

Farm Market program open to food stamps

By Sophie Harris sharris@beloitdailynews.com | Posted: Monday, July 20, 2015 4:00 pm

Those who use food stamps or other government-funded assistance to buy food may not always have access to fresh local food selections. Most assistance programs are accepted at grocery stores and chain stores.

The Downtown Farmers Market in Beloit is an exception. S.N.A.P. benefits are accepted as payment by certain vendors, and Downtown Beloit Program Coordinator Crystal Buhmeyer said this is the third year the Downtown Beloit Association has offered this service.

“A person can come to the information booth (at the farmer’s market) and tell us how many wooden tokens they want,” Buhmeyer said. “Then they swipe their card and get the tokens.”

Buhmeyer said the tokens are accepted at many produce, meat and bakery stands, but they can’t be used to purchase the prepared foods at the outdoor market.

“People were very interested in the program. We are still trying to let people know it’s here, especially in northern Illinois,” Buhmeyer said. “It’s an idea that was around for many years.”

Illinois residents who receive Link benefits also may redeem them for tokens at the market. Buhmeyer said running the program has been fairly easy, and she thinks it’s beneficial.

“We knew there was a need,” Buhmeyer said. “We wanted locally grown fresh produce in the hands of people who need it.”

Buhmeyer said the difference between fresh produce and grocery store produce can be dramatic.

“At the market, the fruit has been picked very, very recently, maybe even the day before,” Buhmeyer said.

Fruit at a grocery store can be significantly less fresh since it was likely shipped from somewhere else. Buhmeyer said there are also many stands that emphasize using organic ingredients in their products at the farmers market.

Don and Marilyn Dralle accept S.N.A.P. benefit tokens at their booth, CC Angus Beef. Marilyn said this is because she wants everyone to have access to high-quality meat that is free from antibiotics, hormones and fillers.

“I want lower-income families to eat well,” Marilyn Dralle said. “This gives them a chance to eat locally and to learn more about how food is produced.”

Marilyn Dralle said she enjoys educating her customers about cooking when they visit her booth.

“We have a variety of different meats, and we want to encourage people to try new things,” Marilyn said.

She and her husband have been at the Beloit Farmer’s Market for 11 years.

To learn more about the S.N.A.P program at the Beloit Farmers Market, look for the Downtown Beloit Association’s booth at the Saturday market or go to www.downtownbeloit.com.