



## FRESH SHARES @ THE MARKET

Promoting Food Justice & Equal Access to Healthy Local Food



**FRESH SHARES IS MAKING A DIFFERENCE!** Over the past year and a half, the Fresh Shares program has enabled the Downtown Bloomington Farmers' Market to provide over \$8,000 in fresh, local food to families in need. The Fresh Shares coupon program provided nearly \$4,200 in fresh, local farm products through food pantries and other community organizations. In addition, by accepting Link cards at the market, we have enabled low-income families to purchase over \$3,800 in healthy, local foods using their SNAP (formerly Food Stamp) benefits. **These sales also provide a new source of sales revenue for local farm families.**

In 2009, with start-up funding from State Farm Bank, the Downtown Bloomington Farmers' Market became one of the first farmers' markets in Illinois to implement a Link program – and, by year-end, the market ranked third (after two Chicago markets) among all Illinois farmers' markets in total Link sales.



**WE NEED HELP TO KEEP FRESH SHARES GOING.** We are excited about the success of Fresh Shares and our Link program -- we feel it is a great way to make sure the entire community can share in the farmers' market. **However, we have an urgent need for continued funding so we can keep Fresh Shares going.**

**CURRENT PLANS:** Despite their many benefits, farmers' markets often seem out of reach for the most vulnerable members of our communities -- including seniors and low-income families with small children. This was a special concern for the Downtown Bloomington Farmers' Market because of its proximity to West Bloomington, a lower-income neighborhood where a large portion of the targeted population of Link recipients resides. According to a U.S. Census Bureau 2007 American Community Survey, there are approximately 2,000 households receiving Link benefits in Bloomington, so the potential market is significant.

Two years ago, the Downtown Bloomington Farmers' Market launched a formal food justice program aimed at making the fresh, healthy local food grown by our farmers more accessible to all members of the community.

- The market instituted a gleaning program, which enables farmers to **donate produce to Home Sweet Home mission** at the end of each market day.
- The Bloomington market became one of the first farmers' markets in Illinois to **accept Link cards.**
- Finally, with a grant from State Farm Bank, the market partnered with Heartland Local Food Network, Inc. (HLFN), West Bloomington Revitalization Partnership, and Harvest of Hope (association of local food pantries) to launch **Fresh Shares.** The current focus of this program is distribution of \$5.00 coupons to customers at local food pantries and other community organizations. Customers then bring the coupons to the market on Saturday, exchange them for tokens, and use the tokens to purchase fresh local food products for their families.

In the future, HLFN is looking at the possibility of expanding these programs to other local farmers' markets as well.

**PROGRAM SUPPORT:** Heartland Local Food Network, Inc. (HLFN) a not-for-profit 501(c)(3) organization, serves as the fiscal agent for Fresh Shares, in partnership with the Illinois Prairie Community Foundation. The program is jointly administered by HLFN and Downtown Bloomington Association. The program is carried out with assistance from Downtown Bloomington Farmers' Market volunteers and Harvest of Hope (network of local food pantries).

**CURRENT FUNDING NEEDS:** State Farm Bank provided funding for program start-up costs in 2009, along with some additional funds contributed by individual donors. Ongoing service and transaction costs for the Link program are covered through a small surcharge on debit/credit card transactions, which have enabled the Link program to become self-sustaining. However, these surcharges do not generate enough revenue to fund the Fresh Shares coupons and other elements of the Fresh Shares program – so HLFN is seeking additional sources of funding.

