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Vancouver Farmers Markets coupon program for low-income families receives \$42,500 boost from Whole Foods Market

VANCOUVER, BC – December 10, 2015 – Sixty low-income families, many of them refugees and newly settled Canadians, will get a boost to their food budgets at Vancouver Farmers Markets (VFM) this fall and winter, thanks to the support of natural foods retailer Whole Foods Market.

Whole Foods Market is providing \$42,500 in funding for the *Fresh to Families Project*, a Vancouver-based expansion of the Farmers Market Nutrition Coupon Program (FMNCP).

Fresh to Families will run until December 31, 2015 at VFM's winter markets, and start up again in June 2016 for the summer market season. Through its in-store Community Giving Program, Whole Foods Market plans to raise an additional \$32,900 for 2017, effectively doubling the number of families who will have access to the coupon program in Vancouver by June 2017.

"We all wanted to see the coupon program grow," says Jen Candela, who manages community partnerships for VFM. "The extra money that comes each season from the coupons has been a boon to our growers, while also providing fresh, farm-direct produce to dozens of Vancouver families. And, thanks to the support of Whole Foods Market, VFM is able to offer access to the coupon program at our winter markets for the first time."

"Whole Foods Market, at its core, is dedicated to supporting communities where our stores are located," says Grant Daisley, associate marketing coordinator for Whole Foods Market in Western Canada. "We love partnering with organizations such as Vancouver Farmers Markets that value nutrition and access to healthier food choices as much as we do."

The FMNCP is a provincially funded healthy eating program – coordinated by the BC Association of Farmers Markets (BCAFM) – that provides fresh food coupons to low income families and seniors that can be spent at all participating BC farmers markets. The program was first piloted in 2007, and has since grown to serve 48 communities and over 3,000 households in BC. The FMNCP coupon redemption rate for the program in 2015 was 97%.

Sanja Sladojevic is the program manager for Mt. Pleasant Circles of Care and Connection, one of three community agencies benefiting from the *Fresh to Families Project*. Twenty-three of her client families, many of them refugees from Afghanistan, Iran, and Iraq, came to the Mt. Pleasant Farmers Market to use their coupons for the first time in October.

“It was wonderful to see so many happy faces,” says Sladojevic. “Most of our families didn’t realize Vancouver had markets like this, and they left with bags full of fresh fruit, vegetables, eggs, fish and meat. One parent commented that the market reminded him of home. These feelings of familiarity and belonging are precious for refugee families.”

VFM has played host to the FMNCP since its inception, and receives allocations from the province for 110 families and seniors in Vancouver each year. In an effort to expand the reach of the FMNCP in 2015, VFM partnered with three community agencies that work with vulnerable and low income families: VCH Healthiest Babies Possible, MOSAIC Building Blocks, and Mt. Pleasant Circles of Care & Connection.

The *Fresh to Families* partners hope to see the project grow. VFM is accepting ongoing donations and sponsorships for the program.

“We’d like to see our participants receiving coupons all year long, and add more families to the program,” says Candela. “But we need more support and funding, both from corporate sponsors and private donations.”

About Whole Foods Market: Founded in 1980 in Austin, Texas, Whole Foods Market (wholefoodsmarket.com, NASDAQ: WFM), is the leading natural and organic food retailer. The company's motto, “Whole Foods, Whole People, Whole Planet”™ captures its mission to ensure customer satisfaction and health, Team Member excellence and happiness, enhanced shareholder value, community support and environmental improvement. Thanks to the company’s more than 91,000 Team Members, Whole Foods Market has been ranked as one of the “100 Best Companies to Work For” in America by *FORTUNE* magazine for 15 consecutive years. In fiscal year 2014, the company had sales of \$14.2 billion and currently has 434 stores in the United States, Canada and the United Kingdom.

About Vancouver Farmers Markets: Vancouver Farmers Markets feed people and create community. We support small farm production, nourish people and connect neighbours. Founded in 1995, Vancouver Farmers Markets (VFM) has grown to become one of Canada’s leading farmers markets, with nine weekly markets, 425,000 shoppers per year, and annual sales of \$8.17 million. For more information on Vancouver Farmers Markets, visit: <http://www.eatlocal.org>

Additional info for the Fresh to Families Project: <http://eatlocal.org/fresh-to-families/>

Additional info for the Farmers Market Nutrition Coupon Program:
<http://www.bcfarmersmarket.org/nutrition-coupon-program>

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Media Contact:

Jen Candela
Communications Manager
Vancouver Farmers Markets
jen@eatlocal.org
604-879-3276