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Editorial | Insight

SNAP benefits link up with healthy farm fare

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COURTESY PIXABAY

There are two sets of “food stamp beneficiaries” shopping at the Blaisdell Farmers Market every Wednesday.

There are the clients actually in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), bringing their plastic benefit electronic cards to buy food.

Then there are the local farmers who get the business.

"We are bringing in \$42 million in SNAP benefits to the state every month," said Kasha Ho, a community food system coordinator. "If we just spent 1 out of every 100 of those dollars at a local farmers market, that's a \$5 million infusion into the local economy for local farmers every year."

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Ho works with Kokua Kalihi Valley and GreenWheel Food Hub, two nonprofits that help connect SNAP with the markets selling all-local produce. In Kalihi, through a partnership with the AlohaCare health plan, dollars on SNAP purchases are matched up to \$20, enabling clients shopping the farmers markets there to double their purchasing power, Ho said.

At Blaisdell, Nanette and Larry Geller are GreenWheel staffers who hand out Green Bucks, tokens issued after clients ask to draw a certain amount from their SNAP account and scan their EBT cards.

"When they're finished shopping, any Green Bucks they have left, they bring back for a refund and it goes right on their card," Nanette Geller said. The farmers don't need to have an EBT scanner and can just cash in the Bucks for a check, like a carnival vendor turns in scrip.

"We want local, fresh healthy produce to be affordable," Ho said.

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