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Fresh produce available at farmers' markets to WIC-eligible Alaskans, starting June 1

Seniors who meet income guidelines also eligible

ANCHORAGE —Alaskans who are eligible for WIC — the Women, Infants and Children's nutrition program for low-income residents — may be eligible for coupons to buy fresh produce at more than 100 farmers' markets or farm stands across the state from June 1–Oct. 31.

WIC is the federally funded Women, Infants and Children program that provides supplemental foods and nutrition education for low-income pregnant or postpartum women, and to infants and children up to age 5 who have a nutritional risk.

Seniors 60 and older who meet income guidelines (185 percent of federal poverty guidelines) are also eligible for the farmers' market program in areas where enough fresh vegetables and fruits are produced locally to provide for low-income residents..

WIC Fruit and Vegetable Vouchers, which may be valued at \$6, \$10, or \$15, and Senior or Farmers' Market coupons, worth \$5, may be spent only at authorized farm stands or markets, and only to buy fresh fruit, vegetables and fresh-cut herbs grown in Alaska.

“Farmers' markets have fresh, locally grown, healthy fruits and vegetables,” says Sandy Harbanuk, Alaska WIC vendor coordinator, “and usually offer great value for the cost of the food — you get more for \$5 or \$10 than you would in a retail store.” Many farm stands offer bags or bundles of fruits and vegetables for fixed prices that match the voucher or coupon denominations.

Although the federal farmers' market program began in 1992, Alaska did not participate until 2000. “At that time, we authorized six markets and 14 farm stands in Kodiak, Anchorage, Eagle River, Mat-Su Valley and Fairbanks,” said Alice Albrecht, project assistant with the Alaska WIC program. The senior program started in Alaska in 2001.

More and more farmers' markets are sprouting up in many parts of the state — “It's expanding every year,” Albrecht said. “The farmers' markets are cropping up in places we haven't seen before. For example, Bethel, Sitka and Petersburg, and Dillingham now have farmers' markets.”

For a complete list of Alaska farmers participating in 2012, and for more information, go to: <http://www.hss.state.ak.us/dpa/programs/nutri/FMNP/Default.htm> or call the WIC Program office at 907-465-3100.