

## **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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### **Food Stamps accepted at Regional Farmers' Markets**

Food stamp users are now able to access fresh food at farmers' markets. This season, Bend, Prineville, Madras and Redmond Farmers' Markets will be expanding access for residents to purchase fresh, local and affordable vegetables, fruits, and meats. Using a wireless electronic transfer system, Oregon Trail (food stamp) participants and debit users can now swipe their card to make purchases.

"This is a win-win situation for everyone. Our project enables low-income residents' access to local and fresh food, increases the capacity of the markets to provide to a wider audience, and directly supports farmers in the region", states Katrina Van Dis of Central Oregon Intergovernmental Council (COIC). With the support of a USDA grant, COIC is working with local farmers' market managers and board members to increase the capacity of the region's farmers' markets.

Since the beginning of the economic recession, the State of Oregon has seen a 46% increase in the number of food stamp recipients; Central Oregon has seen a 19% increase in the number of food stamp recipients in the last year. Over 40,000 individuals can now purchase fresh food that couldn't before.

"The system is easy", states Nora Shapiro of Madras Saturday Market, "an Oregon Trail or debit card user swipes their card like they would in the supermarket and in return they receive wooden tokens. These tokens are then used as an alternate currency with our vendors". The tokens are unique to each market but do not expire and can be used like cash.

Local farmers in the region have stepped up to the plate in terms of providing fresh products at the farmer's markets and are excited about this opportunity. "This program is absolutely wonderful", says Jerre Kosta Dodson of Dancing Cow Farm and Board Member of Prineville Farmers' Market. "To be able to give back to the community is important for my husband and me. We want to provide healthy choices for all individuals, which is one of the main reasons we farm."

Not only can Oregon Trail recipients buy fresh food but also WIC (Women, Infant and Children) clients and seniors (Senior Farm Direct Nutrition Program). These programs are different than the Oregon Trail system where instead individuals receive vouchers or checks from the State of Oregon that can be used at eligible vendors.

For more information on all of these programs visit the Oregon Farmers Market Association website at [www.oregonfarmersmarkets.org](http://www.oregonfarmersmarkets.org) or contact:

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