With funding from the United States Department of Agriculture’s (USDA) Food Insecurity Incentive (FINI) Program, and strong partnerships, health care providers and retailers are working together to help low income families purchase and consume more produce.

The pediatrics offices of the University of Vermont Medical Center (UVM MC) and the Community Health Centers of the Rutland Region (CHCRR) are identifying up to 680 families (410 for UVMMC; 270 CHCRR) eligible for 3 Squares Vermont (a requirement of the grant funding). Once identified, the family’s health care provider has a conversation with the parent and children about the benefits of eating plenty of fruits and vegetables and the family receives 75 $1.00 coupons that can be used at City Market and Hannaford in Burlington or Price Chopper and the Rutland Farmers Market in Rutland. The coupons may be used for fresh, frozen, or canned produce (with no added sugars, salts, fats). After the first 75 coupons are used, the family may receive an additional 75 $1.00 coupons, for a total of $150.00 worth of coupons for produce. All coupons must be used by August 31, 2017.

Fruit and vegetable prescription, and other produce incentive programs such as the Vermont Youth Conservation Corp’s Health Care Share and Vermont’s Crop Cash programs are gaining popularity and attention as public health and other health professionals recognize the importance of diet to health. Poor nutrition is one of the three behaviors that lead to four chronic conditions that result in over 50% of all deaths in Vermont (3-4-50), yet people who may know this, sometimes need more substantial help beyond education. These programs address significant financial barriers, giving health care providers a “tool” to help patients follow through with their recommendations, and have the additional benefit of encouraging the purchase local produce - strengthening Vermont’s economy!

Check out Low Cost Local Food to learn about ways to get your share of local food without breaking the bank. And Rooted in Vermont on Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram, #RootedinVermont, celebrates everyone’s unique connections to local food.