Produce Perks Midwest Receives $2.27 Million From USDA to Empower Low-Income Families Across Ohio to Buy Healthy Food

Harvesting Health in the Heartland:
This Investment Will Expand the Produce Perks Program, Helping Millions of Ohioans receiving SNAP Benefits Access Healthy Foods while Supporting Local Farmers

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On August 2nd, 2018, the United States Department of Agriculture’s (USDA) National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA) announced an award of $2,276,890 to Produce Perks Midwest to expand the Produce Perks program, increasing affordable access to healthy, local produce for the 1.4 million Ohioans receiving SNAP. The award, along with matching funds contributed by Produce Perks Midwest and partners from across the state known collectively as the Ohio Nutrition Incentive Network (OH-NIN), represents a $4.6 million commitment to food insecure families, Ohio farmers, and local economies.

Ohio State University Extension, Cuyahoga County in addition to other OH-NIN partners committed to ensuring equitable and affordable access to healthy food for all Ohioans by joining Produce Perks Midwest to reach more Ohioans. This committed network of multi-sector partners also includes Countryside Conservancy, Farmers Market Association of Toledo, Ohio Department of Health, Ohio Department of Aging, Ohio Farmers Market Network, Ohio Grocers Association, Prevention Research Center for Healthy Neighborhoods – Case Western Reserve University and Wholesome Wave.

The Produce Perks program was first piloted by the Cleveland-Cuyahoga County Food Policy Coalition in Cleveland in 2010 and has been administered locally by Ohio State University Extension, Cuyahoga County since its inception. Produce Perks was selected to be Ohio’s statewide nutrition incentive program administer by OH-NIN. Produce Perks increases affordable access to healthy foods, supports Ohio farmers, and strengthens local economies. The program empowers SNAP recipients to purchase fresh, healthy fruits and vegetables from Ohio farmers markets and grocery-retailers across the state. The program provides a $1-for-$1 match for shoppers using SNAP/EBT to buy healthy produce. The
program operates at over 100 locations statewide and generated over $300,000 in sales for in 2017, with over $61,500 in sales in Cuyahoga County. Find a participating location here.

“We are excited to continue the Produce Perks program which has proven to be incredibly impactful in increasing healthy food access for families in Cleveland and Cuyahoga County,” said Nicole Debose, Director at Ohio State University Extension, Cuyahoga County. “We are delighted to continue our partnership with local farmers’ markets and farm stands by helping to increase sales for farmers’ in the Northeast Ohio region. None of this would be possible without support from local program participants, organizational partners and funders who have supported the program for over eight years.”

“We are grateful for the opportunity to help struggling families and farmers across Ohio,” said Tevis Foreman, Executive Director of Produce Perks Midwest. “Healthy, nutritious food is a basic necessity for us all – yet millions of people in communities throughout Ohio experience the hardship of not having access to affordable fruits and vegetables. We at Produce Perks Midwest are indebted to our local farmers, farmers markets, grocery-retailers, and countless partners working hard everyday to provide this basic need.”

Hunger and food hardship affects Ohioans in every community. “Nationally, Ohio has the seventh highest number of households receiving SNAP benefits,” said Darcy Freedman, PhD, Associate Professor at Case Western University School of Medicine. “This grant provides an exceptional opportunity to link these families with a proven intervention in the form of monetary incentives to purchase fruits and vegetables. This reduces some of the financial constraints for purchasing fresh and healthy foods while also creating a ripple effect stimulating economic opportunities for our local farmers and food retailers serving low-income residents.”

The USDA announced 24 grants totaling $21 million, funded though Food Insecurity Nutrition Incentive (FINI) program, authorized by the 2014 Farm Bill. “We are encouraging low-income families to choose affordable and healthy food options to feed their families,” said Acting NIFA Director Tom Shanower. “At the same time, the program helps growers take advantage of direct marketing and other opportunities to bolster their sales thereby improving their bottom line.”

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