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December 5, 2016

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LOCAL FARMERS' MARKET DOUBLES VALUE OF SNAP/EBT DOLLARS

Everybody should have access to affordable, fresh, locally grown foods. And now there are new opportunities for more Osceola County residents to enjoy healthy, delicious foods.

The Farm Market, located at 5700 East Irlo Bronson Memorial Highway, St. Cloud, is now a SNAP/EBT vendor. Additionally, only at The Farm Market, SNAP cardholders can double the value of their SNAP dollars to purchase fresh Florida vegetables, fruits, and food-producing potted plants. For example: a cardholder spends \$10 worth of SNAP dollars on any eligible purchases at The Farm Market, and they receive a matching \$10 worth of "Fresh Access Bucks" to spend on fresh Florida-grown vegetables and fruits at The Farm Market. A cardholder can receive up to \$20 in matching Fresh Access Bucks every time they visit the market.

Response to the market's new services has been positive. "This program is awesome! Fresh vegetables can be really expensive, but the double-value program makes it possible to feed my family organic produce," says one customer. "I didn't know I could buy plants to grow my own food with SNAP!," says another customer who was excited to have a vegetable garden this season.

This effort to expand access of farm fresh local foods to more people in the community was made possible through a collaboration of Osceola County Grown (ocgrown.org), Florida Organic Growers (foginfo.org), and the UF IFAS Extension-Osceola County (osceola.ifas.ufl.edu).

Florida Organic Growers offers Fresh Access Bucks grants to qualifying farmers' markets statewide. "When it comes to keeping people healthy, we'd rather pay the farmer than the doctor", says a Fresh Access Bucks Program Manager, Mary Hathaway.

"We want to support local agriculture and help everyone in the community live healthier lives, that's why we started The Farm Market," says Market Manager Nancy Pratt. "And with EBT sales and the Fresh Access Bucks program, locally produced foods like produce, honey, and homemade bread are now available to more people."

"The Farm Market is unique because they make it a priority to find local farmers and artisans with diverse products, and they do not accept vendors that resell fruits and vegetables. This is one of the reasons that The Farm Market qualified for the grant," said Jessica Sullivan, Agriculture Educator at the UF IFAS Extension-Osceola. Sullivan reminds farmers market visitors, "growing seasons are different for every crop so farmers are selling what is ready to harvest right then- the offerings will change every

week. Shopping and eating with the local seasons means that you get to enjoy foods when they are the freshest and tastiest.”

The Farm Market is held Saturdays 10:00am-1:00pm now through mid-June.

Ask about discounted weekly produce shares with Osceola CSA (osceolacsa.com) for SNAP customers.