

Overview of the 2011 Vermont Farm To Family Program

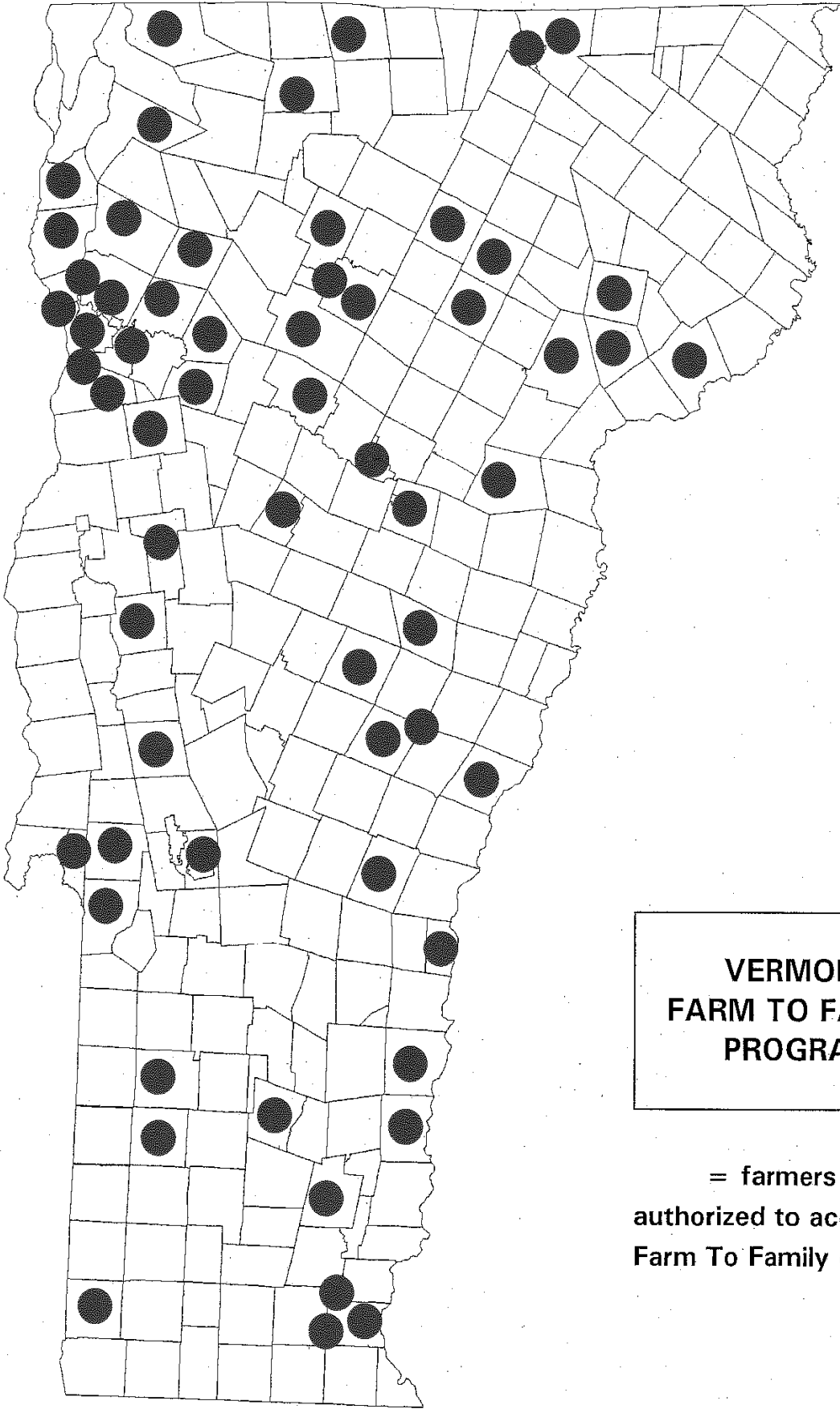
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“I am so grateful for the coupons. I have driven by the farmers market hundreds of times without stopping because I did not think I could afford it. I have now found a whole new world of fresh and locally grown healthy food for me. I LOVE all of the veggies I was able to purchase. I will be a frequent visitor to the farmers market from now on. Thank you so much for opening my eyes.” – Sheldon Springs



**VERMONT
FARM TO FAMILY
PROGRAM**

= farmers market
authorized to accept the
Farm To Family coupons

2011 FARM TO FAMILY HIGHLIGHTS

“You can taste the freshness! Thank you for helping me stretch my food dollars in a healthy manner!” – Wallingford senior

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

- ***Farm To Family improves diets.*** The coupons may only be used to buy fresh, locally grown fruits, vegetables and herbs. 74% of recipients surveyed said that, as a result of the program, they ate more fruits and vegetables last summer than usual, and over 77% plan to eat more fresh produce all year round. Almost every recipient surveyed (98%) said the produce quality at the markets was at least as good as the produce quality at grocery stores, and 80% said it was better.
- ***The benefits are targeted to nutritionally at-risk Vermonters.*** Only income-eligible people may receive coupons. \$169,569 in coupons were issued to 5,179 households comprising about 14,200 Vermonters. 57% of the households included children and/or pregnant, breastfeeding, or postpartum women. 28% included someone aged 60 or older. The remainder 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.*** Farm To Family is now twenty-four years old, yet 24% of the recipients surveyed said that 2011 was the first year they took part. 18% said they had never gone to a farmers market before getting the coupons. 51% 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, 54% of recipients surveyed said they learned new ways to prepare fruits and vegetables, and 47% learned new ways to store fresh produce to keep it from spoiling. Participating farmers report that the program inspired them to do more customer education (e.g., offer recipes or advice on how to select or prepare fresh produce) or improved their display signs to make it easier for market customers to identify food types and prices.

“It’s great for everyone. Healthier food for consumers, more income for farmers, more bodies at farmers markets, more of the public’s money being spent locally.” – Peacham grower

“The food tastes so much better than from the store, and I was able to afford to try new fruit and veggies. Now my son loves summer squash and asks for it every time we’re at the grocery store. Thank you!” – Bridport

- ***The program strengthens farmers markets.*** Coupon redemptions totaled \$124,881 in 2011. Coupons were redeemed at 61 market sites in Vermont, and 342 produce growers took part. Over 30% of recipients surveyed shopped at more than one market. Four out of five spent money there in addition to the coupons, and 68% said they returned to the market to shop after they ran out of coupons to spend there. Participating farmers agree that many coupon shoppers become regular cash customers at the market.

PROGRAM DESIGN AND FUNDING

“It helps me teach my children about nutrition, the importance of our local farmers, where food comes from.” – Bennington

The Farm To Family Program is administered by the Department for Children and Families, Economic Services Division (ESD). Responding to concerns linking health risks to low fruit and vegetable consumption, it was conceived as a community and agricultural development venture that also would improve the diets of families with limited food budgets. It began in 1987 as a joint project of the Agency of Human Services and Agency of Agriculture, Food and Markets. The program now distributes four 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).*** The 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 service nationwide. WIC is a federal nutrition program for low income pregnant, postpartum or breastfeeding women and children under the age of five. The coupons boost the nutritional impact of the food package provided as part of WIC health services, while also promoting farmers markets. Congress limited federal benefits to WIC participants, but let Vermont use its nonfederal CAA coupons 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 matching funds for administrative costs rather than the entire federal WIC FMNP grant, but Vermont continued to distribute the popular nonfederal coupons.
- ***Since 2001, coupons issued by CAAs to income-eligible households with someone aged 60 or older.*** These are supported by a federal Senior FMNP grant administered by the Department of Disabilities, Aging and Independent Living (DAIL). DAIL transfers part of its grant to ESD to fund CAA distribution of senior-only coupons. As allowed by federal policy, DAIL uses the rest of the SFMNP grant to provide fresh produce grown on Vermont community supported agriculture (CSA) farms to residents of dozens of senior housing sites.
- ***Since 2010, coupons issued by the Health Department to participants in their Ladies First program.*** Farm To Family coupons promote the health objectives of this federally-funded cancer prevention program for low income women.

“Coming from the U.K., it reminds me of shopping for my mum while I was little. I’m now 83!” – Fair Haven senior

“It was a wonderful surprise to be offered Farm To Family coupons from Ladies First! It was awesome trying out new veggies.” – Bethel

The 1987 pilot project involved just three markets and \$6,500 in coupons. The 2011 program had 61 market sites. Its \$162,045 budget was supported by an \$82,000 federal WIC FMNP grant, \$38,545 in federal Senior FMNP funds, and \$4,500 in federal Ladies First program funds. State dollars funded the \$37,000 balance, of which \$24,000 was earmarked for nonfederal coupon redemptions.

“It’s a great way to get people to try different kinds of veggies and learn to make other kinds of meals.” – Springfield senior

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 \$3.00 coupons. Except for serial numbers and paper colors to help distinguish funding sources, all Farm To Family coupons are identical in terms of where they may be spent and what they may purchase. They may only buy locally grown fruits, vegetables and herbs 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 use postage-paid envelopes to send the redeemed coupons to ESD for reimbursement.

“It’s a low cost social outing for the family that is healthy. It has opened me to a whole new part of my community that I didn’t know about.” – Hartland

All coupon recipients get a brochure that identifies the eligible foods, lists locations and schedules for participating markets, and has a Vermont harvest calendar and farmers market shopping tips. They are instructed that vendors may not give them cash change for a coupon. The federal ban on cash change was not an issue when Farm To Family began and coupons were worth \$1 each, giving recipients a lot of flexibility when shopping at the markets. The denomination rose to \$2 due to federal rules requiring ESD to trace the path of each individual coupon printed. In 2005, having secured much more federal money for coupon benefits, ESD raised the denomination to \$3 to reduce coupon printing and processing costs and keep the program affordable.

COUPON RECIPIENTS AND BENEFITS

5,179 households comprising about 14,200 Vermonters received Farm To Family coupons in 2011. Over half (57%) were families that included minor children or women who were pregnant, postpartum or breastfeeding. Elderly households represented 28% of the caseload. The remaining recipients were other low income Vermonters, such as adults with disabilities and low wage workers.

WIC Program Participants: Federal rules restrict 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.

“The freshly-picked tomatoes and corn I purchased simply cannot compare to supermarket produce. Much more satisfying!” – Pawlet

Vermont only had enough federal funds to serve 19% of its eligible WIC participants, so WIC families were limited to \$60 in coupons, even those with three or more WIC participants. District Health Department (VDH) offices provide WIC families eligible for \$60 just one \$30 coupon book initially. VDH provides the second book only if there are any undistributed coupons left after their scheduled Farm To Family sessions end. While this resulted in only 468 WIC families receiving \$60 in coupons in 2011, it allowed more families to take part in the program.

“Without the coupons, I wouldn’t have been able to afford fruits and vegetables in the stores. I would have had to buy canned vegetables which are cheaper. I really enjoyed the fresh vegetables I bought.” – Belvidere senior

VDH issued \$30 coupon books to 3,021 WIC participants, 76% of whom were children aged six months to five years. The remainder went to pregnant, breastfeeding or postpartum women. 2,553 WIC families took part in the program, for an average of \$36 in coupon benefits per family for the year. Of the \$90,789 in coupons issued to WIC participants, \$63,225 (70%) were redeemed.

Ladies First Program Participants: 2011 was the second year VDH provided Farm To Family coupons to some participants in Ladies First, a federally-funded health screening and cancer prevention program for women with limited incomes. \$4,500 in coupons went to 150 participants, and \$3,015 in coupons (67%) were redeemed.

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 2011 needed to be under \$1,679 for a single person or \$2,857 for a family of three. 81% of the CAA coupon recipients were also taking part in 3SquaresVT, the federal program formerly called food stamps. That nutrition program offers significantly larger and more flexible food benefits than Farm To Family and is active year-round. Dozens of Vermont farmers markets have become equipped to accept the 3SquaresVT benefits provided on debit cards called electronic benefits transfer (EBT) cards instead of in paper coupons.

“I rarely go to the farmers market because I do not have the extra money to spend on fresh fruits and vegetables. But with the \$30 in coupons and being able to use the EBT card, I will now go down more often. I especially loved the zucchini and green beans I purchased.” – Middlebury

“I can’t afford to take my children out much so this was a way to spend a day outside together, and the kids learned a lot. It was a great way to have a family day in Vermont!” – Grand Isle

The 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 have consistently comprised over a third of the CAA coupon caseload. That proportion doubled after the arrival of federal Senior FMNP funds. In 2011, CAAs issued coupons to 2,476 households consisting of 4,206 individuals, of whom 632 were children and 1,699 were age sixty or older.

The CAAs serve about 40,000 eligible non-WIC 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 in order to serve more applicants. Since the federal regulations require ESD to trace every coupon to an eligible recipient, and if redeemed, to the specific market and vendor, ESD 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.

“The coupons sure helped. I never ate so many fruits and veggies!” – St. Albans

“Thank you for a wonderful experience at the farmers market. The first time I felt a little uncomfortable shopping with the coupons (felt like everyone was watching me) but quickly caught on to how to use them. Everyone was very nice. Thank you again from a 70 year old farmers market shopper.” – Rutland senior

CAA Nonfederal Coupon Recipients: Vermont's nonfederal coupons provided the program infrastructure that enabled Farm To Family to grow. They let 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 demands that can be hard to predict. In 2011, the CAAs distributed \$30,510 in coupons funded with state dollars. The \$30 coupon books went to 1,017 households, of which 32% were families with children. \$22,932 (75%) worth of the nonfederal coupons were redeemed.

CAA Senior FMNP Coupon Recipients: 1,459 households with someone aged sixty or older received \$43,770 in coupons, of which \$35,709 (82%) were redeemed. The federal Senior FMNP funds available from DAIL covered the cost of those redemptions, as well as some of the printing costs generated by senior coupon distribution.

“This is a great program! I had never been to a farmers market before and really enjoyed going every week. It was nice to talk to the local farmers about how they grew their produce and knowing it came from Vermont, not Georgia or out of the country.” – Putney

COUPON REDEMPTION

Full coupon redemption is not expected in a program intended to introduce people to new shopping and dietary experiences and strengthen farmers markets. Most new markets start small and take years to become firmly established with participation that consistently includes several produce vendors. It takes consumers practice to learn how to select and prepare fresh produce and to shop at markets in a region 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 a challenge for many 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.

Based on projected coupon redemption rates, ESD allowed \$169,569 in coupons to be issued in 2011. They went to 5,179 households, for an overall benefit average of \$33 in coupons per household for the season. \$124,881 in coupons (74%) were redeemed. The volume and variety of fresh produce available at Vermont markets was affected by heavy rains and flooding that damaged crops and cropland in the

“This valuable program supports local farmers and the local economy. We know where our food comes from and how well quality is maintained. We can eat organic, healthy, fresh produce!” – South Royalton

spring and again when Tropical Storm Irene ravaged Vermont in late August. Nonetheless, the 74% redemption rate was only one percent lower than for the 2010 season, an indicator that the weak economy and consumer support for 'buying local' appear to boost the likelihood that coupons will be redeemed.

Vermont's WIC FMNP redemption rate has consistently exceeded national averages. For instance, 70% of the coupons that VDH issued to WIC participants in 2010 were redeemed, compared to 56% nationally. 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 lower among non-elderly households (75%) than among seniors (82%). They may have trouble fitting a trip to the market into their schedules or decide that coupons redeemable only for fresh produce do not justify the time and cost to drive to the nearest participating farmers market, especially if they have 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 bad weather had decimated the selection of fresh produce.

“We are low income, and I got vegetables that I wouldn’t be getting from the store. My husband says the tomatoes from the farmers market are better than any he had from the store.” – Fair Haven senior

“I really enjoyed getting outside for a while and talking with the farmers. They were so nice and were extra nice when they saw I had coupons.” – Manchester

PARTICIPATING MARKETS AND FARMERS

A chart at the end of this report identifies the 61 market sites authorized to accept the coupons in 2011. (Some market organizations have more than one market site.) The chart also shows the number of participating produce vendors and value of coupons redeemed at each market.

Coupon recipients get a list of the locations and schedules for participating markets and are told that the coupons may be redeemed at any of those sites. The coupons issued by the Burlington Health office were spent at 24 different markets as far away as Rutland! 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 30% of the recipients surveyed said that they shopped at more than one market. 21% of the farmers surveyed in 2009 said they started growing a wider variety of fruits and vegetables to sell at markets as a result of the program.

Only vendors who grow some or all of the fresh produce they sell at the market qualify to accept coupons. The vendor gets a Farm To Family display sign. Coupon recipients are told to look for that sign at the markets.

“It is a learning experience for my children in a relaxed environment where they learn how to manage money and math skills for life. It is a great program, and I can’t wait to go next year.” – Lyndonville

Farm To Family is intended to be educational. The festive atmosphere at farmers markets invites shoppers to overhear or take part in conversations with vendors or other shoppers that improve their ability to select or use 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 objective to strengthen multi-vendor farmers markets. Including farm stands also would exceed the program budget and administrative capacity.

“Fun outing exploration with the kids. Gives them an open air shopping trip where they are interested in the items at the stands. The stand keepers are very friendly and offer good information for the kiddos!” – Ferrisburgh

In 2011, Farm To Family had 342 participating produce growers, at least 54 of whom sold at more than one market. The program motivates some growers to sell at farmers markets even though the coupons would likely generate a very small part of their sales income. Redemption totals varied widely among vendors. Fifty redeemed no coupons, while eight had coupon sales exceeding \$2,500 for the season.

<u>Coupon Sales</u>	<u># of Vendors</u>	<u>% of Vendors</u>
Less than \$50	132	38.6%
\$50 – \$99	45	13.2%
\$100 – \$249	60	17.5%
\$250 – \$499	43	12.6%
\$500 – \$749	8	2.3%
\$750 – \$999	20	5.9%
\$1000 or more	34	9.9%

“Farm To Family does contribute a little to my bottom line, but I think it serves a greater purpose, getting real, fresh food to people I otherwise would never see at the market or with any vegetables.” – Craftsbury grower

Total coupon sales averaged \$365 per participating produce vendor. 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. As a result, the median coupon sales income among participating vendors was just \$96 for the season. Two-thirds of the vendors surveyed in 2009 said that coupon redemptions represented less than 10% of their

produce sales at markets. Regardless, feedback from farmers consistently indicates that even those accepting few or no coupons are enthusiastic about the program.

“I have noticed that the fresh produce items from farmers markets are so much better than ones from grocery stores. Very tasty and prices aren’t bad at all, so my family became a big fan of them. The coupons helped my food budget, and my family absolutely loved it.” – St. Albans

The 2008 recipient survey asked shoppers how they thought the prices of fresh produce at the farmers market compare to prices at their 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 higher.

PROGRAM 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 low income children, seniors and women who are pregnant, postpartum or breastfeeding. The other goal was to expand the awareness and use of farmers markets, to increase market sales, and to stimulate the creation of new farmers markets and other outlets for produce grown for home consumption.

Coupon issuance to WIC participants happens at special Farm To Family venues – many at farmers markets – offering nutrition education activities and recipes for using local produce. All recipients get information about the nutritional benefits of fruits and vegetables and about how, when and where to use the coupons.

“This program was a huge benefit to our family. The farmers market became an important part of our week. We were able to socialize, get more exercise (we walk downtown) and purchase more healthy, organic food. We’ve made market a family ritual we look forward to.” – Montpelier

***“It was wonderful to actually talk to the farmers and eat REAL fresh fruits and vegetables!”
– Londonderry***

All coupon recipients were invited to return a survey. The results are appended, and most quotations cited in this report are gleaned from those surveys. The most recent survey of participating farmers was done in 2009 – the report also includes a few of its findings. Although Farm to Family is now 24 years old, one out of four recipients (24%) said that 2011 was the first year they 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.

The program produced many positive outcomes:

- 5,179 low income Vermonters, mostly seniors and families with children, used the coupons to buy \$124,881 worth of fresh fruits and vegetables at farmers markets.
- 74% of the farmers surveyed in 2009 said that taking part in the program increases their farmers market sales.
- 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 98% said produce quality at the markets was either better (80%) or about the same (18%) as at stores.

“I find myself doing a lot of teaching about how to cook and eat different vegetables. I love seeing new mothers load up with fresh vegetables. They are always so excited to try making their own baby food.” – St. Johnsbury grower

“The coupons give families a chance to try veggies and fruit they wouldn’t normally buy.” – Granby

- Limited budgets make low income consumers hesitate to buy unfamiliar foods. Nonetheless, 51% of the recipients bought a kind of fruit or vegetable they had never tried before, including 45% of the seniors surveyed. 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.

- 54% of recipients surveyed said they learned a new way to prepare or cook fresh produce. That included over 48% of the seniors surveyed.
- 47% said they learned a new way to store fresh fruits or vegetables to prevent them from spoiling.
- 74% of the recipients surveyed said that they ate more fresh produce last summer than usual.

“It helps me teach my children about where food comes from and how to make healthy, local food choices. We love the opportunity to buy really fresh, local produce. We tried kohlrabi for the first time and some wonderful local harvested mushrooms and other delicious fruits and vegetables. Can’t wait until next season!” – North Hartland

“It is a nice time to socialize with farmers and other shoppers, a time to learn more about the food I’m eating and how to store it properly (example, garlic). A great service.” – Johnson senior

- 77% said that they plan to eat more fresh produce all year-round as a result of taking part in the coupon program. This response was 83% among the seniors surveyed.

The program is an effective family and community development tool. 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 promotes the formation and growth of farmers markets and expands their customer base.

- 18% of recipients surveyed said they had never been to a farmers market before getting the coupons. This percentage has 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.

***“I love that farmers markets are more mainstream and normal now. In the past, many folks would not have considered going – too intimidating. Thanks so much for the coupons!”
– Burlington***

- 30% of recipients surveyed said that they shopped at more than one participating market.
- 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, 80% of the recipients surveyed said yes.

“The coupons are great. I always went by farmers markets but never stopped. Now I will always stop when they are open. The fresh veggies are so GREAT!” – West Charleston

68% of 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. 44% of the growers surveyed in 2009 agreed that many Farm To Family coupon shoppers become regular cash customers of the market.

ESD rarely surveys vendors because there is less turnover among participating farmers than among coupon recipients. 25% of farmers surveyed in 2009 said they had been taking part in Farm To Family for over a decade, some since its 1987 inception. Farmers reported that, as a result of the program, they became more active in market operations, increased the number of days or hours they sold at farmers markets, and:

- 21% started growing a wider variety of fruits or vegetables to sell at farmers markets.
- 27% improved their displays to make it easier for shoppers to identify food types and prices.
- 23% were doing more consumer education, such as offering product recipes or samples.

“I couldn’t grow my own garden this year, so the coupons were especially appreciated. I have to eat organic and mostly raw food. This is not affordable on disability income.” – Brattleboro senior

When Farm To Family began issuing coupons targeted to seniors, this motivated farmers to include more traditional garden vegetables, such as beets and green beans, among the foods they grow for

“I bought fruits and vegetables to make my own baby food for my 6 month old. I was able to get all local and organic. Thank you.” – Post Mills

farmers markets. ESD also has observed attitude shifts over the program’s 24-year lifespan. Farmers initially reluctant to take part in a "government" program evolved into hearty fans. In the past, many recipients commented that they did not like farmers markets because markets sold organic foods, whereas now, survey comments often cheer the opportunity to buy local foods that were grown organically.

The 2011 survey of coupon recipients included a multiple-choice question asking them to indicate the greatest benefit(s) of the program.

Only limited-income people received the coupons, so it was reasonable to assume that the top choice, especially among seniors, would be the financial benefit of having coupons to spend at the markets. However, the survey results indicate that the desire to "buy local" and support Vermont farmers cuts across income lines.

The "other" benefits listed primarily alluded to the social and educational features of farmers market shopping.

What is the greatest benefit of Farm To Family coupons?	Overall Survey	Seniors Only
Supports local farmers	90.5%	91.5%
Makes fresh produce more affordable	74.6%	69.1%
Helps manage a chronic condition, like diabetes, arthritis or heart disease	32.7%	45.5%
Gets people to shop at local farmers markets	79.2%	78.2%
Encourages me to eat more fruits and vegetables	75.4%	76.4%
Other	12.1%	10.9%

“Farmers markets are a great way to enjoy, relax, meet people, teach each other and learn from each other, to make friends and enjoy the fresh produce there. Thank you for farmers markets!” – St. Albans

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 currently provide over \$41 million annually in federal support for those programs in most states. People nationwide now benefit from programs that uniquely merge health and agriculture promotion and put money directly into the pockets of small-scale family farmers.

Since Farm To Family 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 sales, yet welcome this user-friendly way to connect consumers with the farming community.

Families receiving just a handful of coupons are enthusiastic about the program and 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 they remember from their youth but can no longer afford or grow on their own.

“I’m grateful to have farmers markets to eat fruits and vegetables because we can’t have gardens where we live. Only time I go to markets is when coupons come out, and we support local farmers.” – Rutland senior

The Vermont Farm To Family Program helps keep Vermont land open and productive. It 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.

2011 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 372 recipients, representing 11% of the households that got the coupons in 2011.

First-Timers: 23.8% of participants surveyed said 2011 was the first year they had ever received Farm To Family coupons, even though the coupons have been available to low income Vermonters since 1987. 17.5% said they had never gone to a farmers market before taking part in Farm To Family.

Impact on Farmers Markets: The 2011 program had participating farmers market sites in 61 locations throughout Vermont. 30.3% of the participants surveyed checked that they went to more than one market. 67.8% said they returned to the market to shop during the 2011 season after they ran out of coupons to spend, and 80.2% 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?

80.0% – Better 17.8% – About the same 1.1% – Worse 1.1% – 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	74.0%	18.2%	7.8%
plan to eat more fresh fruits and vegetables all year round	77.3%	12.7%	10.0%
learned a new way to prepare or cook fresh fruits or vegetables	54.1%	37.4%	8.5%
learned a new way to store fresh fruits/vegetables to prevent spoiling	46.5%	46.8%	6.7%
bought a kind of fruit or vegetable they had never tried before	50.9%	44.6%	4.5%

What was the greatest benefit of the Farm To Family coupons? *(checking all that apply)*

90.5% supports local farmers	79.2% gets people to shop at farmers markets
74.6% makes fresh produce more affordable	75.4% encourages me to eat more fruits/vegetables
32.7% helps manage a chronic condition, like Diabetes, arthritis or heart disease	12.1% other (42 said it is a fun, social outing that teaches them, especially kids, about food; 7 said it shows commitment to local farms, community life)

Comments were added to 179 of the surveys, tending toward certain themes:

- short expressions of thanks or kudos for the program (54)
- produce at farmers markets is high quality, fresher (34)
- the coupons help low income people, make fresh produce affordable (33)
- likes variety and social atmosphere at farmers markets (20)
- program is educational, fun for kids, promotes family bonding (19)
- program helps diet, promotes healthy eating, encourages people to try new foods (19)
- increase coupon benefit levels – maximum is \$30 in coupons per year (16)
- likes supporting farmers, helping local economy and community (14)
- fresh produce at farmers markets is expensive (14)
- market vendors are friendly, nice, helpful (9)
- wants coupons again, keep the program going (8)
- unhappy with a specific market or vendor, e.g., limited selection, produce not high quality (5)
- program needs more coupon redemption sites, e.g., more farmers markets or include farmstands (4)
- allow redemption for products other than fresh fruits/vegetables, e.g., pickles, meats, jam (2)
- assorted single-survey comments (embarrassed that others know they get help, market hours too limited, coupons helps them to buy organic food, program needs more participating markets/vendors)

2011 Vermont Farm To Family Program / Coupon Redemptions By Farmers Market (11-21-11)

Participating Farmers Markets (56 markets open at 61 sites)	Enrolled Produce Vendors	Dollar Value of Redemptions By Coupon Type				
		Federal WIC Coupons	Fed. Senior Coupons	Fed. Ladies First Cpn	NonFederal Coupons	Total 2011 Redemptions
Bellows Falls	4	\$1,383	\$429	\$0	\$366	\$2,178
Brandon	3	\$330	\$120	\$12	\$93	\$555
Brattleboro (two local sites)	16	\$4,383	\$2,070	\$90	\$834	\$7,377
Bristol	5	\$738	\$249	\$0	\$225	\$1,212
Burlington (City Hall Park)	15	\$5,349	\$2,898	\$405	\$1,638	\$10,290
Caledonia (Danville, St.Johnsbury)	12	\$2,244	\$1,632	\$63	\$888	\$4,827
Capital City (Montpelier)	12	\$3,615	\$1,128	\$51	\$510	\$5,304
Castleton	6	\$99	\$207	\$0	\$90	\$396
Champlain Islands (Grand Isle, So Hero)	5	\$234	\$267	\$21	\$180	\$702
Chelsea	3	\$183	\$231	\$0	\$18	\$432
Craftsbury Common	1	\$123	\$15	\$12	\$39	\$189
Derby	7	\$51	\$45	\$12	\$99	\$207
Dorset	6	\$135	\$60	\$33	\$69	\$297
Enosburg Falls	6	\$717	\$522	\$30	\$294	\$1,563
Fair Haven	4	\$477	\$843	\$24	\$537	\$1,881
Five Corners (Essex Junction)	8	\$900	\$243	\$60	\$144	\$1,347
Granite Center (Barre City)	6	\$2,055	\$1,377	\$132	\$576	\$4,140
Groton	6	\$87	\$99	\$9	\$30	\$225
Hardwick	8	\$756	\$570	\$33	\$327	\$1,686
Highgate Center	4	\$90	\$99	\$0	\$108	\$297
Hinesburg	2	\$321	\$63	\$36	\$126	\$546
Johnson	2	\$411	\$18	\$0	\$51	\$480
Lamoille Valley Farmers Artisan (Morrisville)	4	\$132	\$45	\$0	\$0	\$177
Lunenburg	5	\$132	\$198	\$9	\$30	\$369
Lyndonville (Lyndonville, Greensboro)	5	\$1,140	\$297	\$51	\$147	\$1,635
Manchester	5	\$678	\$93	\$30	\$66	\$867
Middlebury	19	\$2,772	\$2,148	\$144	\$882	\$5,946
Mills Riverside (Jericho)	4	\$219	\$27	\$9	\$6	\$261
Milton Grange	3	\$117	\$15	\$33	\$0	\$165
Morrisville	7	\$1,914	\$1,122	\$21	\$438	\$3,495
Mount Tom (Woodstock)	2	\$12	\$3	\$18	\$6	\$39
New North End (Burlington)	4	\$291	\$246	\$126	\$195	\$858
Newport	12	\$5,148	\$3,936	\$300	\$3,060	\$12,444
Northwest (St. Albans)	12	\$4,185	\$4,191	\$174	\$1,965	\$10,515
Norwich	12	\$2,241	\$543	\$75	\$402	\$3,261
Old North End (Burlington)	10	\$3,186	\$1,674	\$231	\$1,938	\$7,029
Randolph	4	\$762	\$522	\$108	\$183	\$1,575
Richford	3	\$261	\$405	\$0	\$717	\$1,383
Richmond	4	\$243	\$87	\$6	\$99	\$435
Royalton	7	\$573	\$273	\$48	\$90	\$984
Rutland County (Rutland)	15	\$2,448	\$1,320	\$51	\$1,326	\$5,145
Shelburne	4	\$168	\$24	\$24	\$39	\$255
South Burlington at Healthy Living	6	\$246	\$84	\$66	\$51	\$447
Springfield	5	\$432	\$138	\$0	\$45	\$615
Stowe	5	\$435	\$81	\$0	\$48	\$564
Townshend Common (Townshend, Brattleboro)	8	\$360	\$60	\$0	\$27	\$447
Vermont (Rutland, Poultney)	18	\$4,356	\$3,063	\$114	\$2,385	\$9,918
Waitsfield	3	\$258	\$57	\$39	\$72	\$426
Walloomsac (Bennington)	9	\$2,754	\$1,074	\$75	\$999	\$4,902
Waterbury	4	\$291	\$18	\$42	\$30	\$381
Westford Common	2	\$138	\$12	\$0	\$3	\$153
West River (Londonderry)	2	\$144	\$0	\$21	\$0	\$165
Williston	3	\$261	\$111	\$93	\$51	\$516
Windsor	7	\$480	\$225	\$0	\$162	\$867
Winooski	4	\$1,740	\$417	\$69	\$213	\$2,439
Woodstock Market on the Green	6	\$27	\$15	\$15	\$15	\$72
TOTALS	342	\$63,225	\$35,709	\$3,015	\$22,932	\$124,881
Value of Coupons Distributed		\$90,789	\$43,770	\$4,500	\$30,510	\$169,569
2011 Coupon Redemption Rates		69.6%	81.6%	67.0%	75.2%	73.6%