

## Commissioner Jesson announces launch of SNAP+ pilot to encourage healthy eating

Written by

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Participants in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) have an opportunity to purchase more fresh fruits and vegetables this summer.

Minnesota Department of Human Services Commissioner Lucinda Jesson today announced the launch of the SNAP+ pilot at Almsted's Fresh Market in Crystal, one of three Minnesota grocery stores participating in the program. SNAP+, which officially began June 15, will run through Sept. 30, 2013. During this time, SNAP recipients who purchase \$5 or more in fresh fruits and vegetables with their Electronic Benefit Transfer card will receive a \$5 coupon toward their next purchase of fresh produce at a participating store. Approximately 30,000 coupons will be delivered over the course of the pilot.

"We are excited about the SNAP+ pilot because it puts healthy food directly in the hands of those who need it," said Jesson. "Getting businesses, communities, organizations and government together is the best way to ensure Minnesotans get the nutritious food they need to lead healthy lives."

Participating stores are located in both rural and metropolitan areas with high poverty rates, health disparities and demonstrated need for healthier eating. They are:

- Teal's Market, 604 Lyle Chisholm Drive Northwest, Cass Lake
- Almsted's Fresh Market, 4200 Douglas Drive, Crystal
- Super One Foods, 5300 Bristol Street, Duluth.

The \$150,000 cost of the program is funded through the state's portion of a federal bonus for increasing SNAP access for eligible residents. The state's portion—25 percent of the \$1.2 million bonus—will go toward four initiatives to put healthy food on the table for low-income Minnesotans. The Summer Backpack Program, which provides backpacks filled with healthy food and nutritional information to children age 18 and younger, was announced last week. Projects to connect eligible, low-income Latino and Hmong communities to SNAP benefits and to expand mobile food shelf capacity to provide additional food resources to seniors will be launched later this summer. The remaining 75 percent of the federal bonus went to counties for their work with SNAP recipients.

Currently, more than 500,000 Minnesotans participate in SNAP. County social service agencies will notify SNAP participants in the areas of the three SNAP+ grocery stores about the pilot. The grocery stores will post signs and instructions in their stores for participants. Stores will also host Simply Good Eating demonstrations from the University of Minnesota's Extension SNAP-Education program in Crystal and Duluth and the Minnesota Chippewa Tribe SNAP-Education program in Cass Lake to teach customers how to use local produce and build skills to change eating habits.

SNAP+, supported by the [Minnesota Grocers Association](#) and Minnesota Department of Agriculture's [Minnesota Grown](#) program, is part of the department's and its partners in the [Nutritious Food Coalition's](#) ongoing outreach efforts to encourage SNAP-eligible Minnesotans to enroll in the program and

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purchase healthy food for their households. For every dollar in SNAP benefits spent, \$1.73 in economic activity is generated.

"The comprehensive program will bolster Minnesota's farm-to-fork connections by expanding access to low-income communities," said Jamie Pfuhl, president of the Minnesota Grocers Association. "We are pleased to be a part of this exciting partnership."

The U.S. Department of Agriculture's [Food and Nutrition Service](#) granted a waiver to Minnesota to operate the pilot program. Throughout the pilot, the Minnesota Department of Human Services will collect data to track the rate of coupon redemption and correlating sales of fruits and vegetables.

More information about SNAP is available on the [department's website](#) .