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## **Fresh produce for low-income seniors available but many missing out**

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Almost 25,000 low-income Oregon seniors are getting help to buy fresh fruits and vegetables from local farmers markets and farm stands, but some 17,000 additional seniors are eligible but haven't signed up yet, according to the Oregon Department of Human Services. State officials are urging eligible seniors not to miss their window of opportunity and sign up before the September 15th deadline.

"We want to make sure every eligible senior knows that there is help available to ensure they are getting fresh and healthy local produce," says Lauren Mitchell, who helps oversee the program.

The state has sent more than 42,000 eligible Oregon seniors invitations to participate in the federally funded Oregon Senior Farm Direct Nutrition Program, which runs annually from June 1 to October 31, and would like to make sure all seniors know about the benefit. To be eligible, seniors must have turned 60 by April 1, 2009, receive Food Stamps or Medicaid, have a monthly income below \$1038 for an individual, and live in their own home or rental unit.

"Those who sign and return the letter to DHS by Sept. 15 will receive farm direct checks that can be used at any participating farm stand or farmer's market in Oregon through the end of October," says Mitchell.

Participants also receive information on authorized farm stands and farmers markets in their area and nutritional information, including recipes and tips to healthy eating.

“This is one of our most popular programs, and it really is a win-win for seniors and local farmers,” says Mitchell. “Everyone who is eligible should sign and return the letter, and enjoy the benefits of fresh produce and healthy eating.”

The program, now in its sixth year, is administered by DHS in partnership with the Oregon Department of Agriculture and the Public Health Division.

“Some of the comments I’ve received have been heartwarming,” says Mitchell. “I heard from an 80-year-old woman who credits her and her 90-year-old husband’s longevity to a diet high in fruits and vegetables, and I’ve heard from many seniors who say the program lets them buy fresh produce they normally can’t afford.”

For more information on the Oregon Senior Farm Direct Nutrition Program, [contact your local office serving seniors and people with disabilities.](#)

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