



The Federal Government has several programs in place to help low-income families and individuals purchase food. Some of these programs are available at farmers markets and most act as reimbursements. The user provides the vendor with either a card or a voucher and the federal government will reimburse the farmers market or farm (depending on how the system is set up) for the amount purchased.

This is a wonderful opportunity to open your market up to a new customer base while providing a needed service to the community. Make sure you research each program to see if your market is eligible and to see if your market can feasibly set up and manage these programs.

Following are programs that have been set up by farmers markets in Alaska in the past.

#### ***Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)***

SNAP (formerly known as food stamps) is a federal program that assists eligible, low income individuals and families purchase food. SNAP eligible foods include “foods for the household to eat, such as breads, cereals, fruits, vegetables, meats, fish, poultry, and dairy products.” Additional items that can be purchased with SNAP are seeds and plants which produce food for the household to eat. Non-eligible foods include beer, wine, liquor, pet foods, soaps, paper products, household items, vitamins and medicines.

SNAP members are given a QUEST card, which they use like a debit card to purchase food. Farmers Markets that accept SNAP must have an Electronic Benefit Transfer (EBT) machine on site in order to accept QUEST card payments.

In Alaska, there are two programs that help Farmers Markets sign up to accept SNAP QUEST cards at their market.

1. In participation with other agencies, the Alaska Division of Agriculture has a grant

program that is specifically designed to help markets get an EBT machine and accept quest cards. This program uses a token system. The tokens must be unique and have \$1 or \$5 increments stamped on them.

- This grant provides one EBT machine and money to purchase tokens. When a SNAP member comes to your market, they go to a booth, have their QUEST card swiped for a certain amount and then the tokens created for that market are handed to the SNAP member to be used at the market like cash for eligible vendors.
- This method requires that all market vendors understand the SNAP program and know whether their items are eligible for reimbursement.

2. MarketLink began in 2014 and is run by the National Association of Farmers Market Nutrition Programs (NAFMNP). The USDA hired them to distribute funds to all 50 states with the primary goal of helping more farmers markets accept SNAP customers at the market. MarketLink will help any market sign up to accept SNAP members, but they offer more incentives for markets that are attempting to accept SNAP for the first time.

- To find out more, go to: <http://marketlink.org/>

#### ***Farmer's Market Nutrition Programs***

These are federally funded programs to help specific low income groups gain access to healthy foods.

1. Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) Farmer's Market Nutrition Program (FNMP):
  - a) This program specifically benefits women, infants and children. To qualify, participants must meet federal income guidelines, be nutritionally at-risk, and be pregnant, new mothers, infants, or children under age five.
  - b) WIC participants receive one Fruit and Vegetable Voucher (FVV) each month. They come in \$6, \$10, or \$15 increments and can be used at retail stores, farmer's markets or farm stands.
  - c) If eligible, WIC participants also join the WIC



Farmer's Market Nutrition Program (FMNP). This program runs from June 1 – October 31 every year. Participants receive 5 - \$5 coupons to purchase fresh, nutritious, locally grown produce from Alaska WIC-authorized farmer's markets.

2. Senior Farmer's Market Nutrition Program (SFMNP):
  - a) This program specifically benefits senior citizens (age 60 and older) who are nutritionally at-risk, and who meet income, residency and ID guidelines.
  - b) Participants receive 5 - \$5 SFMNP coupons to use at local farmer's markets June 1 – October 31.

***Eligible Farmer's Markets include:***

- Farmers must grow at least one-third (33%) of the produce they offer for sale.
- Farmers must grow produce "locally" – within Alaska's borders.
- Farmer's markets must have enough authorized farmers participating in the market in order to provide enough variety and quantity of produce to meet the demands of WIC, FMNP, and SFMNP participants in the area served.
- Farmer's market must be open for at least 4 consecutive hours every week for the period stated in the Farmer-Vendor agreement.
- Farmer's market must be located in an area that serves enough eligible WIC, FMNP, and SFMNP participants to justify the need for a farmer's market.
- Farmer's markets must be located in an area where the local WIC and/or Senior Agency are able to provide necessary services to administer the programs.

If interested in accepting FVV's, WIC FMNP, and/or SFMNP at your market, go to: <http://dhss.alaska.gov/dpa/Pages/nutri/fmnp/fmnpvendorinfo.aspx>

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**If you have more questions or request additional information, please contact the Division of Agriculture**

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