

The Senior Farmers' Market Nutrition Program

Overview

The Senior Farmers' Market Nutrition Program (SFMNP) provides checks to eligible seniors to purchase fresh, nutritious, unprepared, locally grown fruits, vegetables, and herbs from farmers' markets, roadside stands, and CSA programs. In addition, the program contributes to the expansion and the addition of farmers' markets, roadside stands, and CSAs. The program is operated by the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) and is administered in Wisconsin by the Department of Health and Family Services (DHFS), Division of Public Health (DPH).

Eligibility

Eligible participants must be 60 years of age or older and have incomes of 185% or less of the federal poverty level. Native Americans 55 years of age and older are eligible for the SFMNP.

Access/Participation

The Senior FMNP operates in 37 Wisconsin counties and served 9,700 seniors in 2006.

Benefit Details

The FMNP food package consists of a specified number of food checks with specific denominations preprinted on the checks, currently \$2 or \$3. The total amount of the FMNP food package may change depending on funding. One food package is issued once per year to each eligible household. The current food package for each senior is \$30 per season.

Program Impact

- Use of FMNP checks, in addition to nutrition education, contributes to a positive long-term dietary change toward consumption of fresh produce.
- The FMNP benefits communities by supporting farmers' markets where all consumers can purchase fresh locally grown foods.
- The FMNP also provides a unique opportunity to increase the variety of fruits and vegetables purchased by participants; contributes to participants gaining new knowledge in the preparation and storage of fresh fruits and vegetables; and benefits farmers, especially small farm operations, by providing new customers and increasing sales.

Positive Developments & Trends

The Senior FMNP is very popular with participating seniors and provides them a much needed nutrition benefit. Both the Senior and WIC FMNPs have made significant contributions to keeping small produce farmers in business. The FMNPs have played a

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significant role in increasing the number of farmers' markets in Wisconsin, thereby providing an economic, social, and health benefit to all in their communities.

Concerns, Problems & Negative Trends

- The Senior FMNP has not been able to unserved counties due to limited federal funding. In 2006, seniors spent \$252,000 in checks; 96% of allotted funds. The Senior FMNP is funded through the 2002 Farm Bill at \$15 million; but the need is \$45 million nationally.
- Only 37 Wisconsin counties are being served by the Senior FMNP with small allocations that are not sufficient to serve all eligible seniors even in those communities.
- Administrative funding to states is minimal and does not provide funds to the local agencies that coordinate the distribution of Senior FMNP checks to participants and provide education. Coordinating agencies must rely on volunteers or funds from other sources to operate the program.

The Senior FMNP would be more effective if...

- The counties providing the Senior FMNP benefit had enough funding for food to serve their eligible population, as well as eligible seniors in unserved counties. Local agencies are challenged to distribute the checks in a fair manner and in a way that will not result in excessive complaints from eligible seniors who did not receive checks.
- There was more administrative funding. Currently, 10% of the federal grant can be used for administrative costs. Much of this is used for check processing and state staff salaries. Local agencies receive no funding to administer the program making it difficult to expect local staff to provide high quality services to seniors and farmers.