



Farmers' Market Nutrition Coupon Program Connects B.C. Families to Fresh Food and So Much More.



Photo Credit: BC Farmers' Market Trail & Darrin Rigo

Melany regularly reads a book about farms, called *Farm Block* by Christopher Franceschelli, to her eight-month-old daughter and three-year-old son. At the end, the farmers package up their produce and make jams. The last page says, "We load them all up and we are on our way because today is farmers' market day!" This is now a catch phrase in Melany's house given her family's routine of attending their local market.

She says, "Last summer my son was only two, and you would ask him when he woke up on a Saturday morning, 'What day is it?' And he'd enthusiastically say, 'It's Market Day!'"

Melany and her family, who live in B.C.'s Thompson Valley region,

have been participating in the Farmers' Market Nutrition Coupon Program for four years. The program encourages healthy eating, supports farmers' markets and strengthens food security throughout British Columbia. "It is awesome to be able to show my son that we are eating this food, that comes from the farms around us," Melany says.

The program, which is supported by the Province of British Columbia and the Provincial Health Services Authority and administered through the [BC Association of Farmers' Markets](#), began as a pilot project serving 15 communities in each health authority region. Having now been in full operation for 10 years, the program has grown to serve over 85 communities and reaches over 15,000 people from over 5,000 households.

How the Program Works

As part of the program, community partners provide coupons to [eligible participants](#): lower-income families, pregnant people and seniors participating in food literacy programs. Each household enrolled receives a minimum of \$21 in coupons each week to use at [participating farmers' markets](#) during months when produce is most abundant.

"I use the coupons to buy fresh garden vegetables and fruit, eggs and a large selection of cheese and meats," says Aneta, who is able to walk to her neighbourhood market in the Greater Vancouver area and has participated in the program for two years. She was offered the chance to participate after taking part in a research study, connected to the [Welcoming Seniors' Spaces program](#), which was about food security and access to fresh produce within various demographics, including seniors.



Photo Credit: BC Farmers' Market Trail & Aaron Whitfield

"I believe this program is very important," says Aneta. "The coupons the program generously provides to those who are in the low-income bracket enable me to afford things like fresh vegetables, fruit, cheese and eggs every week."

How the Program Improves Wellbeing

Michelle is a Food Skills Support Worker who coordinates the program in the Vancouver Coastal Health region through the [Healthiest Babies Possible Program](#) and the [Youth Pregnancy and Parenting Program](#). This involves registering people in the program, distributing the coupons, and helping build food literacy and skills through activities that, for example, teach participants how to prepare and cook the produce that they get from the market. "This encourages our clients to cook at home and prepare more nutritious meals for their families," Michelle explains. "Many of the people we work with have reported feeling healthier, while eating and using a wider variety of fruits and vegetables in recipes after joining the program."

Not only does the program increase access to high-quality produce, but shopping at farmers' markets also increases social connections and a sense of community.

"Visiting the farmers' markets helps our families to create a sense of community by meeting local farmers and other families. On top of that, it supports our local farmers and economy by encouraging people to buy seasonal B.C. produce," says Michelle.



Making the Season Last...

As the program continues to grow, participants and organizers consider ways to sustain access to local produce.

For Melany and her family, to make seasonal produce last longer, it's all about planning ahead. "My son is a berry fanatic; he can't get enough of blueberries," she explains. "When the blueberries were in season last year, I was able to purchase a large flat of them with coupons I had saved up and then froze them. It lasted us almost all winter. Things like that help us put local, organic food on the table that we wouldn't necessarily be able to do without the program."



Photo Credit: BC Farmers' Market Trail & B. Long

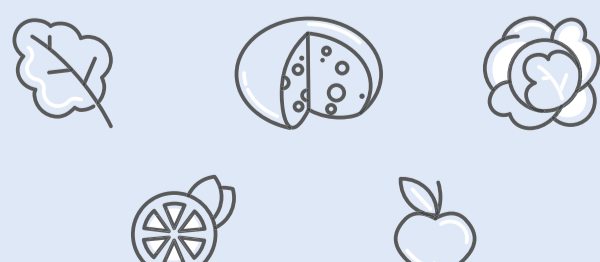
Get Involved

The Farmers' Market Nutrition Coupon Program season runs from June 12 to December 11, 2021. Here are the ways you can get involved in the 2022 season:

- Learn how you can get coupons and participate in the program in your area. Check this [list of participating farmers' markets and community partners](#) in each region.
- Find out how to [become a participating farmers' market](#).
- Find out how to [become a community partner](#).

[BC Association of Farmers' Markets](#) is a registered society that is committed to developing and strengthening the capacity of farmers' markets in all regions of British Columbia. They support, develop and promote farmers' markets so local food continues to thrive.

If you can't get to your local farmer's market in-person, check out [BC Farmers' Markets Online](#).



We welcome your input and feedback. Contact us at: MOHNewsletter@gov.bc.ca

