

## **'Farm 2 Table' brings Brentwood produce to Richmond**

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An initiative that trucks fruits and vegetables from Brentwood's farm fields to Richmond's urban center is nearing its two-year anniversary, and it's about to get a major boost.

The Farm 2 Table program, which distributes boxes of local produce to Richmond residents twice a month, has operated on a skeletal budget since April 2008. Last year, the state Department of Food and Agriculture awarded the initiative \$150,000 to "scale up" from 100 to 500 families.

"The idea is that we build new markets for local farmers at the same time that we bring produce to Richmond," said Kathryn Lyddan of the Brentwood Agricultural Land Trust, one of the program's organizers. "It's been a very successful two years, and I think you should see it greatly expanded in the next two years."

Twice a month, about eight farms from within a 150-mile radius truck seasonal produce to EcoVillage, a farm in Richmond. EcoVillage adds its own crops and assembles boxes of produce for families to pick up at any of four sites.

From May to October, much of the produce comes from Brentwood operations such as Dwelley Farms, organizers say.

Regular participants pay \$50 to receive a produce box twice a month, with a portion of their fee going to subsidize boxes for low-income families. Subsidized members pay a sliding scale of \$5 to \$15 per box, depending on their annual income.

Subsidized families represent about one-third of program participants, and many more low-income families are on a wait list for subsidized boxes. Like many Community Supported Agriculture operations, or CSAs, Farm 2 Table distributes recipes and health tips along with boxes.

The number of families participating in the program has held steady at about 100 since 2009, though there has been a slight dip in participation in recent months. Some have canceled their memberships because of general belt-tightening, said Lucretia Bobo of the Richmond Children's Foundation, and others are putting memberships on hold because of the more limited appeal of winter produce.

Carmen Barrera, of Richmond, says that her Farm 2 Table box, for which she pays \$5, is sometimes the only way she is able to put fresh produce on the table for her family of 10. She does not work because she is the sole caretaker for her husband, who suffered a stroke last year.

"Green vegetables are very important," she said, "but sometimes I don't have money to go to the store and buy that kind of vegetable because they are very expensive."

The vegetables she gets through the Farm 2 Table program, Barrera said, "are very, very fresh and good."

Most participants live in Richmond, San Pablo and El Cerrito, according to Bobo.

The program is designed to make it easier for residents living in "food deserts" to choose fresh produce over processed foods, according to the office of Supervisor John Gioia, who represents the area and is involved in the project.

San Pablo and Richmond have the highest and fourth-highest rates of diabetes deaths in Contra Costa County, according to a recent Contra Costa Health Services report.

The same study shows that San Pablo leads the county in heart disease deaths, and Richmond has the fourth-highest rate of heart disease deaths.

In seeking out fresh produce, West County residents can help prop up the farming industry 50 miles away.

The Brentwood area boasts 12,000 acres of prime agricultural land, but farmers there struggle to compete with large monocrop farms and global agriculture operations. If the program expands as planned, Farm 2 Table may one day constitute a crucial distribution system for East County farms, Lyddan said.

"The idea is that we're building new markets for local farmers at the same time that we're bringing produce to Richmond," she said. "CSAs are an important way to link urban edge areas with their neighbors and cities."

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