



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

Improving Fresh Food Access: Incentives through “Produce Perks” offered at Cuyahoga County Farmers’ Markets

CLEVELAND, OHIO – May 18, 2015 – Seventeen farmers’ markets, two farm stands and one mobile market throughout Cuyahoga County are participating in a program that offers incentive dollars to customers utilizing the Ohio Direction Card, according to [Ohio State University Extension in Cuyahoga County](#).

“Double Value Produce Perks” is an initiative developed by [The Cleveland-Cuyahoga County Food Policy Coalition](#) (a coalition initiated by Ohio State University Extension-Cuyahoga County and Case Western Reserve University’s Prevention Research Center for Healthy Neighborhoods) in partnership with several Greater Cleveland philanthropic partners and Wholesome Wave, a national nonprofit focusing on access and affordability of healthy, local foods in underserved communities.

Produce Perks are incentive tokens given to customers at participating farmers’ markets who use an Ohio Direction Card to purchase food. A customer wishing to use their food assistance benefits can swipe their card at one central terminal, located at participating market’s information booths, and ask to withdraw a desired amount. The market will then provide tokens for the transaction in addition to Produce Perks that can be spent on fruits and vegetables. The incentive is a dollar-for-dollar match to every dollar spent (up to \$10) using an Ohio Direction Card at the market. There is no minimum purchase amount to qualify for the incentives and as the name suggests, Produce Perks are only good for purchasing fruits and vegetables. All other tokens purchased with the Ohio Direction Card are good to use on eligible items at the market.

Addressing healthy food gaps in neighborhoods throughout the county is the motivation for the incentive. With the inclusion of language to support incentives at farmers’ markets for the first time in the recent federal Agricultural Act of 2014, also known as the “Farm Bill,” many stakeholders across Ohio have expressed interest in replicating the program. Franklin and Hamilton Counties both piloted farmers’ market incentive programs in 2014 and plan to expand these programs this season. Through the United States Department of Agriculture’s Food Insecurity Nutrition Incentive (FINI) grant program, Cuyahoga, Franklin and Hamilton Counties will expand their farmers’ market SNAP incentive programs

and will begin strategizing around the development of a statewide network of farmers' markets that offer these types of programs. Cuyahoga County's program will include five new farmers' markets in neighboring Lorain, Medina, Portage, and Stark Counties in 2015. Local partner Countryside Conservancy in Summit County will add two new mini-markets in addition to its three existing farmers' markets.

First piloted at four farmers' markets in 2010, Produce Perks has grown in size and impact with each subsequent year. In 2014, twenty farmers' markets contributed to over \$39,900 in Ohio Direction Card sales with an additional \$29,580 in incentives redeemed to buy fresh fruits and vegetables. In a survey of shoppers during the 2014 season, 85% of respondents reported that Produce Perks were very important in getting them to spend their food assistance at the farmers' markets as opposed to another food retailer.

Ohio Senator Sherrod Brown emphasized, "We should do everything we can to improve the health of our local communities while supporting small farmers here in Northeast Ohio. The Produce Perks program does that by creating new markets for local producers and improving access to fruits and vegetables for thousands of low-income Ohioans. Cuyahoga County Extension and the Cleveland-Cuyahoga County Food Policy Coalition deserve our thanks for their efforts to promote local agriculture and the health and wellbeing of Cuyahoga County citizens."

For more information on the program and to see a [list](#) of participating markets in 2015, visit the Cleveland-Cuyahoga County Food Policy Coalition's website at www.cccfoodpolicy.org.

The Cleveland-Cuyahoga County Food Policy Coalition was convened in 2007 and operates with the support of over 100 other organizations, businesses and public entities in a public-private partnership to improve issues related to health and food security in Cuyahoga County.

Contact:

Nico Boyd

Ohio State University Extension, Cuyahoga County

Boyd.406@osu.edu

5320 Stanard Ave

Cleveland, Ohio 44103

Phone: 216-429-8200 x 212

