Wayne State Farmers Market Supports Healthy Diets

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The Wayne State University Farmers Market unveiled its seventh season on June 4 at its usual location, 5201 Cass Ave, across the street from the Main Branch of the Detroit Public Library. One of 10 neighborhood markets in Detroit, the market offers a range of fresh vegetables, fruits, and herbs, and prepared foods to eat on location or take home.

For 22 weeks, the market will host farmers and food businesses from across the region, including at least 10 from Detroit. D-Town Farm, Grown in Detroit Co-operative, Brother Nature, LaBrosse Farm, and Recovery Park Farm represent Detroit growers. Detroit businesses Avalon, Nikki’s Ginger Teas, Sweet Potato Sensations, Russell Street Deli, and Brooklyn Street Local sell baked goods, desserts, and ready-to-eat foods.

In addition to cash, the Wayne State Farmers Market accepts the Bridge Card as well as WIC Project FRESH and Senior Project FRESH. These benefits help impoverished households increase their budgets for fresh produce and other healthy foods. Additionally, Bridge Card spending is matched one-to-one, up to $20 per card per day, with Double Up Food Bucks.

**Bridge Card:** Participants in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, or SNAP are able to use the Bridge Card at the market through Electronic Benefits Transfer, or EBT. At the market’s EBT station, participants in the program trade their benefits for an equal value of wooden tokens which are then spent on eligible products at various stalls. Funded through the federal Farm Bill, SNAP supports purchase of fresh produce, cold prepared and packaged foods, and potted food-bearing transplants at the market. EBT at the Wayne State Farmers Market operates through a partnership with Eastern Market Corporation.

**Double Up Food Bucks (DUFB):** Silver DUFB tokens offered at the market enhance the spending power of Bridge Card customers at participating markets. Because DUFB may be spent only on Michigan-grown fresh produce, they also increase revenues for the state’s growers. Due to its focus on fresh produce, DUFB supports healthier diets as participants are able to buy a variety of fresh produce and try unfamiliar varieties without having to spend their own money. DUFB is offered at Wayne State’s Farmers Market through a partnership with Fair Food Network (www.fairfoodnetwork.org).

**WIC Project FRESH and Senior Project FRESH:** Also funded through the Farm Bill, these programs provide coupons to purchase Michigan-grown fresh fruits and vegetables at participating farmers markets in the state. Booklets for both programs consist of $2 coupons totaling $30. In order to qualify for WIC or Senior Project FRESH a family must earn no more than 185 percent of the federally defined poverty level. WIC Project FRESH meets the nutritional needs of children, ages 1-4 and pregnant, breastfeeding, or post-partum non-
breastfeeding women. Senior Project FRESH (also called Market FRESH) helps seniors aged 60 and over. Michigan’s farmers and local economies also benefit from these programs.

WIC Project FRESH booklets may be obtained from one of two locations in Detroit: Detroit Urban League, 15770 James Couzens, (313) 832-4600, or Institute for Population Health, 1400 Woodbridge Street, (313) 309-9350. Market FRESH booklets are available from the local Area Agency on Aging office. For more information, contact the State’s Office on Services for the Aging at (517) 373-8230, or browse www.michigan.gov/osa.

To find Detroit markets that accept SNAP, DUFB, Project FRESH and Market FRESH, browse the Michigan Farmers Market Association website at mifma.org/find-a-farmers-market, or call (517) 432-3381.

There is one program that is unique to the Wayne State University Farmers Market: Student Advantage. Aimed at improving diets of participants, this program gives $10 in vouchers to eligible students in exchange for $5 in cash. The vouchers may be used exclusively to purchase fresh fruits, vegetables, herbs, and food-bearing potted plants.

Piloted in 2013, Student Advantage put nearly $10,000 in the hands of produce growers, increasing revenues 15 to 25 percent, and brought more than 500 new customers to the market.

A survey of 58 student participants implemented in October 2013 was illuminating: One, a majority (57 percent) live in 48201 and 48202 zip codes, neighborhoods on or close to campus. Two, sixty-two percent were 25 years or younger, with one in five under age 20.

Three, the program has improved diets. Eighty percent of respondents report that they bought more fruits and vegetables, 69 percent bought more varieties of produce, and 87 percent increased their trips to the market.

Four, Twenty four percent of respondents also reported cooking more at home, 43 percent ate more fruits and vegetables themselves or shared produce with friends, 15 percent tried new fruits and vegetables, and 16 percent ate less junk food.

Finally, participants wanted the program to continue. Its main attractions were students’ ability to double their spending, access to healthy/quality/local produce, and the convenience of the market’s location.

Separately, customer surveys taken prior to Student Advantage indicate that the $5 fronted by students in the project is more than the average spending by individual students on fresh produce at the market. Students typically prefer prepared foods over fresh produce. Thus, the Student Advantage Project constitutes a win-win-win solution: for students in terms of increased budgets for fresh produce and therefore healthier diets; for produce vendors in increased revenues; and for the market, greater numbers of new customers and increased spending per customer.
All the above-mentioned programs continue in 2014. They help the Wayne State Farmers Market support healthier diets of our customers. Have you shopped at the market this season?

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Above: Public Health student and Healthy Eats Trainer Tanya Troy leading a workshop at the WSU Farmers Market.