



Introducing Sprouts: The Southwest Edmonton Farmers' Market's new Kids' Club!

The Southwest Edmonton Farmers' Market is launching a new children's club on its opening day, May 14th. Based on a program implemented by an Oregon City Farmers' Market a few years ago, it is designed to inspire and empower children to make healthy and nutritious choices about food that they choose for themselves.

It is very easy to participate. On market day, children, ages 4-12, come with a parent or



guardian up to the SWEFM tent. There the child enrolls in the **Sprouts Kids' Club** and receives a free passport, a wooden token and a special reusable shopping bag (filled with fun goodies) that they will bring back with them each time they visit the market.

Each and every week that they attend, they come back with their brightly coloured shopping bags in tow, stop in at the SWEFM tent, have their "passport to health" stamped and receive another \$2 token to spend at the market.

The catch is that their token can only be spent at market booths that sell fruit, vegetables or food plants.

And those booths are easy to identify, even if a child cannot yet read, by their large posters with the brightly coloured sprouts logo on them.



With the Sprouts Kids' Club, children are empowered to make their own choices...they can buy a strawberry plant, a package of strangely filigreed kale, an alien looking kohlrabi or a perfect tray of red ripe raspberries. They can try an old favourite, or venture into the world of the unknown. They come to know their farmers and growers and develop an understanding of where their food comes from.

As Sprouts, children are more likely to try new vegetables and fruits because *they* are making their own decisions about what they will buy, letting their innate curiosity lead the way. They are encouraged to become active participants in the *Eat*

Local, Shop Local food scene.

Siblings can work together, with brothers and



sisters pooling their tokens to make purchases together. Or kids can save up their tokens week to week to purchase something bigger, teaching them an important life lesson in saving, delayed gratification and working toward a goal.

Often, when we think of issues surrounding children and food security, we think of children who do not have access to enough food. But living in an area of town, even like Edmonton's Southwest, and raising children to embrace a healthy & active lifestyle has its challenges. Today's children are bombarded with messages that entice them to eat sugary, salty, fatty, good-tasting foods. The supermarket aisles are filled with cartoon covered, child-friendly illustrations on food packages that lead children to believe that this is food made directly *for*

them and that this is food that they are *meant* to eat. And it is often placed at children's eye level. Television and the internet are filled with messages from fast food and packaged snack companies that directly target children, making it challenging to raise children in a healthy and nutritionally sound way.

The Southwest Edmonton Farmers' Market has booths filled with beautiful produce: fresh fruits and vegetables directly from farmers' fields and orchards; meat from animals raised in ethically, sustainable and often organic ways; and food that is prepared without preservatives and that is made from wholesome, whole-food ingredients.



With its Sprouts Kids' Club, SWEFM hopes to back up parents in their attempts to raise their children in a nutritionally mindful way.

The purpose of the Sprouts program is to introduce kids to nutritional food choices, empower children to make their own healthy eating choices, educate them about where their food comes from, and encourage them to lead a healthy lifestyle.

A very special thank-you goes out to **Dr. Darcy Dietz of Towne Square Orthodontics** for financially sponsoring this program, to the generous grant of **Communities Choose Well** for investing in the nutritional health of our children and our community and to **Brookview Montessori** and **AJM's Out of School Care** for their financial contributions to this program.

Thanks also to the **vendors** themselves, who bring their produce to market, who take the time to engage the Sprouts children in a dialogue around food, and who provide incentive pricing for the children to help their \$2 go farther.



Sprouts is really a grass-roots effort. **momstown Edmonton** is supplying and hosting farm-themed crafts for kids at the market. **Curbside Studio** has designed and donated the awesome Sprouts logo and created the signs and information posters for the program. **Matt Hendsbee Graphic Design** has made the wood brand that burns the token images and helped with signage at the SWEFM tent. **Karen Cooper** has been tirelessly chasing down grants and pulling all the details of this program together. **Café O'Play** has generously donated passes to their facilities for the kids' shopping bags and gift baskets for Sprouts draws. **Ada's Soap Shop** has donated kid-sized bars of soap to the shopping bags. And **Dr. Peter Clarke** has donated and created the wooden tokens.

It is really incredible to be surrounded by people who believe in a project to the extent that they work this hard, donating their time, financial resources, creativity and sweat equity, to help get a program like this off the ground, bringing our community together in such an engaging way.

Because this is a pilot program, it will initially be offered to the first 100 registrants.

*by Sheri Hendsbee,
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