**GENERAL**

**How the program works**
The Senior Farmers’ Market (SFMNP) is a USDA funded program that provides $50 worth of coupons to eligible seniors for the purchase of fresh fruits and vegetables and honey. The program operates through the growing season during which eligible seniors can exchange their coupons at farmers’ markets or farm stands that display a SFMNP sign. The program also includes a nutrition education component which provides participants with information about making healthy choices and the benefits of fruits and vegetables in their diets.

**Funding for the program**
The majority of the funding is from the US Department of Agriculture which is granted to the State in early spring. The Area Agencies on Aging that operates the SFMNP may have additional local funds to use. Exhausting the funding before the end of the season is common. Once the funding is spent, a wait list is created. People on the wait list may receive coupons should additional funds become available late in the growing season. This is not something under the control of the Area Agencies on Aging.

**Coupon usage**
Each eligible participant receives 10-$5 coupons. The coupons will have dates printed on them that identify when the coupons are valid. No coupons will be issued after September 30 and no coupon will be accepted after the date listed on the coupon, most usually October 31. The coupons will have the name of the agency issuing the coupons should the participant have questions about the program or coupon redemption. Each coupon will be used to purchase eligible food in $5 increments. The farmers will help the participant select enough produce to use the full value of the coupon as no change is permitted to be returned to the participant. The farmer will periodically stamp the coupons and package them for return to the Area Agencies on Aging for payment.

**Eligible foods**
Many fresh fruits and vegetables and honey are eligible for coupon use. Foods excluded include any processed food or foods grown in states other than Ohio, Pennsylvania, West Virginia, Kentucky, Indiana or Michigan. Coupons cannot be used to purchase flowers, potted plants, crafts, eggs, nuts, rice, popcorn, dried produce, dried herbs and baked items. Also items grown in other states like citrus fruits cannot be purchased with coupons either. Prices are to be listed on the produce or posted on a sign.

**Locations where coupons can be used**
The farmer may be part of a farmers’ market or operate a farm stand by themselves. Farmers who are authorized to accept SFMNP coupons will have a sign posted with that information. Sometimes the sign will also list the foods that can be purchased with the coupons. The farmer will be able to identify which items are eligible products.
Counties without the SFMNP
This popular program is located in 45 of the 88 Ohio counties. Unserved counties have an opportunity to decide whether to participate in the SFMNP if USDA funding is available for program expansion. New counties begin their programs in the early spring. Ohio has experienced no growth in the program since -2008 and has received cuts in funding the last two years which continues to limit the number of counties that can participate in the SFMNP.

PARTICIPANTS
Participant eligibility/who is eligible to participate in the SFMNP?
There are three eligibility requirements for program participants. Each must be 60 years or older; live in a county served by a SFMNP; and have a combined household income of 185% or less of the federal poverty income level.

Application
The SFMNP applications are available from a number of sources. Methods for distribution vary among Area Agencies on Aging and include websites, newspapers, mailings and at senior centers or nutrition sites. Every participant must complete a new application every year. Applications are revised every year so old application cannot be used. If two or more people in a household are applying for the SFMNP, each must complete a separate application. The application asks for information about name, address, age, telephone number and county of residence. It asks whether the participant has already received coupons this year and where the coupons were obtained. One program requirement of the federal government is the identification of ethnicity and race for each participant. If the participant chooses to have a proxy or personal shopper pick up and use coupons for them, the participant or proxy must provide additional information about the proxy including verification of identity. Income information is recorded by selecting the appropriate dollar amount for the household size from the list on the application. No verification of income is necessary; all information on the application is self-declared except for the proxy questions. The participant’s signature indicates that the participant understands their rights and responsibilities and right to appeal any decision about his/her eligibility. All information is kept confidential. The exception is when additional information is being offered to the participant which requires the telephone number to be disclosed to the third party, for example, to receive information about a Medicare issue. Falsifying any information on the application may result in civil or criminal prosecution.

Income calculations
Household income includes not only all wages and salaries, but also such items as unemployment insurance, disability payments, retirement checks and regular rental receipts, as well as any personal business, investment or other kinds of income received routinely. The members of the household do not have to be related to the head of the household for their earnings to be considered part of the household’s income. Income is self-declared; incorrectly stated income is considered to be fraud and carries with it financial penalties.
Proxy or personal shopper
A proxy or personal shopper is someone chosen by a frail or homebound participant who might otherwise be unable to benefit from the SFMNP. Up to two proxies may be chosen by each participant. The proxy can obtain a SFMNP application, help the participant complete the application and get the required participant signature on the application, and do the produce shopping for the participant. The proxy will need to provide proof of identification, either a drivers’ license or state ID, when submitting the application for eligibility determination.

Service to people under age 60
The federal regulations are clear on who can be served. People with disabilities under the age of 60 can participate in some age-limited programs such as Medicare, but the SFMNP is not one of them. You must be 60 years or older to participate in the SFMNP.

Lost or stolen coupons
Coupons are considered to be the same as cash. Once lost or stolen, regardless of the circumstances, they cannot be replaced.

FARMERS
Farmer eligibility
Farmers who wish to participate in the SFMNP must first be authorized by the local Area Agency on Aging that participates in the program. Authorization requires that the farmer attend training, provide information about his/her business and agree to have his farmland reviewed to determine what crops will be grown to be sold in the SFMNP. Farmers must also grow 51% of the produce they sell. Farmers are periodically reviewed to determine their compliance with SFMNP rules. Failure to adhere to the rules can result in sanctions including fines or more serious consequences. Additionally, some local jurisdictions have other rules that farmers are required to follow such as a farmer market requiring that crops be grown in a certain geographic location. In order to conduct business in other Area Agency on Aging a farmer needs to either be authorized in the additional area or enter into a reciprocal agreement (which the Area Agency on Aging can explain).