



## Impact of WIC & Senior Farmers Market Nutrition Programs in Washington's Communities:<sup>1</sup>

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**Background:** Department of Health (DOH) and Department of Social and Health Services (DSHS) operate Farmers Market Nutrition Programs (FMNP) which provide vouchers to low-income mothers, children and seniors to purchase healthy food only from local growers at farmers markets across Washington.

**Please note:** the Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children – commonly known as WIC - is *different* and *separate* from Farmers Market Nutrition Program for WIC families. WIC is funded, regulated and administered differently than FMNP.

FMNP requires a small state match to draw down federal funds for the programs: for \$100,000, Washington can leverage \$894,000 in federal funding. Farmers Market Nutrition Program funds are highly competitive among states; if Washington eliminates our programs now, we won't be able to bring them back when times are better.

**76,000 low-income new moms, young kids and seniors benefit**

**887 Washington farmers benefit**

**126 Farmers Markets in 38 counties and 179 farm stores benefit**

**\$1.5 million in sales generated**

DOH's Nutrition Services division administers WIC FMNP and provides contracting, training, monitoring and other administrative services for DSHS for Senior FMNP. This partnership allows even more dollars to go toward food benefits. Without sufficient administrative funds in the DOH budget, Washington will eliminate the Farmers Market Nutrition Programs for WIC families *and* significantly impact low income seniors.

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### Local Farmers on WIC & Senior Farmers Market Nutrition Programs:

In November 2011, Washington State Farmers Market Association sent surveys to Washington farmers that participate in FMNP to understand the role of FMNP in their farm business. 115 farmers (13%) from across the state responded. Together, these respondents sell at every one of Washington's 126 FMNP-authorized farmers markets.

This is what we've learned about their farms, the role of farmers market sales in their businesses, and the value and impact of the Farmers Market Nutrition Programs for these farmers:

#### FMNP Impact on Farm Jobs:

The 115 farmers who responded to the survey employ 600 people (average of 5 people per farm) just for their farmers market operations. These farms employ 1,530 people (average of 13 people per farm).

Altogether, the 887 FMNP farmers would employ approximately 4,435 people for farmers market operations alone and hire 11,530 employees total.

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<sup>1</sup> Washington State Farmers Market Association – WIC & Senior FMNP Farmer Survey (November 2011)

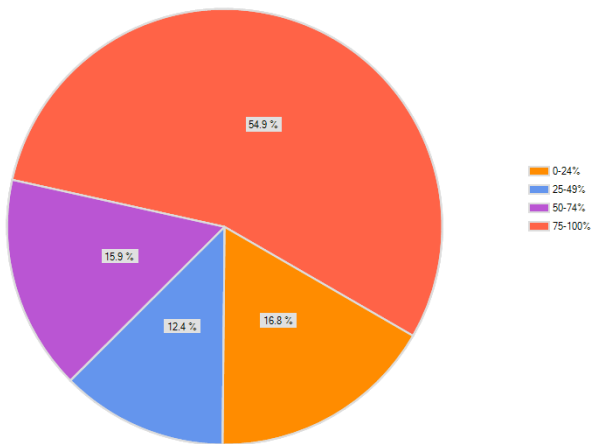
If FMNP were eliminated altogether, conservative estimates by Washington farmers indicate a likely loss of 300 summer farm jobs.

If WIC and Senior FMNP were eliminated, more than 90% of farmers indicated that they would see significant changes to their business, including:

- Hiring fewer people
- Employing staff for less time
- Selling at fewer markets
- Lower sales at markets

## FMNP Impact on Farm Income and Farmers Market Sales:

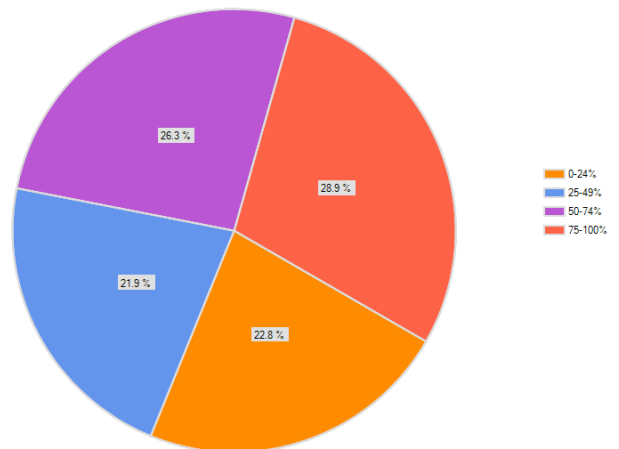
What percent of your annual family income comes from your farm business?



These farms are working farms: the majority of respondents indicated that farming provides a significant source (75 - 100%) of their family's total income.

Over half of the farmers responding (57%) depend on farmers market sales as a primary source of income: at least 50% of their annual farm income comes from selling at local farmers markets.

What percent of your annual farm income comes from selling at farmers markets?

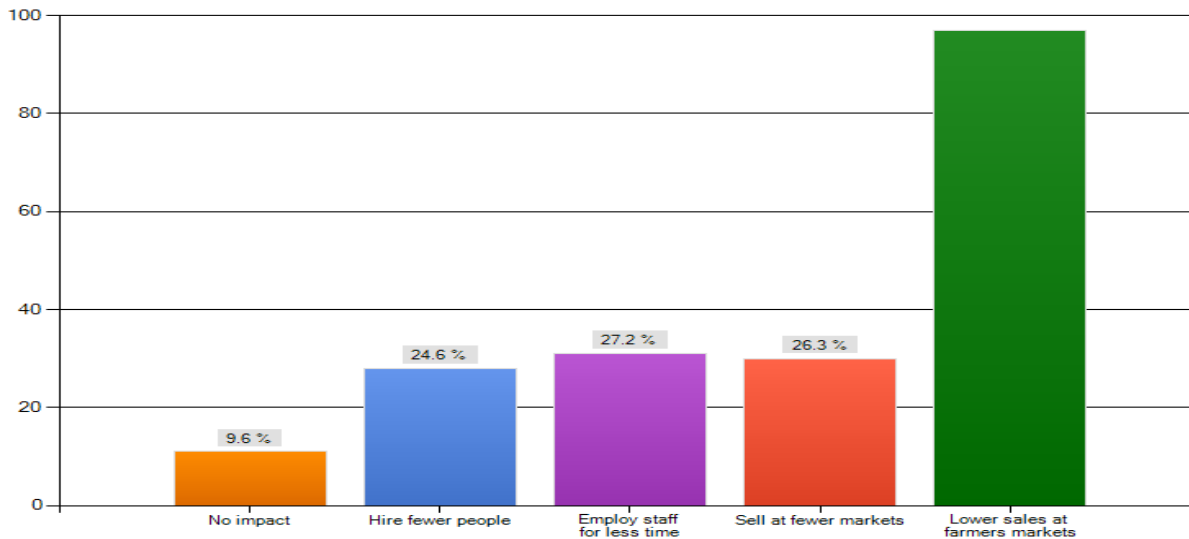


**“Sales generated through the FMNP contribute greatly to the overall viability of new farms that are starting up in rural areas.** In communities like Burlington, FMNP encourages and enables thousands of people who would otherwise not be able to afford fresh local fruits and vegetables to shop and our farm stand and farmers' market stalls and support new and minority farmers.”

Farmer from Mount Vernon/Burlington, WA

More than 85% of farmers indicated that they would have lower sales at farmers markets if WIC and Senior FMNP were eliminated.

**If the FMNP programs were eliminated for the 2012 market season how do you think your business would be impacted? Please check all of the following that apply:**



“I believe we have customers who would not be able to have fresh produce without the FMNP program. **Our small farm may not be able to continue to grow and sell fresh produce without the FMNP program.**”

Farmer from Mount Vernon, WA

Farmers depend on strong farmers market sales so they will look to markets that are the most effective places to sell. Survey results indicate that 54 farmers markets, distributed across the state, could lose farmers if WIC and Senior FMNP were eliminated. Farmers markets are successful when there is a range of vendors, so losing experienced farm vendors would have a negative impact on markets’ overall appeal to customers and the community economic benefits of strong, viable markets. In addition to 49 other farmers markets mentioned, the most frequently listed markets at risk of losing farmers were:

- Columbia City Farmers Market (8)
- Bremerton Farmers Market (5)
- Pasco Farmers Market (5)
- Bellingham Farmers Market (4)
- Renton Farmers Market (4)
- Tacoma Farmers Market (3)
- Yakima Farmers Market (3)

Over 50% of farmers stated that sales from FMNP are strong enough that the revenue from that program is a deciding factor in whether or not to participate in a specific market.

67% of farmers felt that it is “very important” that their farm be able to accept FMNP for the revenue mix for their business.

### **Impact of WIC Program on FMNP:**

Low income women, infants and children enrolled in the WIC Program receive monthly checks to buy certain healthy foods, including a monthly check for fruits and vegetables (\$10 for moms, \$6 for children). Unlike the FMNP checks, WIC checks can be used at any WIC-authorized food retailer; typically these are grocery stores (like Safeway) and megastores (like Walmart). There are *no provisions in the newly revised WAC for farmers markets to become a WIC-authorized food retailer.*

“... (FMNP) drives sales to markets, increasing the playing field for **local farmers who are up against billion dollar multinational food corporations**...in competition for consumers dollars. “

Farmer from Dungeness/Sequim, WA

Also unlike the FMNP checks, WIC checks cannot be used by seniors – by its very definition, monthly WIC fruit/vegetable checks are only for low-income women, infants and children. *Eliminating FMNP severely impacts food assistance for low-income elders.*

Recently the Dept. of Health helped pilot a project that authorized some farmers at 9 farmers markets in King County to accept monthly WIC checks for fruits and vegetables, in addition to being able to accept FMNP checks. The process was difficult with many barriers, as the WIC Program has different federal regulations and processes than FMNP – rules that are not designed for small-scale farmers, but for large retail stores. Though the project is still being evaluated, there are preliminary sales data to compare the impact of FMNP for WIC families and seniors in 2010 (before the pilot) and of the WIC Program checks in 2011 (the pilot year).

In 2010, those 9 farmers markets redeemed:

**\$121,422** – WIC FMNP checks

**\$114,738** – Senior FMNP checks

**\$236,966** – Total WIC *and* Senior FMNP

In 2011, those 9 pilot farmers market sites **redeemed only \$3,051 in WIC fruit/vegetable checks.**

Compared to the approximately 90 farmers authorized to accept FMNP at these 9 markets, only 38 farmers could get authorized for WIC by the end of the 2011 market season.

## **FMNP Impact on Community Well-Being:**

Approximately 98% of the farmers surveyed felt it was important that their farm be able to accept FMNP so that low income people could buy fresh fruits and vegetables. The value of FMNP to these farmers is two-fold: there is business value and clearly there are important social values: serving needy people, promoting healthy nutrition, building a sense of community, and more. In the farmers' own words:

“I cannot think of any other government program that contributes positively to two sectors of society than this one. To the poor and to family farms. I am speaking from the family farm point of view. The numbers are staggering and to a point where I cannot count how many people who use WIC and Senior checks, discover, learn to cook and eat new foods from our farm. Without a doubt, over the years of participating in this program I have had the great pleasure of returning customers who no longer receive WIC or Senior checks. Not only is this a short term sustainable program but a **LONG TERM SUSTAINABLE PROGRAM. This is the least wasteful and the best spent monies I have ever witnessed in any government program. DON'T LET THIS GO!!!**”

Farmer from Stanwood, WA

“Besides the importance of point of contact sales that the Farmer's Markets provide, **FMNP does something else really important to me, as a farmer, consumer and tax payer - they provide a way for the most needy in my community to get great nutrition without wasting money on marketing, long haul transportation, and warehousing.** The money goes directly to the farmer, and the high nutrition produce goes directly to those who most need it. We work hard to grow great food, and everyone should have access to healthy fresh produce. FMNP is a win win program. It would be a travesty to see it eliminated.”

Farmer from Spokane, WA

“We believe that all people should have access to fresh, healthy food and (we) enjoy selling organic fruit to people that would not otherwise be able to afford our product. FMNP maintains diversity in the customer base at Farmers Markets in the state. Farmers Markets are more than just a place to buy food. They have become a gathering place for community members of all ages to spend time sharing, networking and enjoying great food! **The benefits of this program go way beyond putting good food on the table!**”

Farmer from Rice, WA