

Coladaily.com: DSS teams up with local church to give seniors vouchers for fresh produce

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The South Carolina Department of Social Services is offering low-income seniors in Columbia the chance to gain access to fresh produce at local farmers markets.

The state agency has partnered with St. John Baptist Church on the corner of Farrow Road and West Beltline Boulevard to issue free coupons to eligible individuals to purchase fresh produce at participating farmers markets. The coupons will be issued from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. Saturday.

“You wouldn’t believe the amount of people that come and are in need,” said Susan Lewis, St. Baptist Church’s food pantry chairwoman. “The senior citizens are so grateful.”

Seniors will receive five coupons worth \$5 each. They can be used from May through Oct. 15. The coupons will be given out on a first come, first served basis.

“Once they receive them, we recommend they use them as soon as possible because sometimes seniors forget,” said Stacey Richardson, program manager with DSS.

The coupons come from the Senior Farmers’ Market Nutrition Program, a federal grant program through the Food and Nutrition Services division of the United States Department of Agriculture that has operated since 2001.

This year’s grant is provides approximately \$501,077 in benefits to serve nearly 20,000 participants in 36 counties in South Carolina.

Participants must be 60 or older and meet federal household income eligibility limits, which is estimated at \$1,700 a month.

Seniors must fill out an application and bring a proof of identity and residence in Richland County to get the free coupons. Individuals who care for homebound seniors must provide a statement from the senior granting permission to submit an application on their behalf. Proof of identity and income for the homebound senior also must be presented with the application.

Richardson said the program has been great for seniors and has almost become a yearly requirement.

“They look forward to it,” she said. “It’s an opportunity for them to get fresh produce and fruit. It’s also a time for them to get out of the house and just to associate with some of their friends.”

DSS will give out coupons again May 30 at Grace United Methodist Church and June 2 at the Tri-City Leisure Center in West Columbia.

Seniors can use their coupons at the following locations in Richland County:

Trinity Episcopal Cathedral, 1100 Sumter St.

Virginia Wingard UMC, 1500 Broad River Road

Ashland UMC, 2600 Ashland Road

Shandon UMC, 3407 Devine St.

Washington Street UMC, 1401 Washington St.

Tree of Life Congregation, 6719 North Trenholm Road

Unitarian Universalist Fellowship, 2701 Heyward St.

Lutheran Church of the Resurrection, 3707 Moss Ave.

The Lourie Center, 1650 Park Circle

Grace UMC, 410 Harbison Blvd.

Christopher Towers, 1805 Devine St.

Ebenezer Lutheran Church, 1301 Richland St.

The Carolina Apartments, 3201 Meadowlark Drive