ACAP kicks off 2017 Farmers Markets at Gouldville

PRESQUE ISLE – Strawberries, vegetables and other farm fresh goodies were just some of the healthy things available at the Aroostook County Action Program’s Early Care and Education Center at the historic Gouldville School Building at 44 Park Street in Presque Isle as ACAP’s Women, Infants and Children Nutrition Program kicked off its 2017 season Farmers Market on Wednesday, July 19.

Future Farmers Markets this season at Gouldville run from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. on Thursday, July 27; Thursday, Aug. 10; Wednesday, Aug. 16; Thursday, Aug. 24; Wednesday, Sept. 6; and Thursday, Sept. 14.

Farmers Markets at Gouldville have been around for a few seasons now and their popularity continues to grow year after year. The markets, which are held in conjunction with WIC clinics, are open to the public, but were originally designed with WIC customers in mind so they could pick up their food vouchers and then use them that same day to purchase the fresh produce right on site.

“This is super convenient, one stop shopping,” said WIC customer Kylee Pelletier. “I picked up the WIC checks and Farmers Market Vouchers and was able to use everything at once. WIC is great!”

Goughan Farms supplies the produce, which, for the opening week, included strawberries, beets, zucchini and potatoes. Although other farmers have joined in the market over the years, Goughan Farms have offered a steady presence since the Farmers Market program began and have built a community of followers. Throughout the growing season, the variety of produce varies depending on what is harvestable in any given week.

The ACAP WIC sponsored Farmers Markets are just a little different than many other markets in the area, though, and that makes a trip to Gouldville on Farmers Market day extra worthwhile. Because the market was designed around WIC customers, nutrition education and building excitement around trying new and interesting foods is a key component of the markets. ACAP Nutrition Coordinator Rachelle Roy explained that the market gives WIC customers and the young children who attend ACAP Early Care and Education programs at Gouldville an opportunity to try fruits and vegetables they may never have tasted before. For this reason, she prepares recipes around what produce is in season to make available for market customers. In addition, the Gouldville Farmers Markets offer a fun activity for the kids, taste sampling and free giveaways.

“Bringing locally grown fresh fruits and vegetables to our customers certainly makes these items readily available to our participants in a comfortable environment that they are able to ask questions, try unfamiliar foods and get useful, easy recipes,” said Roy. “We aid in improving our customers’ nutritional knowledge while giving them an opportunity to use both their WIC Fruit and Vegetable Check as well as their Farmers Market Vouchers and thus enhancing their diets with fresh produce on site.”

In fact, bringing the produce directly to the Gouldville site has benefits that extend beyond the WIC clientele and general public who take advantage of the market. The children attending ACAP Early Care and Education programs at Gouldville also have opportunities to partake in the fresh fruits and vegetables thanks to the ingenuity and work of the center cook who incorporates the seasonal produce into her meal plans.
“(It’s) so convenient to be able to get fresh fruits and vegetables to be used right here at the center to make meals and snacks. Zucchini muffins are a hit with the children,” said ECE Center Cook Valerie Delong.

ACAP historically has worked to build strong connections with community partners, and the Farmers Market is no exception. Throughout the summer, different community partners and other ACAP programs will simultaneously offer activities and participate in the education components of the Gouldville Farmers Markets. Some of the community partners either scheduled to participate this year or who have been past participants include Drug Free Communities, Maine SNAP-Ed-ACAP, 5210, ACAP Oral Health, ACAP Community Health, Car Seat Safety Checks, Maine Families, and the University of Maine Cooperative Extension.