

Farmers market and WARM to team up

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Clients of the Westerville Area Resource Ministry will have some new options from WARM's food pantries this spring -- fresh-grown produce supplied by local farmers.

For the first time, the Westerville farmers market will partner with the nonprofit agency to supply those in need with food grown fresh for the market, according to farmers market coordinator Doug Winbigler.

Winbigler said the program will operate by providing clients of WARM with coupons or certificates that can be used as cash at the farmers market. Market vendors who accept these coupons will be reimbursed using funds specifically ear-marked for the project, according to Winbigler.

"Final details are still being worked out, but the clients will get a coupon, which the farmers market vendors can then turn in to WARM to get reimbursed," Winbigler said. "They can get fresh fruits and vegetables that are better for them, and taste better, than canned food. It's exciting that this has taken off as it has; it's nice to be a part of something that will have a positive effect on someone at the base level."

WARM is a nonprofit, faith-based organization that serves the Westerville community by supporting families who are on the "economic and spiritual journey of self-sufficiency," according to the group's Web site. WARM provides short-term assistance via its food pantry, along with educational services and spiritual support. In addition to the food pantry, WARM also assists families whose income is below the poverty line with family budget counseling and job placement assistance.

"It's pretty early for us to comment on (the program), but it sounds like a win-win deal," said WARM executive director Scott Marier.

Winbigler said that an initial donation of \$1,000 was supplied by the St. Paul the Apostle parish, to help begin the program by reimbursing market vendors. The St. Paul School and student council also arranged a "dress code infraction day" to help raise additional money, according to Winbigler.

"We're starting to look for additional funding right now. We're hoping that perhaps youth groups, or church groups, or some of the sustainable 'green' groups in Westerville will see this as a way to help the community in addition to being a positive for sustainable agriculture," Winbigler said.

He added that the Westerville farmers market will kick off this year on May 7, and will be held each Wednesday from 3 to 6 p.m. in the Church of the Messiah parking lot, 51 N. State St. The farmers market will continue to run until Oct. 29. Winbigler said that the market will feature about 20 vendors, who will sell everything from fresh eggs and free-range chicken to honey, homemade bread, grass-fed beef, baked goods and maple syrup.

More information on the Westerville farmers market can be found on the Web at <http://www.shopuptownwesterville.com>.