

L.A. Farmers' Markets Go High-Tech to Promote Fruit and Vegetable Consumption

LOS ANGELES--04/28/2004--

Addition of Food Stamp's EBT at L.A. County Certified Farmers' Markets Improves Access for Recipients of Food Assistance

A consortium of Los Angeles County certified farmers' markets announced today that 22 farmers' markets throughout L.A. County will begin accepting Food Stamp Electronic Benefits Transfer (EBT) cards, also known as the Golden State Advantage Card, as a convenient method of payment.

The effort is part of a statewide campaign to improve health through nutrition education and lifestyle changes, particularly among socioeconomic and ethnic groups that suffer disproportionate rates of hunger, obesity and chronic disease.

"We know that families in poor neighborhoods throughout L.A. County often have trouble buying fresh fruits and vegetables because of a lack of grocery stores," said Pompea Smith, CEO of Sustainable Economic Enterprises-Los Angeles and director of the Hollywood Farmers' Market. "Most farmers' markets have traditionally accepted food stamps, but this new technology presented a unique challenge to the cash-only markets, which lack access to electricity and phone lines. Overcoming this obstacle, with the help of state and county Departments of Social Services and community advocates, allows markets to continue the work of providing fresh fruits and vegetables to all income levels."

The EBT card is now used in most of California's 58 counties to manage the food assistance accounts of food stamp participants. The system utilizes a card similar to a bank account debit card to process participants' purchases electronically. Utilizing wireless point-of-sale devices provided by the state's Department of Social Services, farmers' market staff can swipe a food stamp participant's Advantage Card and deduct a chosen amount from his or her account. Participants can then shop the market using market dollars or scrip equivalent to the deducted amount. Any unused scrip may be redeemed at a later date, or returned to the market manager to be credited back to the participant's Advantage Card.

Farmers' markets adhere to the same rules as grocery stores when it comes to what products are eligible for purchase with the EBT card. Fortunately, most items found at farmers' markets are allowable purchases according to U.S. Department of Agriculture guidelines. EBT may be used to purchase fruits, vegetables, eggs, and bread as well as plants that produce food.

Sustainable Economic Enterprises of Los Angeles is working with participating L.A. County farmers' markets to promote county-wide use of the EBT cards at farmers' markets in an effort to help food stamp participants meet the recommended minimum of 5 to 9 servings of fruit and vegetables every day. Through this campaign, brochures listing participating markets will be distributed through the L.A. County Department of Public Social Services to all food stamp clients as well as through local community partners.

Advocates for the use of EBT point out that the benefits of the new program extend far beyond convenience. "This program promotes access to, and consumption of, fruits and vegetables, as well as the sustainable agricultural practices utilized by our farmers," said Smith. "This is the real thing. Our farmers' markets offer fresh, nutritious fruits and vegetables that are locally grown, picked from the fields, and taken straight to the market. By using EBT at a farmers' market we're investing those food stamp dollars right back into our local family farms."

"Accepting EBT at farmers' markets is an important step in reaching out to people nutritionally at risk. It is an opportunity to educate this population on the benefits of shopping at farmers' markets," said Jane Allen, president of Friends of the California Certified Farmers' Markets, an organization that supports farmers' markets through promotion and education.

The California Department of Health Services (CDHS) hopes outreach campaigns touting the new convenience of the farmers' market EBT program will also help increase food stamp participation among eligible families in L.A. County. Countywide, 55 percent of eligible households currently do not participate in the program, leading to an estimated potential loss of more than \$551 million in federal funds to food retailers in L.A. County.

"From the participant's point of view, using EBT at farmers' markets is about convenience and providing for a healthy family," said Frank Buck, associate health program advisor with the CDHS' California Nutrition Network. "We need to do everything we can to make sure food stamp households are utilizing all of the nutrition assistance available to them and obtain the most nutritious food possible."

EBT ready certified farmers' markets in L.A. County include:

- Adams & Vermont Farmers' Market
- Alhambra Farmers' Market
- Burbank Farmers' Market
- Central Avenue Farmers' Market
- Cerritos Farmers' Market
- Gardena Farmers' Market
- Gardena La Salle Farmers' Market
- Hollywood Farmers' Market
- Hollywood-Sears Farmers' Market
- Huntington Park Farmers' Market
- La Cienega Farmers' Market
- Long Beach Downtown Farmers' Market
- Long Beach Marina Farmers' Market
- Pasadena Villa Park Farmers' Market
- Pasadena Victory Park Market
- Signal Hill Farmers' Market
- Santa Monica Farmers' Market
- Santa Monica Main Street Farmers' Market
- Santa Monica Organic Farmers' Market
- Santa Monica Pico Farmers' Market

Venice Farmers' Market
Whittier Uptown Farmers' Market

Additional L.A. County farmers' markets accepting EBT cards will be rolled out within the next few months.

Sustainable Economic Enterprises of Los Angeles is a nonprofit community development corporation working to promote and engage in self-sustaining agriculture, community, and economic development activities within the City of Los Angeles. Through the operation of the Hollywood Farmers' Market, one of the largest certified farmers' markets in Los Angeles, several farm stands serving low-income neighborhoods, "Good Cooking" classes, and the "Bring the Farmer to

Your School" program with LAUSD Nutrition Network, SEE-LA promotes fresh food access and healthy eating. Funding for SEE-LA's programs is provided in part by the California Nutrition Network and the City of Los Angeles Fresh Food Access Program. For more information about SEE-LA, please call 323-463-3171.

The California Nutrition Network and the California 5 a Day Campaign work in cooperation with the National 5 A Day Program and more than 300 organizational partners in California to promote good health and reduce the risks of serious chronic diseases, including obesity, type 2 diabetes, heart disease and some cancers. The goal is to increase the consumption of fruits and vegetables to 5 to 9 servings or more daily as part of a lowfat, high-fiber diet and physically active lifestyle. The Network and Campaign are principally funded by the U.S. Department of Agriculture Food Stamp Program. For more information about the California Food Stamp Program, please call 1-800-952-5253. For more information about the Network and 5 a Day, please visit www.ca5aday.com or call 1-888-EAT-FIVE.

CONTACT: Hill & Knowlton - Lauren Lamkin, 323-966-5763

Lauren.lamkin@hillandknowlton.com or SEE-LA Pompea Smith, 323-463-3171
kate@farmernet.com

SOURCE: California 5 a Day Campaign