

## Farmer's Market – A Healthy Option

August is at our doorstep which means that the Farmer's Market is just reaching peak season for our favorite fresh from the farm produce. The market is a wonderful asset in the community and vendors work all year to prepare their products for the 16 week market season. This past winter the vendors came together to form a Friends of the Market Committee. This committee elected officers and formed task forces which went to work on policies and strategies to make the market a destination with something for the everyone.

Local funders make a huge impact with the Southwest Minnesota Arts Council funding Music in the Market, providing access to and encouraging an appreciation of the arts. Matching dollars to make this possible were provided by Bremer Bank and the Marshall Community Foundation. The Statewide Health Improvement Program (SHIP) has provided funds for needed supplies, publicity and a market manager. The United Way of Southwest Minnesota funded a Power of Produce Grant which provides \$2 tokens for children, providing them the opportunity to experience the market, interact with vendors and make individual purchases of fresh fruits and vegetables. Many community agencies and organizations have also stepped up to assist the Friends of the Market. Healthy56258 and United Community Action provide staff and volunteer assistance. The U of MN Extension Service, Schwan's Company, Hunger Solutions, and the City of Marshall all contribute in unique ways behind the scenes.

As the fiscal host of the market the YMCA can leverage our 501(c)3 non-profit status to provide access to grants and other programs. An EBT card reader was secured through the USDA which allows the market to accept cards from both the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) and major credit cards. Participants debit a set amount from their cards and receive tokens for market purchases. In the case of SNAP cards, participants can receive up to \$10 in matching funds through the Hunger Solutions Market Bucks program with each week. The vendors then submit these tokens to the market manager and are paid monthly through the YMCA.

Another change for 2017 is the market location. The Friends of the Market worked with the Schwan's Company to secure an agreement to utilize the parking lot between Schwan's Corp 1 and the YMCA. This location expands parking, improves access for those with mobility concerns, provides restrooms, water and emergency shelter at the YMCA, and provides electricity for Music in the Market.

We invite everyone to visit our local Farmer's Market on Saturday mornings from 7:30 to noon. Music in the Market performances begin at 9am and \$2 Power of Produce tokens are available for children while supplies last. More information can be found online or on Facebook at Marshall Farmers Market.