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Farmers Market Coalition, Ecology Center, and Michigan Farmers Market Association Partner to Provide SNAP Training and Technical Assistance to Federal GusNIP Grantees

(November 8, 2019) - The U.S. Department of Agriculture National Institute of Food and Agriculture has selected Gretchen Swanson Center for Nutrition (GSCN) to lead evaluation and training and technical assistance to GusNIP grantees. As part of the project, the Farmers Market Coalition (FMC) will coordinate efforts to provide training and technical assistance to farmers markets and other farm direct retailers in collaboration with the Berkeley, California-based Ecology Center, Michigan Farmers Market Association, and Fair Food Network.

The Gus Schumacher Nutrition Incentive Program (GusNIP, formerly the Food Insecurity Nutrition Incentive Program) supports projects to increase the purchase of fruits and vegetables among low-income consumers participating in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP). The program administers consumer incentives at the point of purchase — when a customer spends their SNAP benefits at these retailers, they can receive additional SNAP funds (often double) to purchase fruits and vegetables.

“Farmers markets have always been at the core of these types of innovative programs to connect health and agriculture,” said Ben Feldman, Farmers Market Coalition Executive Director. “Incentive programs were pioneered and proven at farmers markets before growing into a nationwide phenomenon. Even today, farmers markets lead the way on nutrition incentives, not only to support healthy eating but also by directly supporting America’s independent farmers and rural communities.”

FMC, the Ecology Center, and the Michigan Farmers Market Association have been at the forefront of researching, creating resources, and providing training to farm direct retailers for decades. In the first year of the project, the collaboration will develop curriculum to train GusNIP grantees on how to implement incentive programs effectively through online and in person materials. The organizations will also conduct research and report on technology for incentive and benefit (SNAP/WIC) redemption in farm-direct outlets (farmers markets, Community Supported Agriculture box programs, and farm stands) with the goal of identifying barriers and suggesting solutions. Special attention will be paid to high need areas to ensure that these communities receive the support they need to successfully implement incentive programs.

FMC is the only national organization representing farmers market operators and managers, representing 4,500 farmers markets across all 50 states. The mission of FMC is to strengthen farmers markets for the benefit of farmers, consumers, and communities. FMC has an extensive track record developing tools and training materials, as a facilitator and convenor, with government grants and contracts, and as a subject

matter expert on SNAP and Incentives in farmers market setting. From 2014 -2017 FMC administered the USDA Food and Nutrition Service SNAP EBT Equipment Program, which provided no-cost wireless SNAP processing equipment to farmers markets and farm direct retailers.

The Ecology Center (EC) leads California's ten-year old nutrition incentive program, Market Match. Over the last decade, EC has helped hundreds of markets and direct marketing farmers add CalFresh-EBT access, and has become a national leader and statewide technical assistance go-to organization for all information related to CalFresh and nutrition incentives at farmers' markets.

“Our work—supporting farmers markets to expand SNAP access and leading the statewide healthy food incentive program in California, Market Match—has shown us in real terms the positive outcomes these programs have for small and mid-sized independent farmers, low-income shoppers, and communities,” says Carle Brinkman, Ecology Center's Food and Farming Program Director. “It's a triple win, and we are thrilled to be part of this national collaboration.”

The Michigan Farmers Market Association (MIFMA) is a primer, statewide association that has been serving farmers markets and the farmers and vendors that sell at farmers markets in Michigan since 2006. A significant portion of MIFMA's work focuses on ensuring that all Michigan residents have access to fresh, healthy, local foods available at farmers markets.

“The Michigan Farmers Market Association has spent more than a decade ensuring that all residents have access to fresh, healthy, locally grown food available at farmers markets,” said Amanda Shreve, Executive Director at MIFMA. “Supporting markets and farmers in accepting SNAP, and participating in nutrition incentive programs is a key way we can advance healthy food access in our communities while supporting the farmers who feed us and the markets that connect us. We look forward to gathering together with experts from across the country to advance this important work.”

Fair Food Network (FFN) will lead training and technical assistance efforts among collaborators with expertise on food system retailers. FFN has a track record of helping incentive programs launch, evolve, and expand, and their Double Up Food Bucks program is now used in 27 states at more than 870 grocery and farmers market locations.

A list of all selected GusNIP grantees and their projects is available on the NIFA website at the respective links: three [GusNIP Pilot Projects](#), four [GusNIP Projects](#), six [GusNIP Large-Scale Projects](#), nine [Produce Prescription Projects](#), and one [Nutrition Incentive Program Training, Technical Assistance, Evaluation, and Information Center](#).

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