

Overview of the 2008 Vermont Farm To Family Program

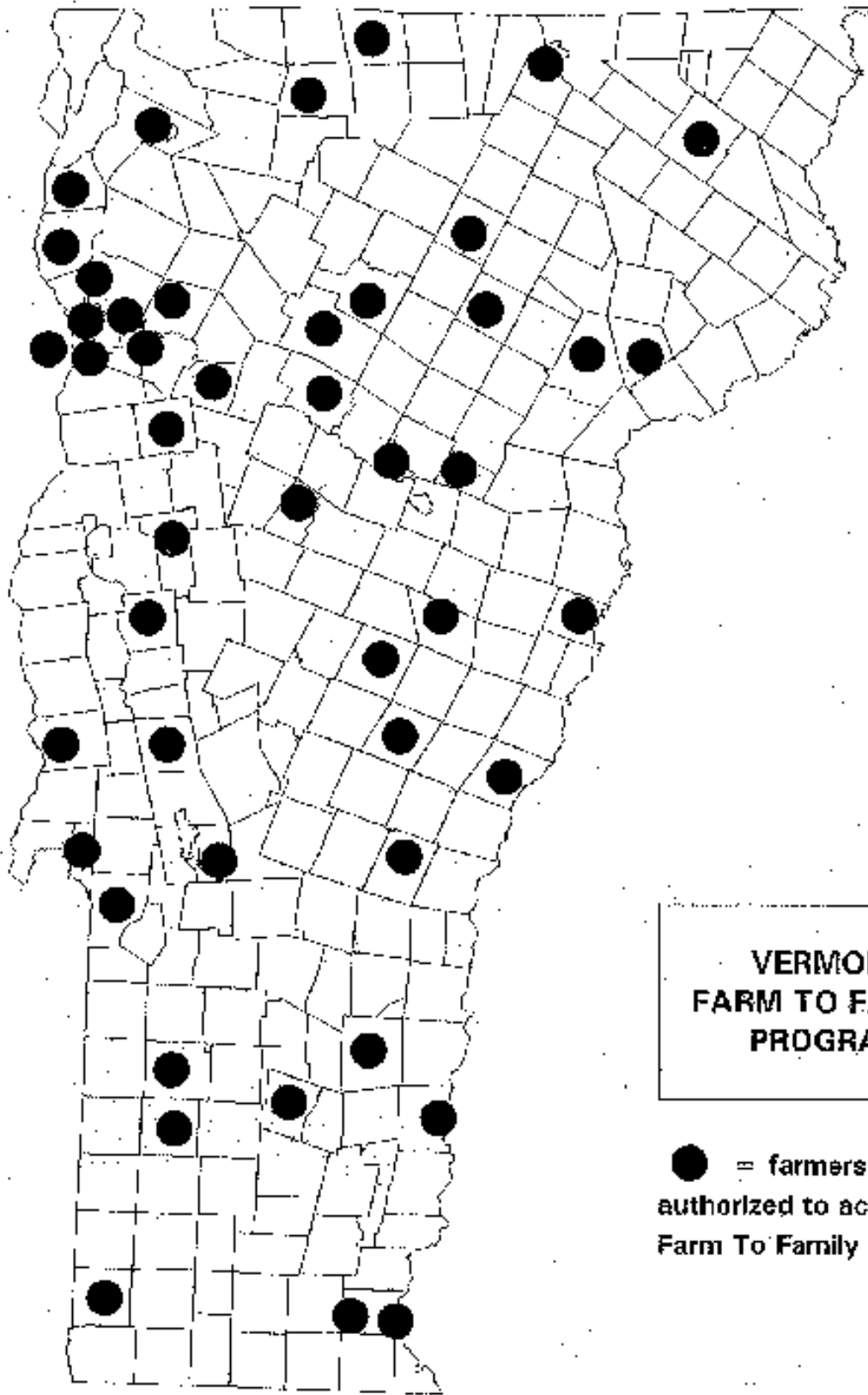
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"My two-year old loves going to the farmers market. She asks to go every other day. I really look forward to Saturday, when the market is open. She talks about the market all the time and asked today if we could get pumpkins there. She's tried new fruits and vegetables as a result of exploring the market. We truly love this program!" – St. Albans



**VERMONT
FARM TO FAMILY
PROGRAM**

● = farmers market
authorized to accept the
Farm To Family coupons

2008 FARM TO FAMILY HIGHLIGHTS

"Thanks for supporting healthy eating and our local farmers." – Bellows Falls

The Vermont Farm To Family Program has two goals. One is to increase consumption of fruits and vegetables by people who are nutritionally at-risk. The other is to increase the use of farmers markets as venues to connect produce growers directly with consumers. The program accomplishes both by giving lower income Vermonters coupons redeemable only for fresh produce sold at local farmers markets.

- ***Farm To Family improves diets.*** The coupons may only be used to buy fresh, locally grown fruits, vegetables and herbs. Over 77% of the recipients surveyed said that, as a result of the program, they ate more fruits and vegetables last summer than usual, and 78% plan to eat more fresh produce all year round. Almost every recipient surveyed (97%) said the quality of produce at the farmers markets was at least as good as the produce quality at grocery stores, and 82% said it was better.
- ***The benefits are targeted to nutritionally at-risk Vermonters.*** Only income-eligible people may receive coupons. \$156,180 in coupons were issued to 4,885 households comprising about 14,000 Vermonters. 49% of the households included children and/or women who were pregnant, postpartum or breastfeeding. 30% included someone aged 60 or older. The remaining recipients were other low income Vermonters, such as adults with disabilities and unemployed or low-wage workers without children.
- ***The program introduces people to new experiences.*** Although Farm To Family is now over twenty years old, 28% of the recipients surveyed said that 2008 was the first year they took part, and 19% said they had never gone to a farmers market before getting the coupons. Nearly half (48%) said they used the coupons to buy fruits or vegetables they had never tried before.
- ***Farm To Family is educational, for both consumers and farmers.*** In addition to learning how, where and when to shop for produce at farmers markets, 55% of the recipients said they learned new ways to prepare fruits and vegetables, and 50% said they learned new ways to store fresh produce to keep it from spoiling. Participating farmers have said that the program inspired them to do more customer education (e.g., offer recipes or advice on how to select or prepare fresh produce) and to improve their display signs to make it easier for market customers to identify food types and prices.
- ***The program strengthens farmers markets.*** Coupon redemptions totaled \$121,992 in 2008. Coupons were redeemed at 48 market sites across Vermont, and 260 produce growers took part. One out of five recipients surveyed (22%) said they went to more than one market, and 79% spent money there in addition to the coupons. 71% said they returned to the market to shop after they had run out of coupons to spend there. Participating farmers agree that many coupon shoppers become regular cash customers at the market.

*"I like that it brings together farmers and people who need more access to good produce, which can be expensive."
– St. Johnsbury*

"It is a better way for seniors to try new fruits and veggies and gives us a chance to buy more of these. Without the coupons, I probably would eat less veggies as I would not be able to afford them all the time." – Randolph

PROGRAM DESIGN AND FUNDING

"I appreciate the program mostly because I feel that it benefits the local farmers. It also motivates us to get out to the farmers markets, which really are a fun day, even in the rain." – Stowe

The Farm To Family Program is administered by the Department for Children and Families, Economic Services Division (ESD). Conceived as a community and agricultural development venture that would also improve the diets of families with limited food budgets, the program began in 1987 as a joint project of the Agency of Human Services and Agency of Agriculture, Food and Markets. It distributes three groups of coupons:

- **Since 1987, state-funded coupons issued by Community Action Agencies (CAAs) to income-eligible households, both elderly and non-elderly.** This nonfederal service was a foundation upon which the rest of the program was built, both in Vermont and nationally.
- **Since 1989, coupons issued by the Department of Health to participants in the Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children (WIC).** These benefits are funded by a federal WIC Farmers Market Nutrition Program (FMNP) grant to ESD. In 1989, Vermont was one of four states whose state-funded programs were the models for a national demonstration project that provided 70% USDA matching funds to test the feasibility of expanding the program nationwide. WIC is a federal nutrition program for low income pregnant, postpartum or breastfeeding women and children under the age of five. Since the food package provided as part of WIC health services lacked vegetables, the coupons boosted WIC's nutritional impact while also promoting farmers markets. Congress limited the federal benefits to WIC participants, but let Vermont use its nonfederal CAA coupon program to supply the 30% state match. The federal expansion tripled Vermont's coupon volume and stimulated farmers market activity statewide. The WIC FMNP became a permanent federal program in 1992. Since 2005, states have only had to provide the 30% matching funds for administrative costs rather than for the entire federal WIC FMNP grant, but Vermont has continued to distribute the popular nonfederal coupons.
- **Since 2001, coupons issued by CAAs to income-eligible households that include someone aged 60 or older.** These are supported by a federal Senior FMNP grant administered in Vermont by the Department of Disabilities, Aging and Independent Living (DAIL). DAIL transfers part of the grant to ESD to fund CAA distribution of some senior-only coupons. As permitted by federal policy, DAIL uses the rest of the SFMNP grant to fund a service that, without involving farmers markets, provides fresh produce grown on Vermont community supported agriculture (CSA) farms to residents of dozens of senior housing sites.

"This is a wonderful program for breastfeeding mothers and for children beginning to eat food. Thanks so much for your help!" – Reading

"The produce at our farmers market is always excellent and so fresh with moderate prices. I live on my Social Security check, so the coupons are heaven to me! Thanks for making my living expense on fruits and veggies good. By the way, I'm 76 years 'young' and still have all my own teeth." – St. Albans

The 1987 Farm To Family pilot involved only three markets and \$6,500 in coupons. The 2008 program had 48 markets. Its \$148,800 budget was supported by a \$75,000 federal WIC FMNP grant to ESD and \$36,981 in federal Senior FMNP funds that covered ESD costs for coupon redemptions by elderly households. State dollars funded the \$36,819 balance of the budget, of which \$24,000 was earmarked for nonfederal coupon redemptions.

"I shopped late enough to get winter squash, blueberries to freeze, and enough beets to prepare a family favorite, beet pickles!" – Morrisville

Coupon distribution begins in late June and lasts until September 30 or coupon supplies are exhausted, whichever comes first. Most coupons are issued by mid-summer because coupon demand is strong, the market season is short and the coupons expire October 31.

The coupons are in \$30 books of ten coupons each. Except for paper color, all three types of Farm To Family coupons are identical in terms of the \$3 denomination, where they may be spent, and what they may purchase. They may only buy locally grown fruits, vegetables and herbs that are sold fresh and unprocessed at farmers markets enrolled in the program. The program defines "locally grown" as grown on Vermont land or on U.S. land within twenty-five miles of the state border.

Participating vendors agree in writing to accept coupons only for eligible foods and only at participating market sites. Markets pay the vendors face value for coupons accepted and send the coupons to ESD for reimbursement. ESD offers markets cash advances to help them pay the vendors promptly for coupons.

"I am grateful for these coupons. My children get fruit that is fresher than the supermarket. They love fruits and vegetables. This helps me to feed them healthy food when our budget is really pressed."
– Bennington

COUPON RECIPIENTS AND BENEFITS

4,885 households comprising about 14,000 Vermonters received Farm To Family coupons in 2008. About half (49%) were families that included minor children or women who were pregnant, postpartum or breastfeeding. Elderly households represented 30% of the caseload. The remaining recipients were other low income Vermonters, such as adults with disabilities, unemployed or low wage workers, and other low income adults without minor children.

"Ordinarily we would never spend money at the farmers market, as the produce is more expensive than the grocery store. Since we get the coupons, we enjoyed fresh blueberries, sweet corn, and a lot of other veggies. My two girls think it's a lot of fun to shop at the farmers market, and do so I." – Beebe Plain

WIC Program Participants: Federal WIC FMNP policy restricts coupons to WIC participants over the age of four months – Vermont sets the minimum at six months – and caps the benefit at \$30 per WIC participant per year. A family may include more than one WIC participant, such as a pregnant woman and toddler.

District Health Department (VDH) offices issued \$30 coupon books to 2,764 WIC participants in 2008, serving about 16% of the WIC caseload. Nearly 74%

of these benefits went to children aged six months to five years. The remainder went to pregnant, breastfeeding or postpartum women. 2,444 WIC families took part in the program, for an average of \$34 in coupon benefits per family for the year. Of the \$82,950 in coupons issued to WIC participants, \$63,606 (77%) were redeemed.

Federal funds have not been available to increase the WIC FMNP grant, so Vermont limits WIC families to \$60 in coupons, even those with three or more WIC participants, to allow more families to take part in the program. Also, VDH changed its process in 2007 to give

"The coupons help us get produce that I could not afford, like apples and blueberries and some asparagus." – White River Junction

"I never have extra money, so we don't usually go to farmers markets, so my kids got to pick out that they wanted to get. It was a blast. I saw stuff I've never heard of." – Essex Junction

WIC families eligible for \$60 in benefits just one \$30 coupon book initially. The second book is made available only if there are any undistributed coupons left after the scheduled VDH Farm To Family sessions end. While this resulted in only 320 WIC families receiving \$60 in coupons in 2008, the number of WIC families able to get any coupons at all increased by more than 500.

CAA Coupon Recipients: Community Action Agencies work with low income Vermonters of all ages and have

been distributing Farm To Family coupons since 1987. A household must have income below 185% of the federal poverty limit to get coupons from a CAA. For example, the monthly gross income in 2008 needed to be under \$1,604 for a single person or \$2,714 for a family of three. Only 62% of the CAA coupon recipients were taking part in the Food Stamp Program (just renamed 3Squares-VT), a separate federal nutrition program that offers significantly larger and more flexible food benefits but has different eligibility policies than those for Farm To Family coupons.

"We like the coupons. Easy to use, no stigma. I wish we had gotten more." – Bradford

"I wish I had more coupons so I could eat better throughout the year. I felt so much better. Wish I could have a garden of my own, but I don't have the land or ability to. I am disabled." – Jeffersonville

CAAs serve families whose children are all too old to qualify for WIC. ESD weights its coupon allocations to local CAA offices to favor sites that serve more children and seniors. Elderly households represent less than a fifth of the eligible population, but consistently comprised over 30% of the CAA coupon caseload. That proportion has grown to 59% since the arrival of federal Senior FMNP funds. In 2008, CAA issued coupons to 2,441 households consisting of 4,138 low income individuals, of whom 656 were children and 1,667 were age sixty or older.

The CAAs serve a non-WIC population of about 40,000 eligible households and have relatively few coupons to give out. Coupon redemption was weak in years when CAAs limited the annual benefit to \$15 or \$20 per household so they could serve more applicants. Since federal regulations require ESD to trace every

coupon to an eligible recipient, and if redeemed, to a market and vendor authorized to redeem it, the CAAs must carefully account for every coupon. Given these considerations, ESD standardized the CAA benefit at \$30 in coupons per household per year, regardless of household size or composition.

CAA Nonfederal Coupon Recipients: Vermont's nonfederal coupons provided the program infrastructure that enabled Farm To Family to grow. It lets the CAAs help Vermonters whose income levels put them at nutritional risk but who do not qualify for WIC or senior coupons. The state-funded coupons also give the program flexibility to meet local coupon needs that can be hard to predict. In 2008, the CAAs distributed \$29,820 in coupons funded with state dollars. The \$30 coupon books went to 994 households, of which 36% were families with children. \$22,290 (75%) in nonfederal coupons were redeemed.

"This is my first year receiving coupons. It's wonderful to be able to purchase fruits and vegetables I might otherwise not be able to get. Money is often not in the budget for me to do extra in the food dept. Thank you for my being able to go to the farmers market." – Middlebury

***"This year and last, I felt free because of the coupons to get different kinds of berries. Before, fresh berries and some fruits were always at the bottom of my food list."
– Brattleboro senior***

CAA Senior FMNP Coupon Recipients: 1,447 households with someone aged sixty or older received \$43,410 in coupons, of which \$36,096 (83%) were redeemed. The \$36,981 in federal Senior FMNP funds available from the VT Department of Disabilities, Aging and Independent Living covered those redemptions, and ESD put the balance toward its costs to print the senior coupons. Some state-funded coupons were given to elderly households by CAA offices that had run out of senior coupons. The federal funds were enough to cover those coupon redemptions in addition to redemptions of the coupons specifically printed for seniors.

Coupon Redemption

Full coupon redemption is not expected in a program intended to introduce people to new dietary experiences and to stimulate the formation of new farmers markets. New markets usually start small and can take years to become firmly established with a membership that includes several produce growers. It takes consumers practice to learn how to select and prepare fresh produce and to shop at farmers markets in a state with a short growing season. Most coupon recipients have limited options for child care and transportation. WIC parents have very young children and often work one or more jobs that make it hard to get to a market that is only open a few hours a week. It is often a challenge for low income residents, especially seniors, to get to a site that is not within walking distance. The selection of fresh produce is very limited at some markets, another barrier to full coupon redemption.

"This was the first year I ever had coupons. They really saved me money, and I ate more vegetables than usual." – Pittsford

Based on projected coupon redemption rates, ESD allowed \$156,180 in coupons to be issued in 2008. They went to 4,885 households, for an overall benefit average of \$32 in coupons per household for the season. Altogether, \$121,992 coupons (78%) were redeemed. Despite the unusually rainy season, this was the highest overall redemption rate in the program's history, perhaps due to the weak economy and growing consumer interest in "buying local."

"Without Farm To Family coupons, I would not have eaten hydroponically grown tomatoes. The 50 cents a pound ones are big and not so pretty, but the flavor and meatiness can't be beat!" – Wallingford

Vermont's WIC FMNP redemption rate has consistently exceeded the national average. This is likely because farmers markets are more accessible in Vermont than in other states, and coupon issuance is combined with nutrition education activities that often take place at the markets themselves.

Among the coupons issued by CAAs, the redemption rate was higher among seniors (83%) than among

non-elderly households (75%). This may be attributable to people deciding that coupons redeemable only for fresh produce did not justify the time and expense to drive to the nearest participating farmers market, especially if they only had a few coupons left to spend. Some participants like to hang onto their coupons until after Labor Day, but forget the market's closing date or find that an early frost decimated the selection of fresh produce.

"I like going and seeing all the nice choices, the friendly people and the freshness of the food. It is great!" – Windsor

PARTICIPATING MARKETS AND FARMERS

A table at the end of this report identifies the participating farmers market organizations that redeemed coupons at 48 Vermont locations. It also shows the number of participating produce vendors and value of coupons redeemed at each market.

All recipients get a list of locations and schedules for the markets authorized to accept coupons, plus a Vermont harvest calendar and farmers market shopping tips. They are instructed that the coupons may only buy fresh fruit or vegetables, and that vendors may not give them cash change for a coupon. Before 2005, Farm To Family coupons were worth \$2 each. This gave recipients more flexibility when shopping at markets, but ESD had to raise the denomination to \$3 to reduce its coupon printing and processing costs.

"I like to support the local people and receive fresh produce. I also like the friendly atmosphere of markets. Europe has been doing it forever. I also like seeing baked goods and lunch items for sale. It's a good thing for the community." – Poultney

Recipients are told that the coupons may be redeemed at any participating market. For example, the coupons issued by the Morrisville VDH office were spent at 22 different markets! This flexibility is important, as market hours and locations may not match those of shoppers. A competitive marketplace encourages farmers to widen the selection of products they offer. Over one in five recipients surveyed (22%) said that they shopped at more than one market.

Only vendors who grow some or all of the produce they sell at the market qualify

to accept coupons. Each participating vendor gets a Farm To Family display sign. Coupon recipients are told to look for that sign at the markets.

Farm To Family is intended to be an educational program. The festive atmosphere at farmers markets invites shoppers to overhear or take part in conversations with vendors or other shoppers that improve their skills at selecting and using fresh produce. Although most towns lack markets, single-vendor farm stands are not authorized to accept coupons. Allowing redemption at roadside or farm stands is incompatible with the program goal to strengthen multi-vendor farmers markets. Including single-farmer stands also would exceed the program budget and administrative capacity.

"It's a great way for low income people to connect with good quality, fresh, local food." – Guilford

The 2008 program included 260 produce growers, at least 50 of whom participated in more than one market. Farm To Family motivates many growers to sell at farmers markets despite the fact that the coupons would likely generate a very small part of their sales income. Redemption totals varied widely among vendors. Twenty-seven redeemed no coupons, while 13 had coupon sales exceeding \$2,000 for the season.

*"Great tasting organic foods, huge selection, ample parking, colorful, joyful. Sometimes entertainment is provided. Costs are higher. I would not be able to afford this wonderful place without the coupons. Thanks!"
– North Hartland*

"Farm To Family allows my children to get more fresh fruits and vegetables. My children get excited about picking out the items and going from tent to tent. They even help trying to figure out what is the better deal! One of the vendors accidentally broke a cucumber and gave it to my kids as a snack. They loved munching on the big cucumber, fresh and uncut. Thanks so much! – Newport

<u>Coupon Sales</u>	<u># of Vendors</u>	<u>% of Vendors</u>
Less than \$50	72	28%
\$50 – \$99	29	11%
\$100 – \$249	56	22%
\$250 – \$499	37	14%
\$500 – \$749	22	8%
\$750 – \$999	9	4%
\$1000 or more	35	13%

"The prices at the farmers market are better than the grocery store. My family will be attending the market each Saturday from now on. I greatly enjoy that this program centers on strengthening Vermont and local farmers." – St. Albans

Total coupon sales averaged \$469 per participating produce vendor. However, some sell at farmers markets only a few days a year. Many specialize in products that do not qualify for coupon redemption, e.g., meats, eggs, prepared foods like maple products or pickles, or non-food items such as cut flowers.

"It is a great program. Prices are higher, but the quality is good and it is fun to go to the farmers market." – North Clarendon

As a result, the median coupon sales income among participating vendors was just \$129 for the season. Regardless, anecdotal feedback from farmers consistently indicates that even those accepting few or no coupons are enthusiastic about the program.

ESD added a question to the 2008 survey, asking recipients how they thought the prices of fresh produce at the farmers market compared to prices at their regular

grocery store. Over 79% responded that the prices were competitive, with 45% saying the prices were better than at their stores. Only 13% said they thought the prices were worse, 15% among the seniors surveyed. The survey generates some complaints about prices every year, but comments often indicate that many consumers do not understand that growing food for public consumption requires a commitment of time, money, land, supplies, trucking, equipment and labor significantly greater than those needed to have a vegetable garden for personal use only.

"It is very nice for these farmers to share their crops with others. I like collard greens that I hadn't had in a long time. They were delicious. Thanks a lot!" – Stowe

PROGRAM GOALS AND OUTCOMES

Congress funded the FMNP with two objectives.

One was to provide fresh, unprepared, locally grown vegetables and fruits to people who are nutritionally at-risk, particularly to low income children, seniors and women who are pregnant, postpartum or breastfeeding. The other, equally-important goal was to expand the awareness and use of farmers markets, to increase sales at such markets, and to stimulate the creation of new farmers markets and other outlets for produce grown for home consumption.

"I just love all the fresh vegetables!" – Fair Haven

All coupon recipients are invited to return a program survey. The 2008 survey results are appended, and the quotations cited in this report are remarks written by recipients on the surveys. Although Farm to Family is now 21 years old, 28% of the surveys said that 2008 was the first year the recipient had ever taken part. Steady caseload turnover is desirable, given the limitations on eligibility and the goal to increase the number of consumers using farmers markets.

"With prices so high these days, it's hard to afford good veggies for the family. With the coupons, we were able to get more veggies to eat better. – St. Johnsbury

The program has had many positive outcomes:

- 4,885 low income households, mostly elderly persons and families with children, used the coupons to buy \$121,992 worth of fresh fruits and vegetables at Vermont farmers markets.
- Coupon recipients were asked to compare the quality of fresh produce at the farmers markets to its quality at their regular grocery stores. An overwhelming 97% said produce quality at the markets was either better (82%) or about the same (15%) as at stores.

- Coupon issuance to WIC participants happens at special Farm To Family nutrition education events varying from short presentations to cooking demonstrations where parents and children can prepare or sample foods made with local produce. All recipients get information about the nutritional benefits of fruits and vegetables and about how, when and where to use the coupons. The agencies offer tips about selecting, storing or preparing local produce. Some have coupon issuance and nutrition education tables at the farmers market themselves.

"Quality of the produce is more important than price." – Vershire

"My children love shopping at the farmers market and picking out their fruits and vegetables. Because of the coupons, I was willing to let them pick out fruits and vegetables they hadn't tried before since if they didn't like them, I wouldn't have wasted my money." – Greensboro Bend

- Limited budgets deter low income consumers from using their resources on unfamiliar foods. Nonetheless, over 48% of the recipients bought a kind of fruit or vegetable they had never tried before. Recipients are encouraged to ask questions of the farmers, who are usually delighted to talk about the foods they grew – how to know when it is ripe or how it may be prepared.
- 55% of recipients surveyed said they learned a new way to prepare or cook fresh produce.

- 50% said that they learned a new way to store fresh fruits or vegetables to prevent the produce from spoiling.
- 77% said that they ate more fresh produce last summer than usual.
- 78% said that they plan to eat more fresh fruits and vegetables all year-round as a result of taking part in the coupon program. A 2007 UCLA study of WIC participants in California found that women getting FMNP coupons not only increased their consumption of fruits and vegetables but sustained the increase six months after the season ended.

"The coupons provided my son and I time to go somewhere together and gave him a chance to pick for himself what he wanted to eat and try. A big hit were raspberries and yellow cherry tomatoes. Thank you!" – Waitsfield

"It showed me a better way to shop for fruits and vegetables." – Bennington

The program is an effective family and community development tool. The open-air markets turn food shopping into a family affair where children, parents and grandparents inspire each other to add variety to their diets and get to know farmers in their area.

Farm To Family also expands the customer base for Vermont farmers markets.

- 19% of the recipients surveyed in 2008 said they had never been to a farmers market before receiving the coupons. This percentage was much higher a decade ago, but it declined over the program's lifetime as the familiarity and number of markets grew. Many coupon recipients take friends or neighbors with them to the market, thus increasing the number of potential farmers market customers.

*"Visiting the farmers market for the first time was fantastic. I met friendly people and a whole choice of veggies and fruit. Delicious. I'm looking forward to going back as soon as I can."
– Highgate Center*

- 22% of recipients surveyed said that they shopped at more than one of the participating markets.
- The financial impact on farmers extends beyond the value of coupons redeemed. When asked if they spent money at the markets in addition to their coupons, 79% of the recipients surveyed said yes. University of Vermont Department of Community Development and Applied Economics researchers who studied a northern Vermont farmers market reported in 2004 that, for every dollar in coupons spent, coupon customers added another 15 cents to the market.

"Being older and on SSI, I really appreciate the coupons. The people at the market are very friendly and helpful." – Winooski

- 71% of the recipients who had spent all their coupons by the time they completed the survey said they had returned to the market to shop without coupons. Vendors confirm that many Farm To Family coupon shoppers become regular cash customers of the market.

Farm To Family promotes the formation and growth of farmers markets. ESD rarely surveys vendors because there is less turnover among participating farmers than among coupon recipients. Many farmers have been taking part in the program for over a decade, some since its inception in 1987. The last vendor survey in 2002 echoed previous surveys, with significant numbers of farmers saying that, as a result of the program, they:

- became more active in farmers market operations
- increased the number of hours or days they sell at farmers markets
- improved their displays to make it easier for shoppers to identify food types and prices
- were doing more consumer education, such as offering product recipes or samples

"As a first-year participant, I am very pleased with this program and think it is a wonderful way to keep money local and help us eat better. My children loved being able to pick out fresh vegetables to bring home. I wish there were more farmers markets." – Johnson

The program helps keep Vermont land open and productive. One out of four farmers surveyed in 2002 said that the coupons had motivated them to increase their fruit and vegetable production, and 22% said they decided to grow a wider variety of produce to sell at farmers markets. The senior coupons particularly influenced those decisions, persuading farmers to offer a selection of foods that includes an ample supply of the more "traditional" Vermont garden vegetables, such as beets and green beans.

"Good program. Helps the people and helps the growers." – Hardwick

"I will be getting a lot of meals out of this, some things I haven't had in a long time because I felt I couldn't afford them. I love all the different vendors because it gives you choices. I think most people are going to need some kind of help as our way of living is in big trouble." – Bennington

Always an innovator, Vermont was one of four states whose 1987 farmers market projects inspired the creation of federal WIC and Senior Farmers Market Nutrition Programs that now provide \$40 million in annual support for FMNPs in most states. People nationwide now enjoy the benefits of a program that uniquely merges health and agriculture promotion, and puts money directly into the pockets of small-scale family farmers.

Since the Farm To Family Program is intended to be an educational and agricultural stimulus program, its full value cannot be measured in terms of the dollar value of coupons distributed or redeemed. It is lauded by farmers who make little money on coupon redemptions, yet welcome this user-friendly way to connect consumers with the farming community. Families that receive just a handful of coupons are enthusiastic about the program and the high quality of foods sold at markets. They often describe the experience as “fun.” How many other federal programs can make that claim? Young children are discovering the variety of foods produced in Vermont, and are learning about those foods from the farmers who grow them. Older Vermonters are enjoying the flavor and freshness of just-picked fruits and vegetables that they remember from their youth but can no longer afford or grow on their own.

"Absolutely great! It made it much easier for me to prepare fresh meals for my 8 month old, and it got me up and out on Saturday mornings, knowing I could go to the market to get fresh, local produce!" – Montpelier

"This program not only ensures that children and families are eating healthier foods, but it also supports the local economy." – Enosburg Falls

Farm To Family has helped make local farmers markets more plentiful, more successful and more attractive to all consumers, not just to the coupon recipients. This has a positive impact on the uncertain financial status of family farms and on the vitality of local communities. The Farm To Family Program is an asset to Vermont farmers, consumers and communities.

"Farm To Family is one of the best programs available. Having the ability to buy my children fresh foods from local farmers without the coupons would be difficult, and they are the freshest. I also like the farmers market for socializing and learning about other ways to make food. This program helps poor people get what otherwise they wouldn't be able to. Thank you!" – Rutland

2008 Vermont Farm To Family Program / Coupon Redemptions By Farmers Market

<i>Participating Farmers Market</i>	<i>Enrolled Produce Vendors</i>	<i>Dollar Value of Redemptions By Coupon Type</i>				
		Federal WIC Coupons	Nonfederal Coupons	Subtotal WIC FMNP	Fed. Senior Coupons	Total 2008 Redemptions
Bellows Falls	5	\$1,293	\$459	\$1,752	\$444	\$2,196
Bradford	5	\$87	\$21	\$108	\$81	\$189
Brandon	2	\$771	\$108	\$879	\$177	\$1,056
Brattleboro (<i>two local sites</i>)	11	\$4,041	\$1,311	\$5,352	\$2,607	\$7,959
Bristol	7	\$840	\$270	\$1,110	\$360	\$1,470
Burlington (<i>City Hall Park</i>)	17	\$5,688	\$2,337	\$8,025	\$3,426	\$11,451
Caledonia (<i>Danville, St.Johnsbury</i>)	16	\$4,206	\$906	\$5,112	\$1,830	\$6,942
Capital City (<i>Montpelier</i>)	11	\$4,290	\$810	\$5,100	\$1,791	\$6,891
Champlain Islands (<i>Grand Isle, South Hero</i>)	7	\$492	\$327	\$819	\$207	\$1,026
Chelsea	6	\$243	\$219	\$462	\$411	\$873
Chester	3	\$969	\$249	\$1,218	\$174	\$1,392
Craftsbury Common	2	\$225	\$18	\$243	\$24	\$267
Dorset	3	\$48	\$18	\$66	\$33	\$99
Enosburg Falls	8	\$1,920	\$399	\$2,319	\$597	\$2,916
Fair Haven	4	\$204	\$315	\$519	\$513	\$1,032
Hardwick	4	\$918	\$195	\$1,113	\$273	\$1,386
Hinesburg	6	\$687	\$27	\$714	\$87	\$801
Island Pond	2	\$12	\$135	\$147	\$84	\$231
Manchester	4	\$846	\$177	\$1,023	\$144	\$1,167
Middlebury	16	\$2,784	\$1,026	\$3,810	\$2,274	\$6,084
Milton Grange	3	\$249	\$42	\$291	\$60	\$351
Morrisville	7	\$2,829	\$849	\$3,678	\$2,046	\$5,724
Mount Tom (<i>Woodstock</i>)	3	\$144	\$0	\$144	\$75	\$219
New North End (<i>Burlington</i>)	3	\$390	\$111	\$501	\$213	\$714
Newport	8	\$5,025	\$2,913	\$7,938	\$3,891	\$11,829
Northwest (<i>St. Albans</i>)	13	\$4,371	\$1,608	\$5,979	\$3,450	\$9,429
Norwich	14	\$2,460	\$537	\$2,997	\$939	\$3,936
Old North End (<i>Burlington</i>)	5	\$1,428	\$1,203	\$2,631	\$1,053	\$3,684
Orwell	2	\$60	\$0	\$60	\$12	\$72
Plainfield	3	\$237	\$12	\$249	\$78	\$327
Randolph	10	\$1,206	\$201	\$1,407	\$759	\$2,166
Richford	3	\$81	\$57	\$138	\$78	\$216
Richmond	4	\$453	\$84	\$537	\$72	\$609
Royalton	8	\$534	\$189	\$723	\$402	\$1,125
Rutland County (<i>Rutland</i>)	8	\$2,823	\$1,233	\$4,056	\$1,911	\$5,967
Shelburne	10	\$525	\$18	\$543	\$120	\$663
Stowe	8	\$660	\$51	\$711	\$111	\$822
Vermont (<i>Rutland, Poultney</i>)	11	\$4,281	\$2,409	\$6,690	\$3,027	\$9,717
Waitsfield	5	\$231	\$9	\$240	\$33	\$273
Walloonsac (<i>Bennington</i>)	12	\$3,078	\$1,131	\$4,209	\$1,761	\$5,970
Waterbury	5	\$339	\$51	\$390	\$63	\$453
Westford	4	\$192	\$3	\$195	\$9	\$204
West River (<i>Londonderry</i>)	2	\$66	\$3	\$69	\$9	\$78
Williston	5	\$564	\$45	\$609	\$60	\$669
Winooski	3	\$816	\$204	\$1,020	\$327	\$1,347
TOTALS	260*	\$63,606	\$22,290	\$85,896	\$36,096	\$121,992
Value of Coupons Distributed		\$82,950	\$29,820	\$112,770	\$43,410	\$156,180
2008 Coupon Redemption Rates		76.7%	74.7%	76.2%	83.2%	78.1%

*260 is the unduplicated count of participating produce growers, at least 50 of whom sold at more than one market. The coupons were redeemable at any of the 48 authorized market sites.

2008 Vermont Farm To Family Program – SURVEY OF COUPON RECIPIENTS

All recipients were invited to respond to a survey after they had taken their coupons to a market. Surveys were returned by 546 recipients (177 WIC families, 271 seniors, and 98 households receiving state-funded coupons), representing 11% of the households that received coupons in 2008. Elderly households comprised 29% of the caseload but 50% of survey respondents; this slightly affected some statistics, e.g., seniors were less likely to visit more than one market or to buy a kind of produce they had not tried before.

First-Timers: 28% said that 2008 was the first year they had ever received the coupons, and 19% said they had never gone to a farmers market before taking part in the Farm To Family Program.

Impact on Farmers Markets: 22% of recipients said they went to more than one market. 71% said they returned to the market to shop during the 2008 season after they ran out of FMNP coupons to spend there, and 79% said they spent money at the markets in addition to their Farm To Family coupons.

How did coupon shoppers rate the quality of fresh fruits and vegetables at the farmers markets as compared to the produce quality at their regular grocery store?

81.6% – Better 15.4% – About the same 1.1% – Worse 1.9% – Don't know

How did coupon shoppers rate the price of fresh fruits and vegetables at the farmers markets as compared to their prices at their regular grocery store?

45.1% – Better 34.2% – About the same 12.9% – Worse 7.8% – Don't know

Because of Farm To Family Program, they or their family...	<u>YES</u>	<u>NO</u>	<u>NOT SURE</u>
ate more fresh fruits and vegetables this summer than usual	77.3%	16.6%	6.1%
plan to eat more fresh fruits and vegetables all year round	77.7%	10.4%	11.9%
learned a new way to prepare or cook fresh fruits or vegetables	54.6%	42.0%	3.4%
learned a new way to store fresh fruits/vegetables to prevent spoiling	49.7%	45.1%	5.2%
bought a kind of fruit or vegetable they had never tried before	48.3%	49.9%	1.8%

The comments added to 290 of the surveys followed certain themes:

- short expressions of thanks or kudos for the program (81)
- the coupons help low income people, make fresh produce affordable (62)
- produce at farmers markets is high quality, fresher (40)
- program helps diet, promotes healthy eating, encourages people to try new foods (39)
- likes variety and social atmosphere at farmers markets (29)
- increase coupon benefit levels or offer program year-round (24)
- wants coupons again, keep the program going (19)
- fresh produce at farmers markets is expensive (19)
- likes supporting farmers, helping local economy and community (18)
- fun and educational program for children, promotes family bonding (17)
- allow redemption for products other than fresh produce, e.g., vegetable starts, pickles, meat, jam (15)
- market vendors are friendly, nice, helpful (9)
- unhappy with a specific market or vendor, e.g., limited selection, produce not high quality (9)
- Farm To Family is an important benefit for WIC Program participants (7)
- program needs additional markets (6)
- make coupons easier to get, especially for WIC families with more than one coupon-eligible person (5)
- allow coupon redemption at farmstands, pick-your-own farms, stores (3)
- assorted other remarks (wants smaller coupon denomination, markets should focus on farm products and not crafts, survey should be postage-paid, using coupons is comfortable and stigma-free, markets should accept EBT card benefits, wants food freezing tips, markets need to offer more fruit)