he life of a nonprofit that can reach 10 years is pretty spectacular,” says Denise Blake, president and CEO of Wholesome Wave Georgia (WWG), an Atlanta-based nonprofit dedicated to ensuring that all Georgians have access to fresh, healthful and locally grown food.

Launched in 2009, WWG now partners with 59 farmers markets, farm stands and Community Supported Agriculture systems in Georgia. Through its Georgia Fresh For Less program, these partners match shoppers’ Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) electronic benefit transfer (EBT) dollars; in other words, SNAP recipients who spend $10 receive $20 worth of fresh, local food.

WWG supports not only farmers who sell at farmers markets “but also locally produced products—you know, the bread maker, the people who make homemade soups, people who make olive oil—all those sorts of things. It’s not just the farmers. It’s also those who produce food products,” says Sissie Lang, co-founder and market manager of East Point Farmers Market in East Point.

According to WWG, more than 1.7 million food-insecure Georgians receive SNAP benefits. Food insecurity is linked to poverty, obesity and diet-related illnesses, and the problem is widespread: Approximately 65 percent of adults and 34 percent of children (ages 2 to 19) are overweight or obese. The high cost and low accessibility of fresh foods are the primary causes.

WWG also addresses food insecurity through its Georgia Food For Health (GF4H) program, which encourages access to affordable fruits and vegetables in underserved communities through partnerships with health care providers, local organizations and produce retailers. GF4H enables health care providers to give individuals innovative “prescriptions” they can use to get fruits and vegetables at partner farmers markets.

By Victoria Scharf DeCastro
"We want it to be symbolic that they have the same kind of written prescription they would take to a pharmacy to take to a farmers market for their fruits and vegetables," Blake says.

GF4H’s current partners are the Harrisburg Family Healthcare Clinic in Augusta and the Good Samaritan Health Center and Grady Health System in Atlanta.

For the last 10 years, shoppers at WWG’s partner farmers markets have received not only fresh, locally grown food but also the benefit of community fellowship.

"People, when they come, they do stay for a little bit; they do visit with each other. And that, to me, is a huge part of what this farmers market is about," Lang says. “I like to describe it as the overall health of the community. It’s not just about food; it’s also about the social aspect of what it brings.”

To learn more about Wholesome Wave Georgia or to find a participating farmers market in your area, visit wholesomewavegeorgia.org.

Victoria Scharf DeCastro is a freelance writer based in Winder.

**Allied organizations**

Wholesome Wave Georgia collaborates with the following nonprofit organizations:

- **The Atlanta Community Food Bank (ACFB)** acquires and distributes more than 60 million pounds of food and grocery products annually. The ACFB sends the products to more than 600 nonprofit partner agencies with food-assistance programs in 29 counties in metro Atlanta and North Georgia. [acfb.org](http://acfb.org).
- **The Georgia Farmers Market Association** is an association of farmers markets, producers and community organizations dedicated to improving access to healthy foods throughout Georgia. [mygeorgiamarket.org](http://mygeorgiamarket.org).
- **Open Hand Atlanta** is an Atlanta-based organization that helps people prevent or manage chronic disease by providing home-delivered meals and nutrition education. Open Hand prepares, packs and delivers more than 6,000 healthy meals daily to people in metro Atlanta who otherwise might have nothing to eat. [openhandatlanta.org](http://openhandatlanta.org).