

Everyone Deserves to Eat Well

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“I can’t afford to buy vegetables from the farmer’s market. I live on a fixed income.” I’ve heard seniors say this more than once. I understand that paying rent, utilities, and medicine comes first. That being said, healthy food is good medicine too. People who eat more fruits and vegetables are less likely to be overweight or obese. Eating healthfully also helps prevent diseases like cancer, heart disease, diabetes, and high blood pressure.

I am part of a group called the South Sound Food System Network’s (SSFSN). We meet monthly to share information about the food system. Starting this summer, we are promoting local foods for everyone. For the purpose of this article, “local” means food grown within 100 miles of where you live. Locally grown foods include fruits, vegetables, meat, milk, and eggs. Locally prepared foods include baked goods, jams, hummus, salsa, and sauerkraut. Our message is that everyone deserves to eat well.

My agency, Senior Services for South Sound (SSSS), manages eight meal sites in Mason and Thurston Counties. Each meal we serve includes a good source of protein, 2 servings of grains/cereals, 3 servings of fruits and vegetables, and a serving of milk or dairy substitute. Senior meals are available to people 60 years of age and older (55+ for Native American/Alaska Natives) for a donation regardless of income. Although income is not a qualification for our meals, 40% of people who attend report that they live at or below the federal poverty level. This means that they are living on \$990/month or less for a household of one; \$1330 or less per month for a household of two. It is hard to eat well on a tight budget, but here is a list of programs that can help.

Several ways to eat well on a budget in the South Sound!

- Join us for a healthy meal and social time at a senior meal site near you. You have to be a senior, but you don’t have to be low income to qualify. To see the lunch schedule, go to www.southsoundseniors.org
- Homebound seniors who cannot prepare meals for themselves may qualify for Meals On Wheels (MOW) regardless of income. In addition to receiving a nutritious meal, the senior will be visited regularly by a caring MOW volunteer. Many seniors tell us that their MOW volunteer is the only person they see some weeks and that the visit helps them feel less lonely.
- Low-income seniors can sign up for a free \$40 set of farmers market vouchers. Mason and Thurston County Seniors can contact SSSS at 360-586-6181 or go to www.southsoundseniors.org. Lewis County seniors can call 360-748-0061 or visit <http://lewiscountywa.gov/publichealth/publichealth-senior-services>
This program is a partnership with the Lewis Mason Thurston Area Agency on Aging.

- Visit your local food bank. The Thurston County Food Bank provides a variety of fresh, frozen, and canned fruits, vegetables, and other healthy foods. To find out more, call (360) 352-8597 or go to www.thurstoncountfoodbank.org
- Use your Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)/EBT benefits (formerly known as “food stamps”) to buy fresh produce at your local farmer’s market. The Tumwater Farmers Market can help you to double your benefits through the Market Match program. It is open each Wednesday from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. May through September. For more information, call 360-464-5879 or visit www.tumwaterfarmersmarket.org.
- Make your SNAP benefits last longer by using them to purchase plant seeds and starts. For every \$1 spent on seeds, home gardeners can grow an average of \$25 worth of produce!
- Apply for a free garden bed for your home through GRuB (www.goodgrub.org).
- Locate a community garden near you by contacting your local WSU Master Gardener Program.
- Sign up for a CSA (Community Supported Agriculture) to receive a share of fresh produce from a local farm. Find farms that accept SNAP/EBT benefits by visiting the Puget Sound Farm Guide at <http://www.pugetsoundfresh.org/>