

Verkuilen Building,
21885 Dunham Road - Suite 12
Clinton Township, Michigan 48036
Phone: 586-469-5180

E-mail: msue.macomb@county.msu.edu
Fax: 586-469-6948
Web: msue.msu.edu/macomb

March 2009

“FRESH” produce from local growers

Consumers are increasingly concerned with increases in food prices and rising gas and transportation costs. To help Macomb County residents who are eligible for the Women, Infant, and Children program (WIC), MSU Extension is providing education and distributing coupons redeemable for locally grown fresh fruits and vegetables. It's all part of Project FRESH.

Project FRESH, the Farm Market Nutrition Program, provides participants with coupons to purchase locally grown fresh fruits and vegetables at participating farmers' markets. Parents enrolled in the program receive \$20 in coupons to supplement their food budgets.

They get the opportunity to improve the nutrition of their children, and receive education about use, selection and storage of produce. The program also provides an economic advantage to Macomb County farmers, increasing produce sales and exposure of the Mount Clemens Farmers' Market, and other county-wide farm markets. In 2008, 6,600 coupons were redeemed, worth nearly \$11,000 in revenue for area farmers.

Macomb County participants can purchase produce from five sites across the county, including the Mount Clemens Farmers' Market, two markets in southern Macomb County and two markets located in the northern end of the county.

Twenty eight area farmers participated in selling locally grown produce for Project FRESH participants last year. The increased availability of farm markets, with daily access, improved the redemption rate in Macomb County from 81 in 2007 to 83 percent in 2008. This was higher than the 2008 state average of 76 percent. Since 2005 the redemption of coupons has steadily improved, rising from 79.37 percent to 83 percent.



Local youths at the Macomb County Farmers Market.

The program is funded by the USDA and administered in a partnership between MSU Extension and the Department of Community Health (Macomb County Health Department). MSU Extension Nutrition staff provide education on how and where to use the coupons, and provide suggestions on use of fresh produce (with an emphasis on the importance of eating 5-9 servings of fresh fruits and vegetables per day).

In a random sampling of Project FRESH participants, 92 percent agreed that family members ate more fruits and vegetables due to the availability Project FRESH coupons. This is a positive sign as childhood obesity rates are rising and families struggle to improve their diet.

-Eileen Haraminac

Helping consumers trust their local food supply

Ensuring the food supply is safe and plentiful was a high priority for 80 percent of Michigan residents surveyed in 2006 by an issue identification process undertaken by MSU Extension and the Michigan



Macomb County cucumbers can be found at local supermarkets.

Recent incidences of food-borne pathogens in spinach, peppers, tomatoes and that have made recent news. Food safety certification measures, both public and private, are rapidly proliferating into a number of confusing and expensive standards that may be required by food retailers.

While it is usually not easy to pinpoint the exact incident that causes product contamination, small farms may just as easily experience problems as large ones. We also know that prevention is a key step in avoiding microbial contamination on fresh fruits and vegetables.

These are called "Good Agricultural Practices" (GAP) and "Good Handling Practices" (GHP). Growers across Michigan have been learning about these practices at MSU-sponsored regional meetings over the winter. In southeastern Michigan 66 local growers, along with regional shippers, retailers and agency representatives attended a full-day program on these topics. Seventy percent of them planned to get a food safety program in place for the 2009 season. All attendees indicated that the program helped them feel more comfortable in with the task.

-Hannah Stevens

4-H youth mentors teach leadership and communication

The MSU Extension Peer Mentoring & Service Learning Project has been educating peer mentors in Macomb County since 2006. High school students mentor elementary students for two hours after school.

The program aims to educate high school students in leadership and communication skills and encourage commitment to the values of community service and civic involvement. Seventy two youths are in peer mentor programs in the L'Anse Creuse, Utica and VanDyke school districts

The objectives of the program include increasing the number of disadvantaged youth with mentors in Macomb County, providing learning experiences for peer mentors in social development, citizenship and leadership, developing an awareness of diverse cultures, conflict-resolution, communications and decision-making skills, and helping youth develop healthy lifestyles.

MSU Extension contracted with an independent research firm, RMC Research Corporation, to evaluate the peer mentor program for program year 2006-2007. Surveys and telephone interviews were used to evaluate progress toward meeting project goals. Including mentors and mentees from Macomb County, 66 mentors and 23 teens (statewide) completed the surveys and telephone interviews.

Highlights of the evaluation include:

- Nearly 90 percent of teen mentors reported that training was sufficient to support their needs.
- All of the respondents felt they had a positive influence on their mentees.
- 81 percent of teen mentors rated themselves highly on being persuasive and being thought of by peers and mentees as a good listener

When interviewed, mentors reported that they improved their communication skills with younger children, their ability to provide leadership for younger children, and said that as a result of mentoring, they were more open-minded about people with different backgrounds.

Interview participants were also asked about the program's impact on their mentees. Most participants suggested that the experience gave the younger children someone to look up to and be there for them. Younger children also indicated they were better able to talk to teens and develop trust in other people.

-Jan Gwozdz