

MEDIA ACCESS @ MOUNTAIN PARK FARMERS' MARKET TUES. AUG 4th

The Mountain Park Health Center Farmers Market will operate **Tuesday, Aug. 4th FROM 8-NOON at 6601 W. Thomas Rd. Phoenix.** Media are invited to come and check out the market, visit with customers and meet IRC staff. Refugee farmers will be on site approx. 7-8 AM dropping off their products and helping with set-up, if you would like to interview or get film. Please contact Courtney at MCDPH for more info or other scheduled markets at 602-540-5473.

Press Release – For Immediate Release



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**SNAP/Nutrition Assistance Benefit Redemptions through Farmers Markets
Show 1200% Increase in Maricopa County**

New Roots Program Helps Refugee Farmers Contribute to Community Food Security Efforts

PHOENIX (Aug. 3, 2015)—The amount of food assistance dollars being spent at Maricopa County farmers markets has increased more than 13 times what it was in 2008, meaning more options for low-income families to incorporate fresh fruits and vegetables in their diet. This dramatic increase also means good business for the local farming community, significantly increasing their customer base and adding an economic boost to the community.

[Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program \(SNAP\)](#) participants are spending more of their benefits to make purchases at roadside farm stands, farmers markets and directly from local farmers than ever before, according to a recent report by the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA). In Maricopa County, SNAP redemptions at farmers markets grew from approximately \$2,400 to \$32,000 between FY2008-FY2014. The number of SNAP-authorized farmers markets in the county nearly doubled in that same time period from seven to 13, with three more added in 2015, bringing the total current number to 16 markets.

“There has been tremendous collaboration in our community to support national and state efforts to expand the use of SNAP and other benefit dollars for children and families in farmers markets and in other initiatives,” said Cindy Gentry, Food Systems Coordinator, Maricopa County Department of Public Health.

“Our goal is to help low-income families have more access to locally grown fresh fruits and vegetables, and farmers markets provide a great way to help bridge that gap.”

Expanding access for SNAP recipients to the fresh produce available at farmers markets has been a top priority for the USDA in recent years. Through a partnership with the National Association of Farmers Market Nutrition Programs, USDA provides free wireless equipment to qualifying farmers and farmers markets, enabling them to accept SNAP via electronic benefit transfers (EBT).

Farmers are a vital lifeline to healthy nutrition in low-income areas because many bring their products to areas with few, if any, supermarkets or grocery stores.

One of the innovative champions leading this effort is the International Rescue Committee’s New Roots Local Foods Program which helps refugee farmers establish their gardens and market their products for sale. With training, tools, and land provided by the IRC, refugees share their agricultural knowledge and culture while producing affordable, locally grown foods for their families and the greater community.

Since June, farmers from the program have been supplying foods to sell at a weekly farmers market held at Mountain Park Health Center in Maryvale, which includes a WIC Office. An integral part of the market is IRC’s Fresh Fund program, which matches SNAP and WIC users’ purchases dollar for dollar, up to \$10, essentially doubling their purchasing power. The market also accepts cash and debit/credit.

“This has been a great location for the market as we are able to provide immediate access for low-income families where they can use their benefits for healthy foods and make it an enjoyable experience,” said Anna Chotzen, program coordinator for the New Roots Program in Phoenix. Already more than \$2,500 in produce has been sold, with 60 percent attributed to food assistance program dollars.

The unique produce offered at the market draws a wide customer base, including clinic staff and the surrounding community. “Some of our farmers bring seeds from their own regions to grow, so it’s not uncommon to see five or six varieties of melons or cucumbers, African dry beans, and other cultural varieties of foods not seen at your typical market,” says Chotzen. Local refugee farmers represented at the market include those coming from Somalia and Iraq as well as West African countries such as Togo.

IRC’s Fresh Fund program is largely funded by a grant award they received through the USDA’s [Food Insecurity Nutrition Incentive](#) program earlier this year. This program, authorized by the 2014 Farm Bill, matches SNAP purchases 1:1 for the purchase of fresh produce.

To find a complete listing of farmers markets in Maricopa County, including those that accept food assistance dollars like SNAP and WIC, go to letsgrowourown.org.

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