

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
Tuesday, July 15, 2014

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**COUNTY, CITY AND LOCAL FARMERS' MARKETS TEAM UP
TO MAKE FRESH PRODUCE MORE AFFORDABLE FOR FAMILIES AND RESIDENTS**

A consortium of six farmers' markets will make more affordable, fresh, local produce available for Central Ohio residents with Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits through a program called Veggie SNAPS.

"Partnering with local farmers who already have a positive presence in our neighborhoods will make it even easier and affordable for our residents and families in need to purchase healthy fruits and veggies," said Commission President Marilyn Brown. "Sadly, 48-percent of Franklin County's SNAP recipients are children. No one in our community and certainly not our youngest residents should lack access to this nutritional produce."

Funding provided by the city of Columbus and Franklin County totals \$20,000 and will cover the costs for Franklin County SNAP recipients to double their dollars (up to \$10) at participating farmers' markets including Bexley, Clintonville, Columbus Public Health, Franklin Park Conservatory and Botanical Gardens, Franklinton Gardens, and Pearl Market.

"Increasing access to fresh fruits and vegetables is critical to improving the health of our community," said Mayor Michael B. Coleman. "By reducing obesity and the chronic diseases associated with it, we all benefit."

Pearl Market debuted a similar program last year and saw an increase in their SNAP transactions by 134% in 2013 compared to the 2012 season. Franklin County and Columbus officials expect similar results under the expanded Veggie SNAPS program.

"Providing easy access to fresh fruits and vegetables promotes healthy choices and increases the chances of children and adults living productive lives," said Councilmember Priscilla R. Tyson, chair of the Health and Human Services committee. "These markets will help fill food gaps when other forms of assistance fail."

“The produce that you purchase at a farmers’ market was picked that morning or the night before, and are at their nutritional peak,” said Pearl Market Manager Adam Schroeder. “Programs such as Veggie SNAPS not only create access and provide food sustainability for EBT users, but they also educate consumers and boost the local economy. Studies show that dollars that are spent locally are re-spent four to six times within a community before that dollar leaves the community.”

Supporting our local farmers markets is good for Ohio's top industry – agriculture - which contributes over \$79 billion to our state's economy. Data also show that food incentive programs help to stimulate the economy, with \$1.70 of economic activity estimated to result from every \$1 in SNAP benefits.

This expanded local initiative is especially significant following the reduction of the 2014 Farm Bill which cut \$8.6 billion from the Federal SNAP program, drastically affecting low-income families by making fresh produce prohibitive on a tighter SNAP budget.

The legislation resulted in \$193 million in cuts to Ohio through September 2014, affecting Ohio’s current 1,760,349 SNAP recipients and Franklin County’s 215,694 SNAP recipients (11% of all Ohio SNAP recipients). Families using SNAP benefits, 80% of whom live in poverty, lose approximately \$29 a month.

Nationally, farmers’ market incentive programs have been successful in the city of Cleveland and the state of Michigan.

2014 Participating Franklin County Farmers’ Market and Dates:

Bexley Farmers’ Market: Thursdays (4-7 p.m.)

Clintonville Farmers’ Market: Saturdays (9 a.m. – noon) through November 22; Wednesdays (4 – 7 p.m.) through August 20

Columbus Public Health: Thursdays, July 31, August 7, August 14 (10am-1pm)

Franklin Park Conservatory and Botanical Gardens Farmers’ Market: Wednesdays, (3:30-6:30 p.m.) through October 1.

Pearl Market: Tuesdays/Thursdays (10:30 a.m. – 2 p.m.) through October

Information on the program is available on-line at www.FranklinCountyOhio.gov/Commissioners, via social media at @FranklinCoOhio and in person at any of Franklin County Job and Family Services’ Opportunity Centers, the Columbus Metropolitan Library, CHOICES, YWCA (4th Street location), the Columbus Urban League, Central Ohio Area Agency on Aging, the Franklin County Office on Aging and many other community partner locations.

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