

## **INCENTIVES PROVIDED AGAIN TO ENCOURAGE LOW INCOME RESIDENTS TO PATRONIZE FARMERS MARKETS**

SPRINGFIELD ó For the second year, St. John's Hospital and the Sangamon County Department of Public Health will team up to offer WIC (Women, Infants and Children) clients access to free produce. The initiative is designed to encourage greater participation in a program that provides vouchers for WIC clients to buy produce at either the Old Capitol Farmers Market or Illinois Products Farmers Market in Springfield.

Starting July 14, WIC clients in Sangamon County will have the opportunity to receive a free bag of locally grown fruits and vegetables. The fresh produce will be made available at the Sangamon County Public Health Department. A local farmer who is a vendor at the Old Capitol Farmers Market will provide and deliver 100 bags of locally grown fruits and vegetables each week from July 14 through August 18.

“As farmers markets continue to grow in popularity, it's important that the fresh, locally grown fruits and vegetables they offer are accessible to all in our community. Providing free produce, in addition to the vouchers, helps reinforce the need for WIC families to visit our local markets and incorporate fresh produce into their meals,” said Teri Brusnighan, RD, WIC coordinator, Sangamon County Department of Public Health.

WIC provides federal grants to states for supplemental foods, health care referrals, and nutrition education for low-income pregnant, breastfeeding, and non-breastfeeding postpartum women, and to infants and children up to age five who are found to be at nutritional risk. WIC began offering farmers market vouchers to clients in 1995. In 2008, Sangamon County Public Health reported that 43% of clients who received the vouchers redeemed them. Last year, the percentage of vouchers redeemed increased to 48%.

“Encouraging WIC families to shop at the farmers markets in our community is one small step toward improved health. We recognize that we live in a fast food culture in which planning a healthy meal takes time and effort. By giving WIC families access to locally grown produce, hopefully we can provide a little extra motivation to prepare healthy meals for their families,” said Sister Ritamary Brown, Assistant Administrator, St. John's Hospital.

The Sangamon County Public Health Department is currently signing up participants for the opportunity to receive the free produce, which will be made available from 4 ó 5 p.m. at the health department on the following days: July 14, 21, 28; and August 4, 11 and 18.

For more information about eligibility for the free produce program, please contact Teri Brusnighan at 535-3100, ext. 233.