

MONDAY  
JULY 26, 2010

# GROWING FUTURES

## NEAT Summer Program Provides Produce, Education To Kids



**M**IDDLETOWN — At 9 years old, Brandon Baker is already a fan of farmers markets.

Brandon, who attends a free summer snack and lunch program at the Salvation Army in the North End, has learned to talk up the vendors at the local farmers market for produce tips. He's also learned that smaller cucumbers are tastier than big ones because they have fewer seeds, and that it pays to comparison shop.

Brandon's experiences are precisely what the North End Action Team and the Community Health Center were hoping to foster through a new program that allows children to buy \$10 worth of free produce every Friday when the farmers set up in front of 575 Main St.

The children, who attend the summer meal program and a summer arts and science camp at the Green Street Arts Center, each pay the farmers with 10 wooden coins worth \$10. The vendors redeem the coins for real money from NEAT, whose office is across the street.

The summertime program, funded largely by a \$2,000 grant from the Community Health Center, accomplishes several goals, said Izzi Greenberg, NEAT's executive director.

The kids, many of whom are from low-income families, learn about fruits and vegetables and share those meals with their families. The program also brings a boost to the farmers market, which has grown from two vendors to about a dozen since it began last year.

The wooden coins are also drawing more children to the summer meals program at the Salvation Army on Fridays, Greenberg said.

"Whole families are coming together, but the kids are leading the way," she said. "I think just changing that dynamic within a household is really interesting."

About 60 children participate in NEAT's produce program each week, Greenberg said. The advocacy group hopes to serve about 80 children a week.

The program first introduces the children to vegetables at the Salvation Army, where they receive easy recipes on a fruit or vegetable of the week before walking over to the market.

Trisha Boirie's five children, aged 4 to 11, have become regulars at the market.

The food, said Boirie, a nursing student, helps her provide her kids with the extra meals they need during the summer. The kids, she said, get to broaden their horizons.



BROOKE LAVALLEY | BLAVALLEY@COURANT.COM

**BRIANNA BOIRIE**, 10, signals to her mother, Trisha Boirie, at the Middletown farmers market on Main Street Friday while, from left, Ajah Boirie, Alana Boirie and Morgan Renisley wait their turns. The North End Action Team and the Community Health Center offer a program at the market that provides kids with \$10 worth of wooden coins that they are then able to use to purchase produce. Above, Trisha Boirie offers the wooden coins to a vendor.



Visit [courant.com/farmersmarkets](http://courant.com/farmersmarkets) for a complete list of farmers markets throughout the state.