

**Maine Department of Agriculture,
Conservation & Forestry**



2017 Program Guidelines and Information

Before filling out an application to participate in the 2017 Maine Senior FarmShare Program, it is important that you read and understand the program guidelines and information. Your signature on the application obligates you to agree to and abide by all provisions of the program guidelines.

If you have questions, please call the Maine Senior FarmShare Program at 287-7526,
or e-mail: seniorfarmshare@maine.gov.

Maine Senior FarmShare – 2017 Program Guidelines and Information

CONTENTS

1. What is the Maine Senior FarmShare Program?	Pg. 1
2. What are shares?	Pg. 1
3. What products can be included in shares?	Pg. 1
4. Types of individual shares for seniors	Pg. 1
5. Guidelines for providing individual shares	Pg. 2
6. How does the produce get to seniors?	Pg. 2
7. Buying Produce from other Maine farms is allowed and encouraged.	Pg. 3
8. What are the requirements for a senior to qualify for Senior FarmShare?	Pg. 3
9. How do seniors find out about the program?	Pg. 3
10. Specifics of farmer participation – who does what and when?	
A. How does a farmer apply to participate in the program?	Pg. 3
B. How and when will farmers know how many shares they have?	Pg. 4
C. How does a farmer find and contract agreements with seniors?	Pg. 4-5
11. How are farmers paid for providing the produce?	Pg. 5
12. What does a farmer do if seniors do not use all of their \$50 shares?	Pg. 5
13. What record keeping and monitoring are required of farmers?	Pg. 6
14. What training is required of and provided to participating farmers?	Pg. 6
15. What happens if a farmer violates the program guidelines?	Pg. 7
16. Where can farmers call with questions?	Pg. 7

If you have questions, please call the Maine Senior FarmShare Program at 287-7526,
or e-mail: seniorfarmshare@maine.gov.

Maine Senior FarmShare – 2017 Program Guidelines and Information

1. 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. Each participating senior receives a share (worth \$50) of produce during the growing season. Farms are prepaid in advance for the produce they commit to provide later in the season.
- The Maine Department of Agriculture, Conservation & Forestry administers the Maine Senior FarmShare Program. The program is funded through the USDA Food and Nutrition Service, Senior Farmers' Market Nutrition Program (SFMNP).

2. What are shares?

- In the Senior FarmShare Program, a share is \$50 of produce at market price. A qualified senior receives a share (\$50 worth) of produce during the growing season. The share is provided according to the signed agreement between the senior and a farmer. Farms are prepaid in advance for the produce they commit to provide through each signed FarmShare agreement.

3. 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, dried fruits or vegetables, meats, cheese, pickles, etc. are not allowed.**

4. Types of individual shares for seniors

There are two types of shares to offer seniors. It is up to the farmer to determine which system will work best and specify this on the agreement form:

- **Senior Selects:** Senior (shareholder) chooses produce themselves at the farm, farmers' market or other location and draws down on a \$50 credit balance.
- **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 (approved by the program).

5. Guidelines for providing shares to seniors

- Maine residents who meet the age and income guidelines are eligible to 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 participants over a period of no less than 8 weeks, or upon a mutually agreeable schedule approved by the FarmShare program.
 - A broad range of seasonal vegetables and fruits is defined as at least five different items each week during a core 8-week period. The five different items should not be the same for the 8-week period. For example, in the late spring, the farm might offer spinach, beets, peas, strawberries, and lettuce. In the fall, the offerings might include potatoes, apples, squash, cabbage, and carrots. It is acceptable 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 and have seniors or their authorized representatives sign for each receipt of produce. The FarmShare program will provide a sample tracking form.
- Farmers who have a farm stand where produce is sold that is not grown in Maine must clearly designate/identify the produce not eligible for senior selection.
- Farmers must allow FarmShare participants to purchase any Maine grown produce that is available to all other customers. Farmers may reasonably limit the amount of produce participants can purchase that the farmer has bought in from other farms.

6. How does the produce get to seniors?

- Farmers determine whether they want to offer delivery to seniors or if the produce will be picked up their farm, farm stand, farmers' market, or other designated site/s. It is important that seniors understand that if they are responsible for picking up their produce, they must do so by the date you designate.
- Delivery and pick-up information is required on the farmer application form and will be listed on the Get Real Maine website as a guide for seniors and agencies to use when they are searching for information on participating farms.

7. 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 only buy up to 25%** of the produce supplied to participants 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.

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

- To qualify, seniors must be Maine resident, age 60 or over, and must have a total income (including all pensions, social security and other payments) of no more than 185% of the poverty level.
- **2017 income eligibility guidelines are currently \$21,978 individual; \$29,637/two-person household. (If these guidelines are updated later in the 2017 season, farmers will be notified by mail when the information becomes available.)**
- Couples meeting income eligibility guidelines are each eligible for a \$50 share.

9. How do seniors find out about the program?

- Through Area Agencies on Aging at 1-877-353-3771.
- By visiting: www.getrealmaine.com.
- By farmers contacting seniors, local organizations, or using local media.
- Word of mouth.

10. Specifics of farmer participation – who does what and when?

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

- Farmers apply for program participation annually. The farmer application is posted at www.getrealmaine.com near the start of each year. Farmer applications are typically due mid-February.
- Farms must have a history of operating and selling produce and must be *for-profit*.
- Minimum acreage for any participating farm is one acre of mixed produce growing.
- After reading the Program Guidelines and Information, farmers complete and submit the application form including the crop-offering list to the FarmShare program.
- Farmers must submit applications by the due date specified by the program.

Note: A representative who has legal authority to obligate the farmer to meet all provisions of the Program Guidelines must sign the application.

B. 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 FarmShare program will allocate shares to farmers.
- **Allocation of shares to farmers follows the USDA procedure of distribution of SFMNP funds to previously participating State agencies. The FarmShare program allocates available funds to keep prior year participating farmers (in good standing) at the level of shares they received the previous fiscal year if sufficient funds are available. If funds are available after allocating to previous FarmShare farmers, new farmer applications are considered.**
- New farmers to the FarmShare Program are limited to five shares (participants) per acre of mixed produce growing with a maximum of 25 shares for the first year of participation.
- The FarmShare program will notify farms how many individual shares they have been allocated in the spring. Farmers approved to participate will receive packets in the mail with all the materials needed to sign up seniors. It will then be up to the farmers and interested seniors to find each other and sign Senior FarmShare agreements.
- **The FarmShare program reserves the right to deny or limit participation in the program based on prior FarmShare performance, references, and availability of funds.**

C. How does a farmer find and contract agreements with seniors?

- Refer to item 9 – “How do seniors find out about the program?”
- After approved for participation, farms authorized to provide Senior FarmShare benefits will receive blank (3-part) agreement forms and other related documents from the FarmShare program. These agreement forms need to be completed, 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 submits the top copy to the FarmShare program.
- Farmers are responsible 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 FarmShare program will provide a copy of the farmer’s seasonal crop offerings (provided by the farmer on the application), which can be given to seniors.
- Farmers should make sure that seniors understand the pick-up or delivery arrangements the farm offers. Farmers should confirm that interested seniors will be able to use their share before they sign the agreement and **that the senior has not already contracted with another farm.**

- Shares may not be contracted with members of the farmers' immediate family or household members of the farmer.
- Farmers can obtain proxy forms from the FarmShare program for seniors who will have another person acting on their behalf (e.g. for picking up produce).
- Farmers must maintain waiting lists with contact information of seniors who contact them about the program, but for whom they did not have available shares. The FarmShare program will provide a waiting list form to participating farms.
- Farmers must submit signed agreements for allocated shares by July 31, 2017. The FarmShare program will reallocate your unobligated shares to other farmers after this date unless you request an extension.
- **The FarmShare program requires participating farmers to submit completed FarmShare agreements within ONE WEEK of a senior's signature. FNS regulation section 249.6(g) (1) states that applicants must be notified of their eligibility or ineligibility for benefits, or of their placement on a waiting list, within 15 days from the date of application. Therefore, the FarmShare program is required to review all agreements and certify that each senior is eligible within 15 days of application. This includes all "spare" and "replacement" agreements.**

11. How are farmers paid for providing the produce?

Farmers begin submitting agreements to the FarmShare program for payment in the spring. The FarmShare program begins disbursing funds to farmers as soon as possible for agreements received. The program will issue payments on a minimum bi-weekly basis based on receipt date of completed and signed senior agreements. The State issues payments to farmers on Mondays.

12. What does a farmer do if seniors do not 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 must be provided with \$50 worth of produce.** Providing partial shares is not acceptable unless the senior is unable to use the entire \$50 share. If the farmer has less than \$50 to make up for partially used shares, it is the farmer's choice to sign up an additional senior and provide that senior with an entire \$50 share or to pay back the FarmShare program the difference. Farmers can combine and utilize partially used shares from multiple seniors to sign up an additional senior.

13. What record keeping and monitoring are required of farmers?

Farmers must agree to:

- Be monitored for compliance with Senior FarmShare Program requirements.
- Notify the FarmShare program of any changes in address, phone number, or email address.
- Fulfill all financial & service obligations of these guidelines.
- **Have all agreements signed by both farmer and senior by September 30 each year.** The grant period closes on September 30 yearly and all funds must be committed by this date. This holds true for any agreement type (i.e. spares, replacements, etc.).
- Finish all produce distribution by the date they committed to.
- **Submit end-of-season accounting reports and surveys by due date.**
- Farmers must have a zero balance at the end of the program year or submit a refund check with your end-of-season accounting report.
- Contact the FarmShare program immediately if the farmer encounters any problems that may prohibit the farmer from meeting Senior FarmShare obligations.
- Be accountable for actions of employees in the provision of eligible foods and related activities.
- Distribute nutrition information to seniors if the FarmShare program or a partnering agency provides it.
- **Offer the same courtesies to FarmShare participants as all 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.

Please note: It is extremely important that all farmers submit end-of-season-accounting reports by the due date. If this report not received by due date, it could affect your farms participation or allocation the following year.

14. 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 FarmShare program) on Senior FarmShare procedures.
- Farmers must provide training to any employees with Senior FarmShare participant responsibilities.
- All first-year FarmShare farmers will be required to participate in interactive training, either in person or on the phone. The FarmShare program will provide options.

15. What happens if a farmer violates the program guidelines or cannot fulfill their obligations?

- The FarmShare program will demand a refund from any farmer that fails to provide the full benefit to all SFMNP participants as specified in the Senior FarmShare agreement, or that provides ineligible foods as substitutes for eligible foods.
- The FarmShare program may disqualify a farmer for program violations.
- The FarmShare program must involve the USDA Office of the Inspector General when there is credible evidence that fraud and abuse has occurred.
- The farmer has the right to appeal a denial of an application to participate, a disqualification, or a SFMNP sanction by the FarmShare program.
- A farmer who commits fraud or engages in other illegal activity is liable to prosecution under applicable Federal, State or local laws.

16. Where can farmers call with questions?

If you have questions, please call the Department of Agriculture, Conservation & Forestry, Maine Senior FarmShare Program at 287-7526, or e-mail: seniorfarmshare@maine.gov.

USDA Nondiscrimination Statement

The U.S. Department of Agriculture prohibits discrimination against its customers, employees, and applicants for employment on the bases of race, color, national origin, age, disability, sex, gender identity, religion, reprisal, and where applicable, political beliefs, marital status, familial or parental status, sexual orientation, or all or part of an individual's income is derived from any public assistance program, or protected genetic information in employment or in any program or activity conducted or funded by the Department. (Not all prohibited bases will apply to all programs and/or employment activities.)

If you wish to file a Civil Rights program complaint of discrimination, complete the USDA Program Discrimination Complaint Form, found online at: http://www.ascr.usda.gov/complaint_filing_cust.html, or any USDA office, or call (866) 632-9992 to request the form. You may also write a letter containing all of the information requested on the form. Send your completed complaint form or letter to us by mail at U.S. Department of Agriculture, Director, Office of Adjudication, 1400 Independence Avenue, S.W., Washington, D.C. 20025-9410, by fax (202) 690-7442 or email at program.intake@usda.gov.

Individuals who are deaf, hard of hearing or have speech disabilities may contact USDA through the Federal Relay Service at (800) 877-8339; or (800) 845-6136 (Spanish).

USDA is an equal opportunity provider and employer.