

# Montana's Farmers Market Nutrition Programs: Resources and Case Studies to Increase Low-Income Local Food Access

*By Shay Farmer, Community Food and Agriculture Coalition*

Increasingly, farmers markets in Montana are being recognized as healthy-food access points. Greater awareness has been drawn to enticing low-income community members to the nutritional and social benefits of farmers markets. Many organizations and the Montana Department of Health and Human Services have worked to increase accessibility to low-income populations through Federal and State nutrition programs, which can aid markets in attracting all demographics. Citizen groups in certain communities have also started local initiatives to ensure that all citizens feel welcome and can afford healthy, local food at markets.

This resource sheet will describe the different Federal and State programs that support low-income local food access and their status in Montana. It will also cover grassroots efforts to expand or start these programs if funds are not available within a given community.

## State and Federal Programs

**WIC**, or Women, Infants and Children, Farm Direct Program provides nutrition assistance for pregnant and nursing women and their young children. The Farm Direct Program provides coupons that can be used to purchase produce items at farmers markets. It is available in the following counties: Flathead, Missoula, Ravalli, Cascade, Lewis and Clark, Gallatin, Riverstone, and Dawson.

As of market season 2017, the program is at capacity. However, the program director suggested notifying the WIC office if your

community is in need so that they are aware of which communities are interested in offering WIC Farm Direct for their low-income clients.

**Contact:** Glade Roos, WIC Farm Direct Program, MT Department of Health and Human Service

**Email:** [GRoos@mt.gov](mailto:GRoos@mt.gov)

## Senior Farmers Market Nutrition Program

provides coupons to low-income seniors to spend at farmers markets throughout Montana. The program is currently available at 10 markets throughout the state: Bozeman, Helena, Hamilton, Butte, Darby, Stevensville, Polson/Ronan, Livingston, Manhattan, Miles City, and Missoula. Billings has a bulk distribution program operated through the Billings Food Bank. Local coalitions, which include senior centers, county councils, Area Agencies on Aging, food banks, and market masters,



**Photo:** Community Food and Agriculture Coalition (CFAC) Suzanne Melina-K, Double SNAP Dollar Ambassador who helps promote the Double SNAP Dollar Program at the Clark Fork Market in Missoula

operate the programs in participating areas. This program is also at capacity, but you can get on a waiting list by calling the Senior Farmers Market Nutrition Program coordinator. Farmers interested in accepting senior coupons at farmers markets in the participating areas are required to take part in a brief training. For more information on this program and Farmer training, **contact** Jackie Stoeckel at the State Office on Aging at 800-332-2272 during normal business hours or **email** [jstoeckel@mt.gov](mailto:jstoeckel@mt.gov).

Because both senior coupons and WIC Farm Direct coupons are contingent on redemption rates, outreach is critical in participating communities.

**SNAP**, or Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, is the largest nutrition program both nationally and in Montana. Many farmers markets are authorized to accept SNAP electronically. The availability of SNAP equipment grants, available to farmers and farmers markets from the National Farmers Market Coalition, makes it a good time to become authorized. For more information on SNAP, see the manual *How to Accept SNAP Benefits at your Market*, available online at: <http://dphhs.mt.gov/publichealth/NAPA/FM>.

## Grass Roots Food Access Spotlight

While many of the Farmers Market Nutrition Programs are currently at capacity in Montana, some communities have taken fundraising and program development into their own hands by tailoring and creating programs that fit the needs of their individual communities.

**SNAP Incentive Programs.** Citizen groups across the state have privately raised funds, taken advantage of mini-grants offered through the National Center for Appropriate Technology, or joined the Community Food and Agriculture Coalition's Double SNAP Dollars to provide a matching program SNAP recipients. Many markets match \$10 or \$20 to be spent on local produce to increase purchasing power and stimulate local economic growth.

- The *Double SNAP Dollar* program is a SNAP incentive program that encompasses markets in three counties in western Montana. As an outreach tool, it has provides stipends to low-income Street Team members who help promote the program to their networks.



Eat better on a budget.

Local community organizations and farmers markets have found creative ways to fund their nutrition programs without Federal funding. These innovative programs can serve as models of how to increase food access at markets without relying on Federal grants.

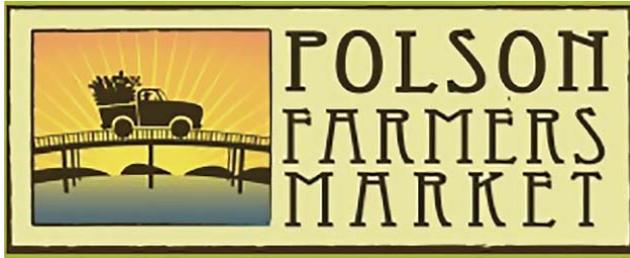
- *Farm Hands: Nourish the Flathead Community Nutrition Programs*, Columbia Falls and Whitefish Farmers Markets



Farm Hands is a program in Northwest Montana with a mission to connect people to the source of their food and to those who produce it through education, outreach, and market support. Its work is focused on increasing good food access, supporting food security programs, and youth empowerment. The program's interests include ecologically sound, socially just, and economically viable ways of growing food and making it accessible to everyone.

Farm Hands programs are available at the Whitefish and Columbia Falls Farmers Markets through Double SNAP Dollars, which provides a \$10 match when SNAP cards are used at the market; Senior Citizen Coupon Booklets; and School Coins Program.

The program is entirely funded with non-Federal dollars through local fundraising for all aspects of programming. The program includes farm dinners and events, as well as work with local foundations to raise funds for these programs.



- The *Polson Farmers Market* offers locally produced fresh vegetables, fruits, meats, cheese, eggs, honey, jams and jellies, baked goods, bedding plants, perennials, shrubs, veggie and herb starts, hanging baskets, cut flowers, soaps, skin-care products, wood-working products, jewelry, photography, art, pottery, and many more unique craft items.

The market has offered a SNAP incentive program for the past five years. They expanded into incentivizing self-sufficiency classes and joined under the Double SNAP Dollar marketing umbrella in 2015.



Polson Farmers Market board member Darci Jones and Mission Falls Market in St. Ignatius board member Eva Masin at the community picnic which fundraised for Double SNAP Dollars in the Mission Valley. Photo: Community Food and Agriculture Coalition

The first four years of the program were funded entirely by the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribe's Human Resources Department. In market season 2017, the market received private grants and held a community picnic fundraiser to raise money for the SNAP incentives, self-sufficiency classes, and budgeting classes. The picnic featured local food and a pop-up art show, which propelled them forward on their financial goals.



Pop-up art show at the picnic. Photo: Community Food and Agriculture Coalition

**T**here are many ways to provide low-income local food access throughout Montana. It requires commitment from market managers, the market board, and community leadership, but once instituted it can provide multiple economic and social benefits to your community.

**Questions about general market resources and SNAP?**

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**Questions about bringing federally and non-federally funded nutrition programs to your market and want to know where to start?**

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**Questions about WIC Farm Direct Program?**

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Montana WIC Program

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**Questions about Senior Farmers Market Nutrition Program?**

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