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State of North Carolina
Department of Health and Human Services

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Seven North Carolina Counties Join in Pilot Project to Benefit Local Farmers and Lower Income Households

RALEIGH – Farmers' markets in seven N.C. counties are making fresh fruits and vegetables easier to buy and eat for lower income households. A pilot program is linking three USDA-affiliated food assistance programs for senior citizens, WIC (Women, Infants and Children) clients and Food and Nutrition Services (FNS/food stamps) participants to encourage and enable them to use any of their benefits at the participating farmers' markets.

"We know that access to healthy food is critically important to improving health outcomes," DHHS Secretary Lanier Cansler said. "This is a great example of how state agencies, non-profits and communities can work together to decrease barriers so many North Carolinians face to living a healthy lifestyle."

Approximately 28 farmers' markets across the state offer FNS participants use of their benefits cards for food purchases. In addition, WIC and Senior food programs offer coupons to their clients for shopping at selected farmers' markets. Agriculture and health officials believe jointly promoting all three programs and providing consistent nutrition education messages through the N.C. Farmers' Markets Nutrition Programs pilot project may heighten awareness among lower income families of farmers' markets in their communities and encourage them to make the markets part of their regular shopping routine.

"In these seven counties, we anticipate reaching more than 50,000 people and at least 200 farmers selling locally-grown produce," said Agriculture Commissioner Steve Troxler. "By bringing these programs together, we are helping individuals stretch their food dollars and support their local farmers too."

The participating farmer's markets are:

Carrboro Farmers' Market -- Orange County, Carrboro, NC
Columbus County Community Farmers' Market --Whiteville, NC
Lexington Farmers' Market -- Davidson County, Lexington, NC
Onslow County Farmers' Market --Jacksonville, NC
Salisbury Farmers' Market -- Rowan County, Salisbury, NC
Watauga County Farmers' Market --Boone, NC
Yancey County Farmers' Market --Burnsville, NC

The N.C. Farmers' Markets Nutrition Programs pilot project is made possible by linking the WIC Farmers' Market Nutrition Program, the Senior Farmers' Market Nutrition Program and the 21st Century Farmers' Markets Program through support from the Division of Public Health, Division of Aging and Adult Services and the Division of Social Services all in the N.C. Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS), the N.C. Department of Agriculture & Consumer Services, and the statewide non-profit, Leaflight. Individuals may get further information about participating in any of these programs through their local health departments or Division of Social Services.

The N.C. Farmers' Markets Nutrition Programs pilot project will continue throughout the summer and will be evaluated for future expansion.

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