

Senior Farmers' Market Nutrition Program Fact Sheet

What is the Senior Farmers' Market Nutrition Program (SFMNP)?

The SFMNP is a federal program which provides coupons for low-income seniors to buy fresh, unprepared foods at farmers' markets, roadside stands, and community supported agriculture programs. It is administered by the U.S. Department of Agriculture Food and Nutrition Service.

The program is designed to improve the health of seniors by providing access to fresh fruits, vegetables, and herbs. It is also designed to increase domestic consumption of agricultural commodities, and specifically to help support and create more farmers' markets, roadside stands, and community supported agriculture programs.

Who is eligible to participate in the Senior Farmers' Market Nutrition Program?

Seniors (60 years of age or older) with incomes less than 185 percent of the Federal Poverty Income Guidelines are eligible to participate (for households of one and two, the maximum allowable incomes in 2003 are \$16,613 and \$22,422, respectively). Some state agencies grant categorical eligibility to seniors enrolled in other means-tested programs, like the Food Stamp Program or the Commodity Supplemental Food Program.

Who participates in the Senior Farmers' Market Nutrition Program?

In FY 2001, 419,127 seniors nationwide received coupons through the SFMNP. The coupons are distributed once a year, at the beginning of the growing season. Coupons ranged in size, from \$10 to \$540, with the average benefit level at \$66. The coupon amounts are determined by individual state agencies, not by recipient income levels.

Also in FY 2001, 8,508 farmers in 1,205 farmers' markets, and 49 community supported agriculture programs, accepted the coupons.

How does the Senior Farmers' Market Nutrition Program work?

The federal government awards grants to individual state agencies to fund the program. The state agencies then distribute the money to low-income seniors in the form of coupons. The federal government provides no money for program administration; states must pay those costs (in fact, those administrative costs may be the reason why more states do not participate in the program).

SFMNP benefits can only be used during the growing season, which varies from quite long in some states, to quite short in others. Dried fruits and vegetables, potted fruits and vegetables, rice, and honey are not eligible for purchase with SFMNP coupons.

Some state agencies restrict use of the coupons to *locally grown* produce, to encourage support of their state's farmers.

Community Food Security Coalition: www.foodsecurity.org