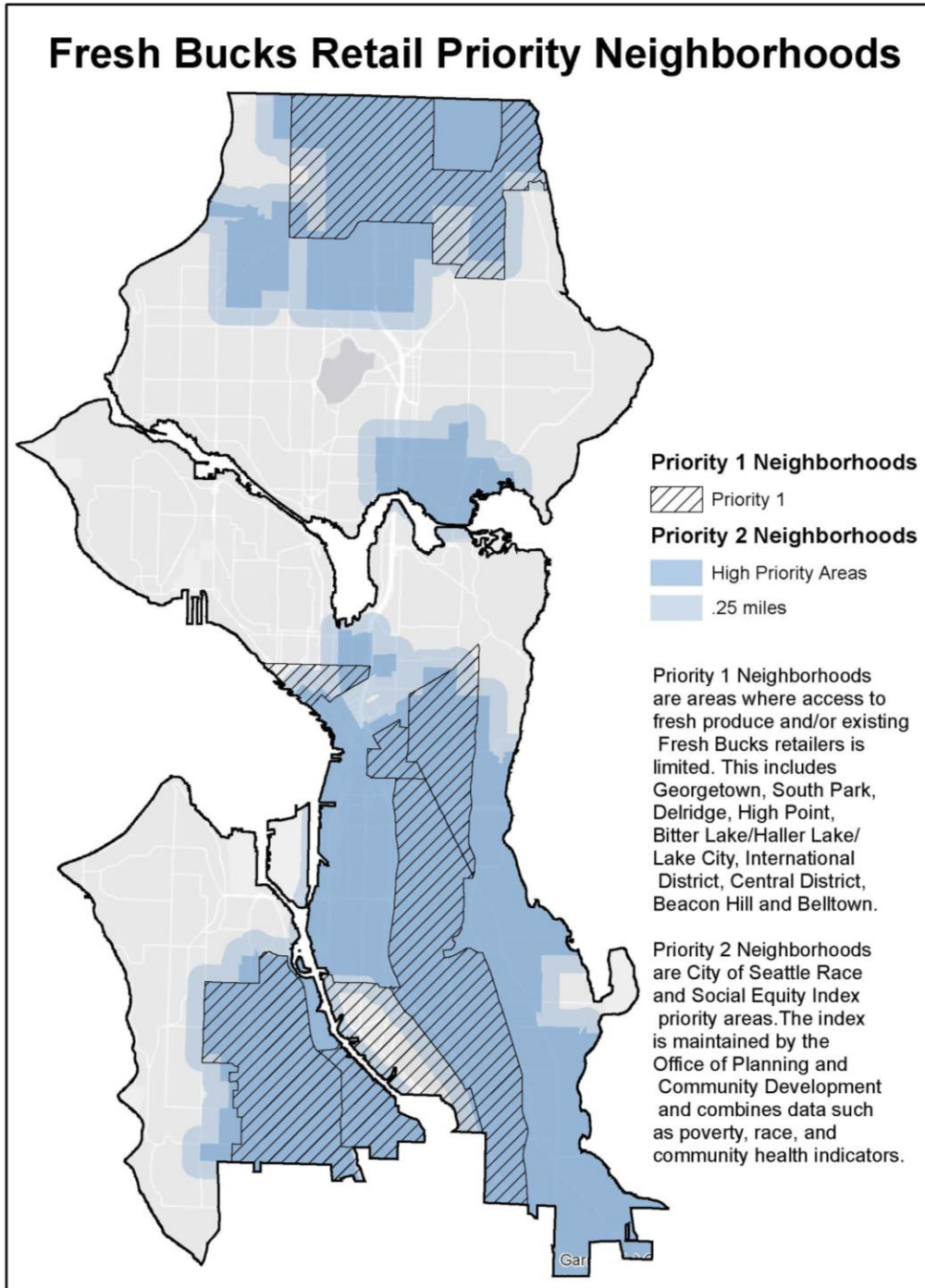


Interest Form Question	Purpose/Assessment Criteria
Is your business at least 51% owned by women and/or minorities?	The City of Seattle defines Women and Minority Owned Businesses (WMBE) as those that are at least 51% owned by a woman or minority. The City of Seattle actively supports partnership with WMBE contractors. Retailers that meet this criterion will be prioritized.
How many types of produce do you usually have in stock on a given day?	To be eligible, stores must consistently stock at least 10 types of produce. Retailers that provide more than 10 types of produce will be prioritized.
Do you sell produce and other groceries that are culturally or ethnically specific or that meet specific dietary needs? If so, please tell us which cultures, ethnicities and dietary needs are represented in your store.	<p>These culturally specific grocers were identified in a 2020 survey of Fresh Bucks customers and through conversations with community organizations that partner with Fresh Bucks:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Asian grocers</li> <li>• East African and/or Halal grocers</li> <li>• Latinx grocers</li> </ul> <p>To be eligible, retailers must identify with at least one of the culturally specific grocer categories <b>OR</b> serve at least one of the priority neighborhoods.</p>
Why are you interested in becoming a Fresh Bucks retailer?	Responses to this question will help the Fresh Bucks team assess how familiar retailers are with the program and their hopes/reasons for becoming a Fresh Bucks partner.
To be eligible for selection as a small food retailer, your business’s annual revenue in Seattle must not exceed \$2 million. We will assess annual revenue based on general business and occupation (B&O) tax filings to the City of Seattle Department of Finance and Administrative Services. By submitting this interest form, you authorize the City of Seattle Office of Sustainability & Environment to access and review the B&O tax information submitted by your business.	<p>Your B&amp;O tax filings will be used to confirm your annual revenue.</p> <p>To be eligible, your store’s annual revenue must not exceed \$2 million.</p>



APPENDIX A: 2021 Small Retailer Priority Neighborhoods

Below is a map of the high priority Race and Social Equity index neighborhoods and additional information about the neighborhoods where access to fresh produce and existing Fresh Bucks retailers is limited.





The **Priority 1 Neighborhoods** have limited access to fresh produce and existing Fresh Bucks retailers, which is further explained here:

- **South Park, Delridge, High Point, and Georgetown.** These neighborhoods were identified by Public Health – Seattle & King County as overlapping on three main factors that affect access to healthy foods—a large proportion of residents are lower income, travel times to healthy food retailers are longer, and there is higher percentage of unhealthy food retailers.<sup>2</sup> There are also only two existing Fresh Bucks retailers across these four neighborhoods.
- **Bitter Lake, Haller Lake, Northgate, and Lake City.** These north Seattle neighborhoods were identified by the USDA as areas where a significant share of residents are more than half a mile from the nearest supermarket. In addition, in their [2019 Healthy Food Availability report](#), Public Health identified small areas within these neighborhoods where low-income residents may face challenges in accessing healthy food. There is also only one existing Fresh Bucks retailer in that area.
- **International District, Beacon Hill, Central District, and Belltown.** The existing produce and Fresh Bucks options in the International District, Central District, and Belltown are largely farmers markets and farm stands where hours are limited. Portions of Beacon Hill are not served by any Fresh Bucks retailers.

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<sup>2</sup> This is based on 2019 data analyzed in PHSKC’s [Healthy Food Availability and Food Bank Network Report](#). Discussion of healthy food priority areas starts on page 23 of the report.