

Maine Senior FarmShare

2009

Program Information and Guidelines for Farmers



Maine Department of Agriculture

Before filling out an application to take part in the Maine Senior FarmShare Program in 2009, it is important that you read and understand the program guidelines as described in this document, as your signature on the application obligates you to agree and abide by all provisions of the guidelines.

If you have questions, please call the Maine Department of Agriculture at 287-7526 or email us at seniorfarmshare.agr@maine.gov.

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What is the Maine Senior FarmShare Program?

Through the Maine Senior FarmShare Program, Maine farmers provide fresh, unprocessed, locally grown produce to low-income seniors. Food is distributed directly from farms to seniors or through approved agencies to seniors, with each participating senior receiving a share (worth \$50) of produce during the growing season. Farms are prepaid in the spring for the produce they agree to provide later in the season.

The Maine Senior FarmShare Program is administered by the Maine Department of Agriculture (the Department) in partnership with other agencies and organizations, including the Office of Elder Services, the Maine Nutrition Network, Maine Cooperative Extension, and Maine's five Area Agencies on Aging. The Program is funded through the Senior Farmers' Market Nutrition Program (SFMNP), a permanent program administered by the USDA Food and Nutrition Service.

What are Shares?

Under the Senior FarmShare Program, a share is a \$50 of produce at market price. A qualified senior receives \$50 (a share) of produce during the growing season according to a signed share agreement between the senior and a farmer. Farmers are prepaid for shares they have committed to provide through the share agreement.

What products can be included in shares?

Only fresh unprocessed Maine-grown fruits, vegetables, and herbs, grown by the participating farmer (or up to 25% by other Maine farmers) are acceptable FarmShare products. Other items often offered for sale at farm stands i.e., eggs, meats, cheese, pickles, pies, dried fruits or vegetables, etc. **are not allowed.**

Individual Senior FarmShares

Types of Individual Shares for Seniors

- There are two types of individual Senior FarmShares. It is up to the farmer to determine which system will work best and specify this on the application form:
 - 1) **Shareholder Selects:** Seniors (shareholders) choose produce themselves at the farm, farmers' market or other location and draw down on a credit balance
 - 2) **Farmer Selects:** Farmer provides the senior a bag or box of assorted produce at least 4 times over a minimum of 8 weeks or upon a mutually agreeable schedule.

Guidelines for Providing Shares to Seniors

- Seniors who meet the age and income guidelines may receive one \$50 share per growing season.
- Farms must be able to provide a **broad range** (see definition below) of Maine-grown seasonal vegetables and fruits to individual shareholders over a period of time, no less than 8 weeks.
- A **broad range** of seasonal vegetables and fruits is defined here as at least 5 different items each week during an 8-week period. The 5 different items should not be the same for the 8-week period. For example, in the fall, the offerings might include potatoes, apples, squash, cabbage and carrots. In the late spring, the farm might offer spinach, beets, peas, strawberries and lettuce. It is fine for the farm to provide fewer items before or after a core 8-week period, determined by each farm.
- Prices charged to seniors for produce must be the same or lower than those charged to other retail customers.
- Farmers must maintain a tracking system of senior pick-ups and deliveries (a sample "Individual Share Record" form will be provided by the Department) and have seniors or their authorized representatives sign for each receipt of produce.
- Farmers who have a farm stand where produce is sold that is not grown in Maine must clearly designate/identify the produce eligible for senior selection.

Farmers must agree to distribute printed nutrition information to seniors if the Department or another partner agency provides it.

Bulk Shares

- At this time there is no bulk share component of the Maine Senior FarmShare Program, although it may be reestablished at a later date. Bulk shares would allow farms that specialize in only a few crops and/or have large volumes of specific crops to participate in the FarmShare program by providing a volume of bulk (wholesale) produce to approved agencies. Agencies would then further package produce (from one or more farms) and distribute it to eligible seniors who have signed share agreements with the agency.
- Farmers who cannot or don't want to provide individual shares are encouraged to request bulk shares, understanding that it is possible but unlikely that there will be bulk purchases in 2009.
- If a bulk program is initiated, more information will be made available.

How does the produce get to seniors?

Farmers determine whether they want to offer delivery to seniors or whether the produce will be picked up their farm stand, farmers' market or other designated site/s. It is important that seniors understand (at the time of sign-up) that if they are responsible for picking up their produce, they must have reliable transportation.

- Delivery and pick-up information is required on the farmer application form and will be listed on the FarmShare website as a guide for seniors and agencies to use when they are searching for information on participating farms.

Buying produce from other Maine farms is allowed and encouraged.

- Participating farmers must grow or oversee the growing of at least 75% of the produce they provide through the FarmShare Program. Farmers may buy up to 25% of the produce supplied to individual shareholders from other Maine farms for the purpose of supplementing and expanding their offerings. For example, farms that only grow vegetables may want to buy strawberries in the spring, blueberries in the summer and apples in the fall from other Maine growers. Farmers can contact Department for assistance in sourcing products that they don't grow.

What are the requirements for a senior to qualify for the Senior FarmShare Program?

To qualify, seniors must:

- Be age 60 or over (age 55 or over for Native Americans).
- Have a total income (including all pensions, social security and other payments) of no more than 185% of the poverty level. Income guidelines for the 2008 were \$19,240 for a senior living alone, or \$25,900 for a two-person household.) Couples meeting income guidelines are each eligible for a \$50 share. The income guidelines are not yet available for 2009, but will be printed on the senior agreement forms.

How do seniors find out about the Program?

- Through Area Agencies on Aging (1-877-353-3771)
- By visiting: www.getrealmaine.com//connect/farmshare
- By farmers contacting senior or other local organizations or using local media
- Word of mouth
- Statewide media coverage resulting from Department press release

Specifics of Farmer Participation – Who Does What and When?

1. How does a farmer apply to participate in Senior FarmShare?

- After reading through the guidelines (this document), farmers fill out an application form and complete the crop-offering list. Return both forms by **February 9, 2009**. **Note:** A representative who has legal authority to obligate the farmer to meet all provisions of the Program (these guidelines) must sign the application.
- Farmers apply for program participation annually.

2. How and when will farmers know how many shares they have?

- After receiving and compiling farmer applications and other relevant information, and matching it with senior eligibility around the state, the Maine Department of Agriculture (with the FarmShare Advisory group) will allocate shares to farmers.
- The Maine Department of Agriculture reserves the right to deny or limit participation in the program based on prior FarmShare performance, references and availability of shares.
- The Maine Department of Agriculture plans to be able to let farms know how many shares (individual and/or bulk) they have been allocated or authorized by the beginning/middle of March. Farmers will receive packets in the mail with all

the materials needed to sign agreements with seniors. It will then be up to the farmers and interested seniors to find each other and sign share agreements.

3. How does a farmer find and sign agreements with seniors?

- Refer to page 5 – “How do seniors find out about the program?”
- After approved for participation, farms providing individual shares to seniors will receive blank (3-part) agreement forms and other related documents from the Department. The agreement needs to be filled out, signed and dated by the farmer and the senior. The farmer and the senior each keep a copy of the agreement form, and the farmer sends the top copy to the Department.
- It is the farmers' responsibility to make sure that seniors understand the range of produce that will be made available to them, and whether the farmer or the senior will be making the selection. The Department will provide copies of the farmers' seasonal crop offerings (provided by the farmer on the application), which can be given to seniors.
- It is the farmers' responsibility to make sure that seniors understand the pick-up or delivery arrangements the farm is offering. The farmer needs to confirm that interested seniors will really be able to use their shares before they sign the agreement - for example, confirm that the senior has reliable transportation.
- Shares may not be contracted with members of the farmers' immediate family or household members of the farmer.
- Farmers must obtain signed proxy forms (form to be provided by the Department) for seniors who will have another person acting on their behalf (e.g. for picking up produce), and keep these on file.
- Farmers must maintain waiting lists with contact information of seniors who contacted them about the program, but for whom they didn't have available shares. (A waiting list form will be provided by the Department to participating farms.)
- Allocated shares are expected to be filled and paperwork sent to the Department by June 5, 2009. After that date it is up to the Department's discretion to extend time to fill the shares. Shares may be reallocated to other farms.

4. How do farmers get paid for providing the produce?

- The Maine Department of Agriculture plans to issue checks to farmers before the end of May for all share agreements received at the Department by April 13th.
- Payments to farmers will be made in June for agreements received after April 14th and before May 15th. Checks will be issued at least monthly for all agreements arriving after May 15th.

5. What does a farmer do if seniors don't use all of their \$50 shares?

- It is expected that farms will sign agreements with seniors that can and will use their entire \$50 share, but in the situation where a senior does not use his/her entire share (for any reason), it is the farmers' responsibility to sign on additional seniors from their waiting lists. Note that each senior who signs an agreement is provided with \$50 of produce – partial shares are not provided. If the farmer has less than \$50 to make up for partially used shares, it is the farmer's choice to sign up another senior or pay back the Department for the amount less than \$50.

6. What record keeping and monitoring are required of farmers? Farmers must agree to:

- Be monitored for compliance with Senior FarmShare Program requirements.
- Notify the Maine Department of Agriculture of any changes in address, phone number or email address.
- Fulfill all financial & service obligations of these guidelines.
- Finish all produce distribution by October 31st.
- Have a zero balance at the end of the program year.
- Submit year-end accounting reports by expected date.
- Submit year-end survey by expected date.
- Contact the Maine Department of Agriculture immediately if the farmer encounters any problems with crops, seniors or authorized agencies that may prohibit the farmer from meeting Program obligations.

7. What training is required of and provided to participating farmers?

- Farmers must be willing to participate in ongoing training as needed (as determined by the Department) on Senior FarmShare procedures.
- Farmers must provide training to any employees with FarmShare senior participant responsibilities.
- All first-year FarmShare farmers will be required to participate in interactive training, either in person or on the phone. Options will be provided by the Department.

8. What happens if a farmer violates the program guidelines or cannot fulfill his or her obligations?

- The Department will demand a refund from any Farmer that fails to provide the full benefit to all SFMNP shareholders as specified in the share agreement, or that provides ineligible foods as substitutes for eligible foods.
- The Department may disqualify a Farmer for FarmShare Program violations.
- The Farmer has the right to appeal a denial of an application to participate, a disqualification, or a SFMNP sanction by the Department.
- A farmer who commits fraud or engages in other illegal activity is liable to prosecution under applicable Federal, State or local laws.

Farmers must also agree to:

- Be accountable for actions of employees in the provision of eligible foods and related activities.
- Offer the same courtesies to FarmShare participants as other customers.
- Not discriminate against any participant because of race, color, sex, age, religion, national origin, disability or any other factors as specified in the Civil Rights Act of 1964, and subsequent amendments for any applicable State statutes.

Where can farmers call with questions?

If you have questions, please call the Maine Department of Agriculture, Senior FarmShare Program at 287-7526, or send e-mail to: maineseniorfarmshare.agr@maine.gov.

