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## Community

# Coupons link local farms, churches

By Carol Reeves  
Gazette-Times reporter

### *Project leaders hope to give low-income families coupons*

More than \$12,000 in "That's My Farmer" coupons were sold in 2006 in an effort to promote social justice, support local family farms and address hunger in Benton County.

The amount of coupons sold, for use at the local farmers markets, represented a 300 percent increase over the year before, when the Interfaith Food and Farms Partnership campaign was launched by St. Mary's Catholic Church.

"People were universally enthusiastic about the program," Leslie Richards of Oregon State University's human development and family science department said during a celebration Thursday night at St. Mary's.

Richards, who teaches a "Families in Poverty" class at OSU, served as an evaluator for the Food and Farms Partnership, which was expanded in 2006 under a USDA grant received by Ecumenical Ministries of Oregon.

Participating farmers, representatives of local faith communities who sold the coupons and partners from OSU and EMO gathered to hear reports on the 2006 campaign and make plans for next year's program.

Books of six \$3 coupons were sold for \$20 with the extra \$2 going to provide coupons for low-income clients of the South Corvallis Food Bank, the Gleaners' Program of Linn-Benton Food Share, and the St. Vincent de Paul Food Pantry at St. Mary's. More than \$2,000 in coupons were given away.

Not all the coupons that were given out were redeemed, however. Only 43 percent of the donated coupons were used, raising questions about food access for the poor, Richards reported.

"This gets at a basic social separation," she speculated. "People think 'the farmers' market is for yuppies.'" Participants agreed that including more low-income people in conversations about how the program can be improved for next year should be a priority.

Funds not used to reimburse farmers for unredeemed coupons will be saved to enable project coordinators to distribute coupons to low-income families early next spring.

Farmers and church members at Thursday's meeting agreed that in addition to finding ways to better reach low-income residents, next year's coupon program should establish stronger connections between congregations and participating farmers.

One suggested farmers could bring samples of their produce and give cooking demonstrations at the churches. Another said people from the churches could take "field trips" to their farms.

Julia Sunkler of My Pharm in Monroe suggested each farmer provide a photo and farm description to the participating congregations so they might feel more personally connected.

"That way people can learn that I'm in braids and I have a dog named Ebony," Sunkler said.

Liv Gifford, local coordinator of the That's My Farmer project, expressed thanks to the eight churches and farms that participated in the program.

They included St. Mary's, Corvallis Mennonite Fellowship, First United Methodist, Monroe United Methodist, Knollbrook Christian Reform Church, First Presbyterian, First Congregational United Church of Christ and Grace Lutheran Church, as well as Sunbow Farms, Midway Farms, My Pharm, Denison Farms, Gathering Together Farm, Bald Hill Farm, Deep Roots Farm and Heavenly Harvest Farm.

The campaign is already seeking additional faith communities and farms to join the coupon program next year.

At a glance: For more information about the "That My Farmer" food coupon program, contact Liv Gifford at 757-1988, ext. 107, or at [lgifford@emoregon.org](mailto:lgifford@emoregon.org).