

## Coupons, cookies, more at market

By Diane Strandberg

Five year old Natalie Watkins received a pot of soil and seeds at a farmers market last season. The program will be repeated this year as Coquitlam Farmers Market kicks off on Sunday.

Low-income families redeemed nearly \$6,000 worth of coupons at the Coquitlam Farmers Market last season to boost the nutritional content of their meals with healthy fruits and vegetables.

The Tri-Cities had one of the highest coupon redemption rates in the province for the Farmers' Market Nutrition and Coupon Pilot Project.

As study into the program's success last year has recommended it go ahead again for this season, which starts Sunday in Coquitlam.

"It worked very well for many families," said Tabitha McLoughlin, market manager.

She said the \$1 coupons will be handed out again to families through the program supported by the Ministry of Agriculture and the Ministry of Employment and Income Assistance. Qualifying families get up to \$15 a week to spend at farmers markets to split between various produce vendors. Vendors often topped up the coupons with extra fruits and veggies, McLoughlin said.

Through the program, local families redeemed \$5,522 worth of coupons, an 85% redemption rate.

Opening day for the spring market takes place this Sunday — Mothers Day — from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. With fields and fruit trees still mostly bare, the focus of the first few markets will be nursery plants and prepared food, jewellery and other hand-made items.

There will also be kids' activities and crafts and a special gift for mom at the market in the parking lot of Dogwood Pavilion, 624 Poirier St.

McLoughlin said she's looking forward to a busy season with the return of the salmon and burger barbecue, the blueberry pancake breakfast, healthy living and green living months, and a new program that will show consumers where the food comes from and how far it has to travel.

As well, children will be encouraged to participate in the Young Gardeners Planting project in which they can grow their own flower or vegetable and create a journal about their experience.

— For more information, visit [www.makebakegrow.com](http://www.makebakegrow.com).

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