Northeast Iowa Farmers Market Coupon Program Annual Report - 2012

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Background:
Most farmers' market mission statements include the notion of increasing the consumption of healthy local foods. While there are several state-authorized coupon program available in Iowa, the process to become an authorized vendor and the lack awareness of these services by the target population have limited the success of these programs to increase access to locally grown foods – especially at small, rural farmers markets.

In an effort to simplify the process of getting local food into the hands of vulnerable families, the NE Iowa Farmers Market Coupon program was launched in 2011. The program partners with the organizations on the frontlines of hunger in Iowa – the local food pantries. According to the Northeast Iowa Food Bank, northeast Iowa food pantries serve at least 40,000 people annually – 40% of those served are children.

Modeled after a successful program in Wisconsin and driven by donations, $5 coupons were distributed by local food pantries to be redeemed at the local farmers market for fresh produce or eggs. Three communities participated in the program in 2012: Waukon, Riceville and New Hampton.

Methods:
Farmers market and food pantry coordinators were contacted to participate in the program. Communities were targeted based on willingness and ability of the Farmers Market coordinators to accept the coupons and reimburse the farmers.

The coupons were distributed through local food pantries to qualifying households once each month. Coupons were to be used at farmers markets or food stands for locally grown fresh produce or eggs. Locally grown produce included product grown within the six county area. Fresh produce included unprocessed fruits and vegetables. The market coordinator recorded vendors who were reimbursed for the coupons.

Impact:
The program started mid-July and ran through the end of September. Two hundred twenty-seven coupons were redeemed at a farmers market for local produce. Fourteen farmers sold $1135 in product through this program.

Table 1. Summary of Northeast Iowa Farmers Market Coupon Program, 2012

Farmers Market/ Stand	Allamakee FM (Waukon)	New Hampton	Riceville FM	
Food Shelf	Allamakee Food Shelf	Chickasaw County Food Pantry	Riceville Food Pantry	Total
County	Allamakee	Chickasaw	Howard	
Program Length	11 weeks	9 weeks	9 weeks	
# Coupons redeemed	89	108	30	227
Coupon Value	$445	$540	$150	$1135
Vendors Affected	6	6	2	14

Table 2. Historical Impact of Northeast Iowa Farmers Market Coupon Program

Farmers Market	2011	2012
Allamakee	$630	$445
Riceville	$170	$150
Calmar	$250	
New Hampton		$540
Total	$1050	$1135

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