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ASAP's Farm Fresh Produce Prescription Expands

The program gives healthcare providers a tool to help patients eat well and improve health outcomes.

ASHEVILLE, NC (June 21, 2022)—After piloting the Farm Fresh Produce Prescription in 2021, ASAP has expanded the program this season to partner with multiple healthcare access points and local food outlets in Buncombe and Henderson counties. The program allows healthcare providers to “prescribe” patients fresh fruits and vegetables from local farms to help treat or prevent diet-related illness. Patients can redeem prescriptions, totaling \$20 to \$60 per week, depending on household size, at nine farmers markets or through The AVL Box, a local food delivery service. The Farm Fresh Produce Prescription is part of ASAP’s Farm Fresh for Health initiative, which addresses the real and perceived barriers that influence what we eat and determine health outcomes.

ASAP is currently working with MAHEC (Mountain Area Health Education Center) and Sona Pharmacy to offer produce prescriptions. In addition, the program is available as a service of the Healthy Opportunities Pilot with select Medicaid insurance providers. Eligible patients are those who suffer from or are at risk of developing a diet-related condition and are either eligible for a federal supplemental nutrition program such as SNAP or enrolled in Medicaid or CHIP. Find out more about eligibility and the referral process at asapconnections.org/prescription.

“MAHEC is excited to partner with ASAP on the Farm Fresh Produce Prescription,” said Francisco Castelblanco, DNP, RN, director of MAHEC and chair of the Department of Continuing Professional Development. “The program gives healthcare providers a concrete action step that fits within the established healthcare visit. We know social environments significantly impact food choices and are an important intervention point to increase healthy eating with our patients. Farmers markets are environments that naturally encourage eating fresh and seasonal fruits and vegetables, and we are excited to be part of this project.”

Eligible patients receive a Prescription Identification Number to present at a participating farmers market information booth in exchange for Farm Fresh Bucks. Farm Fresh Bucks can be used to purchase fresh fruits and vegetables from any produce vendor and may be used at other participating markets. Participating farmers markets are Asheville City Market, East Asheville Tailgate Market, Enka-Candler Tailgate Market, Hendersonville Farmers Market, Mills River Farmers Market, North Asheville Tailgate Market, River Arts District Farmers Market, Southside Community Farmers Market, Weaverville Tailgate Market, and West Asheville Tailgate Market. All participating markets accept SNAP/EBT and offer Double SNAP for Fruits and Vegetables incentives. For participants who face transportation barriers in visiting farmers markets, ASAP is partnering with Asheville Rides Transit to provide free bus fares. Most farmers markets in Asheville are accessible via ART bus lines.

Program participants may also use their Prescription Identification Number to order produce boxes via theavlbox.com. Produce boxes are available for delivery or at four pickup locations in Asheville, Black Mountain, Fairview, and Hendersonville.

ASAP's six-month prescription program pilot in 2021, working with nine physicians and one farmers market, showed significant impact. More than 250 prescription coupons were redeemed, with over \$2,500 spent with local farmers. Eighty-six percent of participants reported changes to their shopping and eating habits based on the program, including consuming more fresh fruits and vegetables. Physicians described the prescription as a useful tool for connecting patients to other health supporting resources.

Throughout the summer and fall of 2022, ASAP will offer a series of symposiums for healthcare professionals in Western North Carolina to explore Farm Fresh for Health principles and strategies. The Aug. 27 Farm Fresh for Health Symposium at Hendersonville Farmers Market will focus on the Farm Fresh Produce Prescription. Visit asapconnections.org to find out more and to register.

ASAP's Farm Fresh Produce Prescription is supported in part by the Healthy Opportunities Pilot, a grant from the Community Foundation of Western North Carolina, and by Gus Schumacher Nutrition Incentive Program [grant no. 2021-70030-35870/project accession no. 1027407] from the USDA National Institute of Food and Agriculture.

[High-resolution photos available. Contact Sarah Hart at sarah@asapconnections.org.]

ABOUT ASAP (APPALACHIAN SUSTAINABLE AGRICULTURE PROJECT)

ASAP's mission is to help local farms thrive, link farmers to markets and supporters, and build healthy communities through connections to local food. To learn more, visit asapconnections.org.

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