

Fresh from farm, produce finds an Oak Park home; activist hopes neighborhood will benefit

By Anita Creamer Tuesday, May 16, 2009

Thanks to the new Urban Farm Stand opening in McClatchy Park today, Oak Park residents will be able to eat their fresh fruits and veggies – or at least buy them with a little more ease.

The farm stand, which offers a selection of produce culled from local farms at one centralized check out station, is one step toward what the neighborhood hopes will be a weekly farmers market in the park at 3500 Fifth Ave.

“It’s time to improve the living circumstances of all of our neighbors by providing walkable nutrition,” said Oak Park Neighborhood Association President Joany Titherington.

“What better way is there to build capacity for a farmers market than by offering this farm stand to people coming to McClatchy Park?”

The opening of a Food 4 Less store on Broadway and Stockton Boulevard in the mid-1990s provided Oak Park with its first supermarket in decades. But Titherington and Urban Farm Stand coordinator Davida Douglas see the farm stand as an additional measure in improving residents’ nutrition and upgrading the neighborhood’s quality of life.

The Oak Park farm stand is a collaboration involving the neighborhood association, Sacramento Mutual Housing

Association and Alchemist Community Development Corp.

Unlike Sacramento’s 10 large Certified Farmers’ Markets, the farm stand allows buyers to pay for their produce with electronic benefit transfer (EBT), also known as food stamps - a feature that came as a surprise to some consumers at the farm stand’s preview May 9 at the Celebrate Oak Park festival in McClatchy Park.

“We had big EBT signs up at Celebrate Oak Park,” said Douglas, “and people were absolutely in shock I’d hear them saying, ‘You can’t do that in the park.’”

“I’d hold up my little machine which swipes EBT cards and I’d say, ‘We take EBT.’”

The first Urban Farm Stand opened in 2007 in Alkali Flat and continues serving that neighborhood with Tuesday evening markets during the spring and summer months. Customers there also can use EBT, as can shoppers at the seven seasonal farm stands operated around the county by Soil Born Farms.

Soil Born Farms’ small Del Paso Heights farmers market, which opens for the year in June, also accepts EBT, said the project’s food access coordinator Randy Stannard.

“At the farm stand in Alkali Flat, they have nice fresh vegetables picked that day,”

said Margaret Olivares, who bought strawberries, carrots and greens there earlier in the week. “When you bite into the lettuce, it’s crisp. The snow peas, when you break them, they crackle.

“You pick out what you want, and they swipe your EBT, and that’s it.”

Neighborhood activist Jason Tescher, a four-year Oak Park resident, said he plans to walk around the corner to shop at the farm stand because he wants to support a community project.

“The neighborhood is ready for this,” he said. “I’m looking forward to seeing my neighbors there. All the work being done in Oak Park now around walkability and livability makes McClatchy Park prime real estate for a larger farmers market down the road.”

That’s the hope, at least.

“You know what, I’ve got probably 12 requests for locations around Sacramento County on my desk,” said Dan Best, Certified Farmers’ Market coordinator. “Maybe one in terms of feasibility will occur.

“What I’d like to see in Oak Park as a natural outgrowth of the farm stand would be a food co-op. That’s essentially the community saying ‘If we can’t get somebody to come in here, we’ll do it ourselves.’”

Call The Bee’s Anita Creamer, (916) 321-1136.

IF YOU GO

What: Oak Park's new Urban Farm Stand, offering fresh produce and sponsored by the Oak Park Neighborhood Association, Sacramento Mutual Housing Association and the Alchemist Community Development Corp.

When: 10 a.m. to 2 p.m., every Saturday through October.

Where: McClatchy Park, 3500 Fifth Ave.

Other details: EBT accepted



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