

The WIC Farmers' Market Nutrition Program

Overview

The WIC Farmers' Market Nutrition Program (FMNP) provides food checks to WIC participating families to purchase fresh fruits, vegetables, and herbs at selected farmers' markets. The two purposes of the FMNP are to increase fruit and vegetable consumption for participants, and to expand the awareness, use of and sales at farmers' markets.

Eligibility

WIC FMNP checks are issued to most families participating on the WIC (Women, Infants, and Children Nutrition) Program. At least one participant within the family must be either a pregnant, breastfeeding, or postpartum (up to six months after delivery) woman, or a child.

Access/Participation

The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) provides funding to the Wisconsin Department of Health and Family Services (DHFS). A 30% non-federal match requirement is satisfied by Wisconsin General Purpose Revenue. The Division of Public Health, Bureau of Community Health Promotion (BCHP) administers the WIC Program. At the local level, WIC is administered through 56 local health departments, 12 private non-profit agencies and three tribal health agencies. In 2007, there are 71 local WIC projects serving approximately 72,000 families of all 72 Wisconsin counties.

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 WIC family.

In 2004, WIC families received a \$20 food package and redeemed \$848,250 worth of checks. Due to reduced funding in 2005 and 2006, WIC families now receive \$15 food packages.

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 provides a unique opportunity to increase the variety of fruits and vegetables purchased by participants.
- The FMNP contributes to participants gaining new knowledge in the preparation and storage of fresh fruits and vegetables.
- The FMNP benefits farmers, especially small farm operations, by providing new customers and increasing sales.

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- The FMNP benefits communities by establishing farmers' markets where all consumers can purchase fresh locally grown foods.

Positive Developments & Trends

- The WIC FMNP is extremely effective in teaching women and their children how to select, prepare, and store fresh fruits and vegetables. Many WIC families have not previously shopped at a farmers' market until receiving FMNP checks.
- Both the Senior and WIC FMNPs are the reason why many small farmers have stayed in business. The FMNPs have played a 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

- WIC FMNP Federal funding is decreasing. For fiscal years 2005, 2006, and 2007 \$19.8 million was appropriated by Congress for the program. In addition, dollars unspent the previous year (carryover funding) are allocated to states. The amount of carryover funding has been decreasing as states spend more due to inflation of food and administrative costs.
- The WIC Program Food Packages Rule, if approved as proposed, would allow fruits and vegetables to be purchased with WIC checks at grocery stores as soon as 2009. There is concern that the FMNP may be affected or eliminated.

This program could be more effective if...

- There was sufficient funding for increasing administrative costs (salary increases, etc.). As cost of staffing increase and the funding remains stagnant or decreasing, it becomes increasingly challenging to administer the program at a high level.
- Many WIC participants need education on how to prepare fresh fruits and vegetables. An effective way to teach such skills is hands-on which requires more resources than simply providing a recipe. In addition, support for farmers and market managers could be improved such as providing assistance to a market manager struggling to form a new farmers' market or more proactive strategies to farmer compliance issues.
- Congress provided additional funding for benefits so WIC participants could receive a more substantial check to purchase produce.