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Food stamps growing at farmers markets

Electronic processing systems would be required under bill

BY MICHELE CLOCK, UNION-TRIBUNE STAFF WRITER WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 17, 2010 AT 12:02 A.M.

Every weekend Patricia Andrews sets up elaborate displays of locally produced honey at farmers markets around the county. A good chunk of her business comes from people on food stamps.

"Not everybody has a lot of expendable income," Andrews said after squeezing a sample of the gooey, golden stuff into a spoon for a customer at the Mission Valley Farmers Market.

But just four of 42 farmers markets in San Diego County, and less than 15 percent across the state, accept food stamps.

That may soon change.

Under an Assembly-approved bill assigned to a Senate committee last week, farmers markets across the state would be encouraged — and in some cases required — to become food-stamp friendly. The legislation introduced last year by Assemblyman Juan Arambula, an independent from Fresno, would give the state's estimated 640 farmers markets two years to install electronic systems for processing them. If a market failed to do so, a nonprofit or other agency could step in and create a payment program for the federal benefit.

The bill was introduced in part to help the growing number of Californians who rely on food stamps and to encourage healthier eating.

"Connecting the farmers markets to (food stamps) is a way of introducing locally grown, often organic food into the diets of those folks in most need," said Joseph DeVin, Arambula's legislative director in Sacramento.

The four farmers markets in San Diego County that accept food stamps are in the City Heights neighborhood of San Diego, Lakeside, San Marcos and Valley Center, according to the San Diego County Farm Bureau, which runs all four. Markets in Carlsbad, Santee and Escondido accept other government assistance programs, such as Women, Infants and Children.

Casey Anderson, the Farm Bureau's membership and marketing manager, said his agency was encouraged by its partners to look into a food stamp system when it was setting up the City Heights market in 2008.



EARNIE GRAFTON / UNION-TRIBUNE

Sabano Benega of Carlsbad Strawberry Co. filled up a basket Friday afternoon at the Mission Valley Farmers Market, which is not among the farmers markets that accept food stamps.

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Under the payment system there, recipients swipe a debit-type card and get tokens they can use to pay vendors. Vendors return the tokens to the market operator in exchange for payment. Anderson said the City Heights market processed about \$30 to \$50 worth of tokens in its first few weeks. A year later, at the peak of the produce season, that figure jumped to \$700 a week.

Even though the county is known for its low food-stamp participation rates, vendors say usage could increase under the legislation. According to a report issued last year, 65 percent of San Diego County residents eligible for food stamps did not receive the federal benefit.

While some local farmers market operators said they liked the idea of the legislation, they said the logistics seemed daunting.

Brian Beevers, who launched farmers markets in Mission Valley and Point Loma late last year, said he can't afford to hire another employee to run such a system. He runs the markets on his own.

"With one person, it's virtually impossible," he said.

At the Carlsbad Village Farmers Market, events manager Christy Johnson said she was considering the idea, but that new costs, extra labor and paperwork may put it out of reach for a small nonprofit like hers.

"It may not be something we do, but we're still looking at it," she said.

A spokeswoman for the U.S. Department of Agriculture said some equipment can be provided at no cost.

Standing in front of a booth loaded with cucumbers, strawberries and other fresh produce at the Mission Valley Farmers Market, Carlsbad Strawberry Co.'s Roberto Medina said he supports letting more people use food stamps at the markets.

"There must be a way to work though the logistics," he said. "It shouldn't be too hard.

For Andrews, the honey hawker, the work involved in processing tokens is worth it.

"They're great for my business," she said.

Michele Clock: (619) 293-1264; michele.clock@uniontrib.com

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thatpageguy 02/17/2010 09:03 PM

All you idiots posting here who are decrying food stamps and other "welfare," get a clue. Read about the Depression, especially during Hoover's time. There was no welfare such as food stamps or unemployment



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insurance. When faced with the choice of starving, people would steal. The lack of the social safety net lengthened and deepened the Depression because people didn't have money to spend at the store, so more stores went out of business. This led to more unemployment, which led to more businesses going under, etc. More houses went into foreclosure, more people became homeless. When banks tried to foreclose on some homes, especially in rural area, they were often faced with armed, angry mobs. There was civil unrest and the Communist Party was stronger than at any time in our history. If you want to make the recession even worse than it is, take away food stamps and those other evil welfare programs. Then you'll see a real tailspin in the economy. Maybe you haven't noticed, but people aren't working because there aren't jobs, not because they are lazy.

Flag



**onlysocalhockeyfan** 02/17/2010 08:18 PM

I'm not for this plan, but if it does happen, can we make sure these families are not buying crepes, flowers, and other knickknacks that are often found at farmer's markets?

Except for those who want the Torpasta... those things are teh best.

Flag



**Brass** 02/17/2010 02:35 PM

Nothing wrong with helping those who need a hand up, but there needs to be a limit, not a lifetime entitlement. Remember the saying about giving a man a fish vs teaching him how to fish? Just good common sense and good public policy.

Flag



**La Jolla of East County** 02/17/2010 07:27 PM [in reply to Brass](#)

thatpageguy liked this.

Give a man a fish and he'll eat dinner for one night.

Teach a man to fish and he'll sit in a boat and drink beer all day.

Flag



**Brass** 02/17/2010 02:26 PM

I haven't been to too many of them, but the farmers markets I've been to in this country are overpriced for my money. I can buy much cheaper elsewhere.

If those with limited incomes who need to stretch their food budgets are shopping at these markets, I don't believe they are getting good value for their dollar.

Flag



**teacher76** 02/17/2010 02:02 PM

jacksplat liked this.

You can argue about who is worse all day long. Point is, you guys are still scrambling to feed your families and BOTH political parties are doing just fine.

Stop voting.

Go back to school

Dont have kids.

Flag



**Brass** 02/17/2010 02:30 PM [in reply to teacher76](#)

thatpageguy liked this.

Good advice! Stop participating in our republic. Give the politicians cart blanche to do as they please. Don't have families, give up your dreams.

Just roll over and play dead.


I hope your signon is just for fun and you're not really a teacher. If so, please let us know what school

you teach at so I can insure my grandchildren don't come in contact with your loser attitude.

With more citizens like you we could have lost WWII and surrendered to the Axis.

Flag


 


 **Cypherlock** 02/17/2010 01:41 PM

San Diegans are on the edge financially. Yet the UT has the temerity to post an editorial in defense of throwing away hundreds of millions of dollars on a bloated, unnecessary NFL stadium for the San Diego Chokers. Even worse: the UT locked the "comments" section under the editorial, after several people correctly noted sports stadiums are well-known money losers which steals taxpayer money to line the pockets of billionaire sports team owners. San Diego: rise up and say no to billionaire sports playhouses.

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 **ainsd** 02/17/2010 01:10 PM

 jacksplat liked this.

since when is honey a necessity?

Flag

 **leafye** 02/17/2010 12:38 PM


If food stamps offer enough for these people to be buying honey and organic food at farmers markets, please sign me for that program.

Flag

 **Socialism\_Is\_An\_Evil\_System** 02/17/2010 12:29 PM

Comment removed.

 **thatpageguy** 02/17/2010 08:39 PM [in reply to Socialism\\_Is\\_An\\_Evil\\_System](#)

90% of the stuff there is opinion from right wingers. Nothing from scientists, no science, just a lot of claims and opinions. Meanwhile, back in the real world, Nova had a show on last night showing scientists actually at glaciers taking measurements of glacial melt. They have direct physical evidence that the glaciers in Greenland are melting faster than had been predicted. Greenland is losing 150 billion tons of ice each year (that's net loss, accounting for new snowfall).

Flag

 **Brass** 02/17/2010 02:31 PM [in reply to Socialism\\_Is\\_An\\_Evil\\_System](#)

Thank you.

Flag


 

 **La Jolla of East County** 02/17/2010 12:23 PM

How about letting food stamps be used to buy beer or wine? Countless studies have shown that consuming two alcoholic drinks a day reduces one's risk of having a heart attack. Imagine how much money Medicare could save!

Flag

 **Peking\_Duck\_sd** 02/17/2010 11:22 AM

 [La Jolla of East County and 3 more liked this.](#)

Republicans claim to be against welfare, but many of their constituents in rural red states are on welfare.

It amazes how Republicans have been able to get away with their "anti-welfare" rhetoric while at the same time passing "pro-welfare" legislation.

During the six years of the Bush Admin. when the Republicans controlled the Presidency and Congress, welfare reform could have easily been passed. In fact, many Conservatives in congress touted welfare reform to get elected. Six long years of complete Republican control went by and the only "reform" the Republicans did to welfare was to GROW IT.

The GOP hypocrisy at its most prolific state.

Flag

**jnojr** 02/17/2010 01:17 PM in reply to Peking\_Duck\_sd

Your posts become more incoherent and rambling with each passing week.

Seriously... see a neurologist. You may be suffering from some sort of degenerative disorder. Or I guess it could be crack or meth.

Flag

**RidersOfThePurpleSage** 02/17/2010 12:40 PM in reply to Peking\_Duck\_sd

jnojr liked this.

"reform could have easily been passed"

How could reforms been easily passed? Republicans did not have a super majority. No Democrat would vote for it since most of their constituents are on welfare. They can't even drive to the polls, they have to be bussed in and counseled by the Democratic party on why voting Democrat means free everything and how it is in their best interest. Any welfare reform was DOA.

Flag

**DeeArrGee** 02/17/2010 11:19 AM

There's no shame in being on welfare anymore, thats why there's so many people on welfare. I saw a bum standing in the median with a sign that said he was a homeless vet and would work for food. So I had some weeds that need to be pulled, so I offered him ten bucks to do it thinking I was helping him, and he didn't look like an illegal. He looked at me funny and said no that he was trying to get some cash together, and then grabbed money that another car was giving him. I saw a cop and tried to have him arrested for begging, and the cop told ME that I was out of line and to leave! THAT is what is wrong with this country! It used to be that you didn't except any welfare no matter what. My grandparents were in the depression and came to california and it killed them that they couldn't support themselves, but they didn't take handouts. Grandpa told me he would work all day in the fields just to get enough money to buy food for dinner for one night, that was better than taking a handout. No one thinks like that any more, now its totally ok to get welfare and have other people work to support you. Thanks liberals!

Flag

**KDee** 02/17/2010 02:41 PM in reply to DeeArrGee

Working in the fields all day to feed your family. Where have I heard that before? That's right, the people who pick crops in the US are doing that today. Some things never change.

My grandparents were raising families during the depression. They said that they never took a handout either. I, however, understand their need to stand up as an example for their grandchildren. The average life expectancy at that time was about 45 years old. Starvation, malnutrition, and related illnesses took their toll on the population. I have studied a lot of history from that era. There were no welfare checks or food stamps in the 1920's. There were plenty of soup kitchens, but no one seems to be related to anyone who ever stood on line for food. Your opening sentence about shame and being too proud to take a handout says it all. To have survived long enough for you to have met them, they must have been getting food somewhere. Weird how that works, isn't it?

Flag

**DeeArrGee** 02/17/2010 10:44 AM

dghere liked this.

Food stamps promote lazyness. Farmers markets are places where you pay 5 dollars for a tomato because its organic - whoopee! You can get macaroni and cheese boxes at a discount store for ten cents - corn flakes for 99 cents - spagettey for 50 cents and so on. If you have to have a welfare program, then people shoud work for their food stamps - have them go downtown and pick up trash or something. Pay them the minimum they need to buy the cheapest food, lots of people who work have to keep a bugget and shop a the discount stores. I have heard that they give each person 500 dollars a month for food stamps, which could feed a family of 4 for a year if they bought cheap food. This whole thing makes me sick. Also I walked into some farmers market in OB once and theres a lot more than food being sold there, someone was passing out socialist party newspapers and there was lots of drug pipes and acessoreys being sold.

Flag



**KDee** 02/17/2010 12:54 PM [in reply to DeeArrGee](#)

Dirty\_Republicans\_On\_The\_Take and 1 more liked this.

I go to the farmers market every week. The eggs that I buy are less expensive than some of the brands at Ralph's. So are the strawberries and other fruits and vegetables. Are some products more expensive, yes they are, but not all.

We have an obesity problem in this country and you have decided that poor people should eat more refined carbs such as mac and cheese because it is cheap, instead of healthy fruits and vegetables. BTW: mac and cheese and spaghetti are not sold at the farmers market. Food stamps are not just for people on welfare, many of our military receive food stamps. Are they lazy? You have "heard" that each person gets \$500 a month? Maybe you need to get your ears cleaned out.

As for your silly story about drug pipes, etc. I have never seen those products sold at a farmers market. I have seen booths for Republican and Democratic voter registration. Is that some socialist plot?

Flag

**supersenior** 02/17/2010 11:20 AM [in reply to DeeArrGee](#)

La Jolla of East County and 1 more liked this.

Unbelievably cold hearted. Hope you never loose your job because you obviously don't have a clue about how hard it would be. In what country do you think you can feed a family of 4 for \$500 a year? All I can say is that God does not like people like you.

Flag

**Peking\_Duck\_sd** 02/17/2010 11:17 AM [in reply to DeeArrGee](#)

La Jolla of East County and 1 more liked this.

Your post is riddled with so many errors and lies I can't begin to address them all, but in reference to price, a lot of produce I buy at Farmer's Market's is cheaper than at the grocery store when you compare apples to apples (i.e., organic produce from a farmers market vs organic produce from the supermarket).

Flag

**DeeArrGee** 02/17/2010 11:21 AM [in reply to Peking\\_Duck\\_sd](#)

Where is a lie?

Flag

**franklinS** 02/17/2010 11:16 AM [in reply to DeeArrGee](#)

La Jolla of East County and 2 more liked this.

Further proof that ignorance is indeed bliss.

Flag

**ChairmanLMAO** 02/17/2010 10:58 AM [in reply to DeeArrGee](#)

La Jolla of East County and 5 more liked this.

Congratulations - you just won Most Ignorant Post of the Day. And it's not even noon!

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