

## Farmers market accepts food stamps for most items

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By Erika Engle

Nobody will be performing a rehearsed yet seemingly spontaneous dance routine. However, the [GreenWheel Food Hub](#) will stage what it calls a "SNAP Mob" at the Hono-lulu Farmers' Market fronting the Blaisdell Concert Hall from 4 to 7 p.m. today.

The Honolulu Farmers' Market, run by the [Hawaii Farm Bureau Federation](#), is the second of five Oahu farmers markets that GreenWheel has worked with to accept SNAP benefits, formerly known as food stamps or EBT cards. GreenWheel is a nonprofit organization that is focused on increasing access to fresh, locally grown produce while supporting the local farms that grow it.

[Food stamps](#) have long been accepted by the [City and County of Hono-lulu People's Open Markets](#) which were established when Frank Fasi was mayor.

The SNAP Mob reference is a way to characterize increased acceptance of the public assistance benefits at farmers markets.

Honolulu Farmers' Market vendors began accepting SNAP payments in December, but due to the schedule, which changed over the holidays, this evening's event is a sort of a grand-opening celebration, said Kasha Ho, director of communications and administration for GreenWheel.

GreenWheel previously partnered with organizers of the [Wahiawa Farmers Market](#) in efforts to enable acceptance of SNAP cards, which began in September.

The only items that cannot be purchased using SNAP benefits are street-food-type items: hot, prepared foods meant to be eaten on site, Ho said.

The benefits can be used for packaged foods intended for consumption at home, such as packaged soups, salsas, or "even if it's pasta in a container, you can use EBT (SNAP) for that," she said.

Farmers markets are intended for all consumers, not just low-income shoppers, but for decades, consumers receiving public assistance could not use their benefits to benefit from farm-to-table produce.

The ability of SNAP users to pay using their benefits not only provides them and their families nutrition, but also adds a new revenue stream to the farmers.

"You can find locally grown, fresh produce either at the same (price), and oftentimes a lot cheaper prices" than at supermarkets, said Ho.

"You also find things you can't find at a supermarket," such as ethnic specialty items including banana flowers, she said.

She's seen lines form for the delicacies, "which sell out immediately," she said.

Beyond pricing, "the flip side of providing access is really about that direct-to-farmer benefit," wherein farmers market customers, including SNAP users, "are giving money directly to the farmer," paying no shipping costs or refrigeration costs, "just investing it right back into that farm on your island," said Ho.

Different farmers markets have different demo-graph-ics around them, "and we're looking at farmers markets located in areas with a high concentration of low-income folks," Ho said.

The Honolulu Farmers' Market was chosen not just for that reason, but also because of its central location and accessibility via multiple bus lines. "For working parents on the way from home from work, it's pretty easy to stop by on TheBus," she said.

Farmers market customers in cars can park in the Blaisdell parking structure for free.

"Usually there's not even an attendant, but if there is, just tell 'em you're going to the market," said Ho.

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Reach Erika Engle at 529-4303, [erika@staradvertiser.com](mailto:erika@staradvertiser.com) or on Twitter as [@erikaengle](https://twitter.com/erikaengle).

[Wahiawa Farmers Market adds EBTpayment option](#)

[Da Kine](#)

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