FreshConnect Checks Program

Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) and Veterans, Servicemembers and their Families

Information for Market Managers and Vendors

FreshConnect Checks

What is the FreshConnect Checks Program?

- Governor Cuomo launched the FreshConnect Program in 2011 to create new farmers’ markets and support existing markets that provide outlets for fresh food in high need neighborhoods.

- FreshConnect aims to expand access to fresh food in underserved communities to improve the diets of individuals in those communities and foster economic development.

- The FreshConnect Checks Program (FCC) is a component of Governor Andrew Cuomo’s FreshConnect Program. The program was designed to increase the purchasing power of SNAP (Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program) consumers by 40 percent while supporting local farmers, farmers’ markets and farm stands.

- In 2014 the FreshConnect Checks Program also became available to Veterans, Servicemembers, and their immediate family members at regional Division of Veterans’ Affairs offices on a first come, first served basis to be used to purchase fresh foods at participating farmers markets and farm stands.
Where are FreshConnect Checks accepted?

- Farmers’ Markets
- Farm Stands
- Mobile Markets
- New York State only

Why participate in FreshConnect Checks Program?

- Additional revenue source for farmers or vendors
- Attract additional customers to the farmers’ market or farm stand
- Expand access to fresh food in communities with farmers markets or farm stands
- Improve the diets of individuals in those communities
- Foster economic development
- Show appreciation to Veterans, Servicemembers and their immediate family members for their service to our country
For whom are FreshConnect Checks?

- Farmers or Vendors who sell SNAP eligible food items at any farmers market, farm stand or mobile market in New York State.
- Farmers’ markets that enroll and participate in the NYS Wireless EBT Program.
- Farm stands, farmers markets, and mobile markets in New York State where SNAP eligible food items are sold.
- Veterans, Servicemembers, and their immediate family members.
- Customers with SNAP benefits.

Who is eligible…

...to ACCEPT FreshConnect Checks?

- Farmers and Vendors
  - at a farmers market, farm stand or mobile market in New York State
  - must sell eligible food items
  - no application required

...to ISSUE FreshConnect Checks?

- Markets
  - who participate in the NYS Wireless EBT Program
  - who request FCC annually

- Veterans’ Service Providers
  - to Veterans, Servicemembers and their immediate family members
The FreshConnect Check

Redeemable for SNAP eligible items at participating farmers’ markets and farm stands in New York State.

PMNP Stamp

Initial if not in PMNP

Coupon must be used by December 31, 20XX, at participating farmers’ markets and farm stands in New York State.

Not redeemable for cash. No change given.

Not valid at supermarkets or grocery stores.

FreshConnect Checks Sign

- Farmers and Vendors should hang this sign at their stalls during market hours.
- Laminated sign
- Available for any farm or vendor selling SNAP eligible foods at farmers markets or farm stands in New York State
- Identifies the farm or vendor participating in the FreshConnect Checks Program
### Eligible Food Items

The Farmer may only accept FreshConnect Checks for SNAP eligible food items. This includes, but is not limited to:

- Eggs
- Pasta
- Honey
- Maple Syrup
- Dairy Products
- Baked Goods, Breads, Cereals
- Produce: Fruits, Vegetables, Mushrooms, etc.
- Meats, Fish & Poultry
- Coffee (whole bean or ground)
- Seeds and Plants that will produce food


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### Ineligible Food Items

FreshConnect Checks are for SNAP eligible food items only. They may NOT be used for any other product at the market. This includes, but is not limited to:

- Beer, Wine & Liquor
- Cigarettes & Tobacco
- Brewed coffee/tea (for consumption at the market)
- Pet Foods
- Soaps & Lotions
- Vitamins & Medicines
- Hot Foods (for consumption at the market)
- Other Prepared Foods (for consumption at the market)
- Seeds or Plants that do not produce food (i.e. decorative plants and flowers)
- Crafts

See USDA list of SNAP eligible foods.
The Big Picture

January 1
Program Begins

Operating Markets may request and begin to issue FCC to SNAP customers

January 15
Last day vendors can redeem FCC

Farmers/vendors accept FCC

December 31
Program ends

Feb 1 FCC redemption begins for farmers/vendors

July 1 issued to Veterans, Servicemembers and their immediate families

How does it work?
for Farmers or Vendors

- No application required to accept checks as payment.
- Free to participate.
- May accept FreshConnect Checks for SNAP eligible food items at any farmers’ markets and/or farm stand in New York.

- Redemption of FCC is through mail-in process by January 15.
- Address for redemption is on the back of the FreshConnect Check
- Use a redemption form when mailing FCC.
- Reimbursement check will be mailed back to contact and address on redemption form.
### FreshConnect Checks

#### How does it work?

**At Farmers’ Markets**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Eligibility:</th>
<th>Redemtion:</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• No application.</td>
<td>• Market may choose to manage redemption process for vendors.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Free to participate.</td>
<td>➢ Market must reimburse vendors in timely manner.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Must operate in New York State</td>
<td>• Mail-in FCC to be received no later than January 15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Must be participating in the NYS Wireless EBT Program (wooden tokens) to issue FCC.</td>
<td>• Use a redemption form when mailing FCC.</td>
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<tr>
<th>Operations:</th>
<th>Promotion:</th>
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<td>• Must request FCC from Department each year.</td>
<td>• All markets enrolled in the Farmers Market Nutrition Program (FMNP) will be mailed signage for farmers and vendors to hang at their stalls, regardless if market runs the EBT program and issues FCC.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Must follow issuance instructions (if applicable)</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Should be aware of program rules</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Should instruct vendors and farmers of rules</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Program rules are found online at: <a href="http://www.agriculture.ny.gov">www.agriculture.ny.gov</a></td>
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#### How does it work?

**At Farm Stands**

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<tr>
<td>• Free to participate.</td>
<td>• Address for redemption is on the back of the FCC.</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Must operate in New York State</td>
<td>• Use a redemption form when mailing FCC. Available online.</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Must sell SNAP eligible food items</td>
<td>• Reimbursement check will be mailed back to contact and address on redemption form.</td>
</tr>
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<td>• May not issue FCC at this time</td>
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<td>• Should instruct farm stand staff in the rules</td>
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Operating a FreshConnect Checks Program at a Farmers’ Market

Step 1: Request & Receive
Step 2: Issue
Step 3: Record Keeping

Market Managers:
• Email the Department with request for FreshConnect Checks to issue
• Must include in the email:
  – Previous year’s SNAP sales
  – Shipping address, no PO BOX
  – Information about any other point-of-sale SNAP incentive program running at the market
    ➢ Example: CNY Health Bucks; NYC Health Bucks
Step 1b: Receiving FreshConnect Checks

Upon receipt of FreshConnect Checks:
- Familiarize with the rules for managers and vendors
- Inventory the FreshConnect Checks
- Manager must sign and return the FCC Receipt
- Keep the coupons secure like cash to avoid theft or loss

Step 2: Issuing FreshConnect Checks

- At participating farmers’ markets, for every $5 of SNAP benefits a customer exchanges for wooden tokens, the manager may issue a $2 FreshConnect Check
  - $10 in tokens = 2 FreshConnect Checks
  - $20 in tokens = 4 FreshConnect Checks
  - $50 in tokens = 10 FreshConnect Checks
  **No limit required**
- Be sure to instruct customer in the use of the FreshConnect Check
Step 3: Record keeping

Use the Daily Log Sheet

Record:
- Number of issued FCC
- Number of vendors
- Number of customers (estimate)
- Day total SNAP sales
- Date of issuance

Submit the daily log sheet and any un-issued FreshConnect Checks back to the Department at the end of the market year.

FreshConnect Checks

Not Operating a FreshConnect Checks Program at a farmers market or farm stand

- FreshConnect Checks are circulating year round.
  - Farmers Markets and Farm Stands may still experience an interaction with a FreshConnect Check, even if they do not issue them.
  - Customers may save FreshConnect Checks from a previous SNAP transaction from another farmers market or,
  - Customers may be a Veteran, Servicemember or an immediate Family member and have been issued FreshConnect Checks from a regional Veterans Affairs location.
- Farmers and Vendors may accept these FreshConnect Checks for SNAP eligible food items at any farmers’ markets and/or farm stand in New York.
  - Information about redemption is on the back of the FreshConnect Check.
- Redemption forms are available online and also included in the FMNP Market Authorization Packages.
FreshConnect Checks

Promoting the FreshConnect Checks Program

• Laminated sign
• Identifies the farm or vendor participating in the FreshConnect Checks Program
• Available for any farm or vendor selling SNAP eligible foods at farmers markets or farm stands in New York State
• In 2018, sign is distributed to all markets participating in the Farmers’ Market Nutrition Program for managers to give to their vendors

Accepting FreshConnect Checks -Transaction Awareness

Farmers and Vendors:
• Can accept between January 1 and December 31
• Must accept for SNAP eligible foods only
• Should accept current year FreshConnect Check; If expired, it might not get reimbursed
• Cannot give cash change for FreshConnect Checks
  • If the transaction includes both cash and FreshConnect Checks, customers may receive change for the cash portion only
• Treat FreshConnect Checks like cash! Secure them to avoid loss or theft
• Can accept two or more FreshConnect Checks as payment for eligible foods.
Redeeming FreshConnect Checks

- Instructions are on the back of each check
- Submit the FCC with the Redemption Form to the Farmers Market Federation of New York
  - All farmers in FMNP will receive a redemption form in the authorization package
  - All markets in FMNP will receive a redemption form in the authorization package
- Forms can be found online for download: www.agriculture.ny.gov
- If the farmer participates in the FMNP they can stamp the FCC with FMNP stamp
- If the vendor does not participate in the FMNP they can initial each FCC in the box

https://www.agriculture.ny.gov/AP/agservices/freshConnectPrgm.html
Violations to Highlight

Customers may not:

- Request cash or other currency for FreshConnect Checks.
- Use a FreshConnect Check for ineligible food items.
- Shop at supermarkets or grocery stores with FreshConnect Checks.
- Use a FreshConnect Check after December 31 of the year it was issued.

Farmers may not:

- Redeem a FreshConnect Check for cash, or other currency, for customers or vendors.
- Accept a FreshConnect Check from customers for ineligible items.
- Accept a FreshConnect Check after December 31 of the year it was issued.

The Customer Perspective
SNAP customers:
• At participating farmers markets, SNAP participants shopping with their Electronic Benefit Transaction (EBT) card who purchase $5.00 in wooden tokens will be given a $2.00 FreshConnect Check. For each subsequent $5.00 increment, they will be given an additional $2.00 FreshConnect Check, while supplies are available.
• Can then shop with these FCC at the farmers market or farm stands.

Veterans, Servicemembers, and their immediate family members:
• Receive FreshConnect Checks through the Division of Veterans’ Affairs offices on a first-come, first-served basis, while supplies are available.
• Can then shop with these FCC at the farmers market or farm stands.

Customer Perspective: How does it work?

Customer Perspective: Where to get FreshConnect Checks - Farmers’ Markets

• Farmers markets in upstate New York that operate a central SNAP-EBT terminal have the option to participate in FreshConnect Checks Program.

• Customers can find out which markets participate by going to the Department’s webpage www.agriculture.ny.gov or by contacting their local farmers market or farm stand.

• Select “Find a Farmers’ Market”.

• You can then select the county desired and review which markets are identified as “FCC Issued”
Customer Perspective: Where to get FreshConnect Checks - Veteran’s Offices

Veterans, Servicemembers, and their immediate family members:
• Must visit their regional State Division of Veterans’ Affairs office

• 27 regional offices

• Westchester Warren Suffolk Saratoga St. Lawrence Rensselaer Queens Otsego Orange Ontario Onondaga Niagara Monroe Kings Jefferson Genesee Essex Erie Dutchess Clinton Chemung Chautauqua Cattaraugus Broome Bronx Albany

• Contact the Department or Division of Veteran’s Affairs for more information.

FreshConnect Checks Summary

• $2 FreshConnect Checks (FCC)
• Issued at markets with NYS Wireless EBT
• For every $5 SNAP in benefits spent, a $2 FCC can be issued
• Issued at local participating Veterans Affairs offices for Veterans, Servicemembers and their immediate families
• Every farmer or vendor at a NYS farmers’ market or farm stand is allowed to accept a FCC for SNAP eligible food items, even at markets where the checks are not being issued
### Program Contact Information

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>NYS Department of Agriculture &amp; Markets</th>
<th>NYS Division of Veterans’ Affairs*</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Mark McMullen</strong>, Unit Supervisor</td>
<td><strong>Benjamin Pomerance</strong>, Deputy Director for Program Development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Jacqueline Boyer</strong>, Operations Manager</td>
<td><strong>Shannon MacColl</strong>, Program Assistant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phone: (518) 457-7076 ext. 1</td>
<td>Phone: (518) 474-6114</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Toll Free: (888) 554-4501</td>
<td>Email: <a href="mailto:Shannon.MacColl@veterans.ny.gov">Shannon.MacColl@veterans.ny.gov</a></td>
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<tr>
<td>Email: <a href="mailto:farmersmarkets@agriculture.ny.gov">farmersmarkets@agriculture.ny.gov</a></td>
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*Veterans interested in obtaining FreshConnect checks should call: 888-838-7697*