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USU Extension and Salt Lake County Partner to Provide Produce for Seniors



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Salt Lake County Aging and Adult Services has partnered with Utah State University Extension to provide the fresh produce weekly to seniors as a supplement to the Meals on Wheels program.

Getting fresh produce into the hands of homebound senior citizens is the goal of the new MealsPlus fresh produce program in Salt Lake County. Salt Lake County Aging and Adult Services has partnered with Utah State University Extension to provide the fresh produce weekly to seniors as a supplement to the Meals on Wheels program.

“We are working with several partners to get fresh produce donated once per week,” said Jeremy Hart, Salt Lake County’s Independent Aging Program manager. “We harvest and package the produce on Monday and get it out to our seniors on Tuesday.”

The MealsPlus program is volunteer based and relies on donations from local farmers and gardeners. USU Extension has played a vital role in connecting local producers with the program.

“Extension has been instrumental in helping us develop the program,” Hart said. “They’ve helped connect us with many local farmers and producers. They also maintain the garden areas at Wheeler Historic Farm and all the produce harvested is donated to the program.”

Katie Wagner, USU Extension assistant professor of horticulture in Salt Lake County, has worked to create partnerships within the community to help the program succeed. Wagner has facilitated a partnership with the Genesis Youth Center and Bell Organic Gardens. Several youth from

Genesis Youth Center travel to Bell Organic Gardens each week to harvest excess produce to donate to MealsPlus. Wagner has also facilitated a partnership with the Salt Lake County Jail where produce from the jail's garden is donated regularly.

“It's the spirit of community partnership and it's a win-win relationship for everybody,” said Wagner. “There's benefit for everyone involved.”

Providing homebound or vulnerable seniors with fresh produce they might not receive otherwise is a way to ensure that they are getting the recommended daily servings of fruits and vegetables, according to Hart. Although many of the seniors receive nutritious mid-day meals from the Meals on Wheels program, most don't have easy access to, or can't afford, fresh fruits and vegetables.

Currently, the program reaches less than 10 percent of Meals on Wheels clients. According to Hart, the goal is to increase that percentage so that all Meals on Wheels clients receive the fresh produce if they desire.

The MealsPlus program accepts both monetary and fresh produce donations. Those interested in donating or volunteering time are encouraged to contact Hart at (385) 468-3258 or at jhart@slco.org.

Related link:

[Utah State University Extension](#)

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