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Press Conference

Sunday, December 19, 2004 10:30 am

At the Selma Flea Market - Mountainview Exit off of Freeway 99

Selma Flea Market Goes High-Tech: Customers can now use Food Stamps to buy fresh produce



At the Kiosk:

Jeremy Hofer, Fresno Metro Ministry / Fresno Co EBT Outreach Project
Susana Mora, Selma Flea Market Manager
Sergio Navarro, Selma Flea Market Vendor
Dennis Barrett, Congressional Hunger Fellow

Fresno County, CA, December 19, 2004 – The Selma Flea Market will begin accepting Food Stamp Electronic Benefits Transfer (EBT) cards, also known as the Golden State Advantage Card, as a convenient method of payment. **Selma is the first flea market in the nation to include the Food Stamp EBT program.** The effort is part of a statewide campaign to improve health through better access to local fruits and vegetables, particularly among socioeconomic and ethnic groups that suffer disproportionate rates of hunger, obesity and chronic disease.

“We know that low-income families in Fresno County have trouble buying fresh fruits and vegetables because many times food is one of the last things a family will purchase. First they will pay for shelter, utilities and medicine. A lack of grocery stores in many neighborhoods and an environment which encourages unhealthy eating choices has led to serious health problems in low-income communities.” said Jeremy Hofer, of Fresno Metro Ministry's Hunger and Nutrition Project which is currently in the final year of a 3 year USDA Sponsored Community Food Assessment. “Many produce vendors at these markets used to accept food stamps, but the new EBT technology presented a unique challenge because of the need for high-tech machinery and a phone line. Overcoming this obstacle, with the help of the state Departments of Social Services, USDA Food and Nutrition Service, and community advocates, now allows these 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. Utilizing a point-of-sale device provided by the state's Department of Social Services, market staff can swipe a food stamp participant's EBT Card and deduct a chosen amount from his or her account. Participants can then shop at eligible food vendors using market scrip in the form of wooden tokens equivalent to the deducted amount. Any unused scrip may be redeemed at a later date, or returned to market staff to be credited back to the participant's EBT account.

Susana Mora, the Selma Flea Market manager says her vendors are excited about the new service offered by the market. "After the change from paper stamps to EBT, many customers tried to use their cards at the market only to be turned away. The centralized scrip system gives our eligible food vendors a way that they can participate in the new Food Stamp EBT program."

The *Fresno County EBT Outreach Project* is a cooperative effort between Fresno Metro Ministry, USDA Food and Nutrition Services, California Department of Social Services, and the California Nutrition Network.

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