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2015 farmers market season open for SNAP purchases

Commissioner to visit Minneapolis market during National Farmers Market Week

The 2015 Minnesota farmers market season is underway, helping Minnesotans with low-incomes access nutritious food. More than 486,500 Minnesotans who receive Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits can use their Electronic Benefit Transfer (EBT) cards at 64 participating markets across the state this summer and fall.

“When fresh fruits and vegetables are easier to purchase with SNAP, it is easier for participants to make healthy choices for their families,” said Minnesota Department of Human Services Commissioner Lucinda Jesson, who will visit the Midtown Farmers Market in Minneapolis Tuesday during National Farmers Market Week Aug. 2-8. “High intakes of fruits and vegetables results in healthier Minnesotans.”

Since 2010, the EBT and Market Bucks Initiative has helped create and sustain a network of farmers markets that accept EBT cards while providing a healthy eating incentive for SNAP participants to purchase fresh, locally grown produce more easily. The Market Bucks healthy eating incentive provides a dollar-for-dollar match, up to \$5 worth of Market Bucks per day, to customers who use SNAP benefits to purchase eligible foods at participating farmers markets.

“Health is not solely an individual issue, but rather, is something greatly impacted by people’s surroundings,” said Janelle Waldock, director of the Center for Prevention at Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Minnesota, a primary funder of the Market Bucks program. “Minnesotans say difficulty getting to stores with affordable, fresh fruits and vegetables makes it hard for them to live a healthy lifestyle. The Market Bucks program helps address these issues by making healthy options more affordable, and by providing access to fresh produce in neighborhoods where access to retailers that sell healthy food is currently limited.”

Jesson added, “When Minnesotans use federal food assistance at their local farmers markets, they are not only taking a step toward better health for themselves and their families, but they’re also supporting their local economies and farmers.”

According to the U.S. Department of Agriculture, every dollar in federal food assistance that is spent in the local economy generates \$1.80 worth of economic activity. Use of SNAP at farmers markets is a win for consumers, farmers and Minnesotans’ health.

The Market Bucks program is administered by the Minnesota Department of Human Services and its partners, and is 100 percent funded by contributions, sponsorships and grants from national and state collaborations. Blue Cross Blue Shield of Minnesota has been the primary funder since 2010. Other partners include:

- Children's Hospitals and Clinics of Minnesota
- Diocese of St. Cloud
- Initiative Foundation
- Lakes and Pines Community Action Council, Inc.
- Staples Motley Area Community Foundation
- Statewide Health Improvement Program
- UCare
- United Way of Central Minnesota.

Visit z.umn.edu/farmersmarkets to see a map of farmers markets participating in the 2015 EBT and Market Bucks Initiative. For more information, visit the department's [webpage about SNAP](#).

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Editor's note: Human Services Commissioner Lucinda Jesson will visit the [Midtown Farmers Market](#) in Minneapolis 4 p.m. Tuesday, Aug. 4, to highlight the SNAP, EBT and Market Bucks initiatives during National Farmers Market Week. The market is located at the corner of Lake Street East and 22nd Avenue South. Jesson and market officials will be available for media interviews.