



**For Immediate Release**  
March 20, 2012

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## **New SFC Farmers' Market East First to Double Value of WIC and SNAP Benefits**

(AUSTIN, Texas)—Today marks the grand opening of the SFC Farmers' Market East at the East Communities YMCA. The market is the first of its kind in Texas to offer an incentive to its low-income customers to use their WIC and SNAP (formerly food stamps) benefits to buy fresh produce from local farmers. The market is run by the Sustainable Food Center (SFC), a nonprofit organization that creates opportunities for Austin residents to make healthy food choices and to participate in a vibrant local food system.

WIC and SNAP are federally funded nutrition programs that supplement the food budgets of low-income Americans. Almost one million women and children in Texas receive WIC benefits, and 3.5 million residents are enrolled in SNAP.

The new SFC Farmers' Market East will bring fresh locally-grown food into an East Austin neighborhood that has so few fresh food retailers it has been labeled a "food desert" by the United States Department of Agriculture. A food desert is a census tract in which over one-third of the residents live over one mile from the nearest major grocery store. In conjunction with the grand opening, the Center for Public Policy Priorities (CPPP) released a [policy page](#) today on food access and affordability in Texas.

The SFC has been accepting SNAP benefits at its farmer's markets for seven years, but this pilot program will double the value of fresh fruits and vegetable purchases made with WIC and SNAP benefits. The SFC expects to generate \$100,000 in local produce sales through the incentive program. This money will support local farmers and increase the consumption of fruits and vegetables by low-income Austinites. Funding for the incentive program comes primarily from the St. David's Foundation and the national organization Wholesome Wave.

"The Sustainable Food Center is helping low-income Austinites to make healthier food choices by increasing the availability and affordability of fresh produce in an area where fast food chains and convenience stores are often the only option," said Celia Cole, CPPP senior policy analyst. "Closing the grocery gap statewide should be a component of Texas' efforts to improve nutrition and prevent obesity."

This farmer's market incentive program has been successful in hundreds of markets across the country. Wholesome Wave launched its Double Value Coupon Program (DVCP) in 2008 and has since expanded to 24 states and over 200 markets. Last year, the group conducted a survey of buyers and sellers who participated in the DVCP to determine the impact of the incentive. They found that 73 percent of consumers reported that they would not have come to the market to use their benefits if not for the double value incentive. Over 90 percent of consumers agreed that the amount of produce that they bought at the market made a big difference in their family's diet. Half of the participating farmers who were surveyed reported that the DVCP was important to their sales and increased the likelihood that they would continue as a vendor in the market.



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The SFC Farmers' Market East will offer produce and other foods of 12 Texas farmers and local food vendors. It will run year-round from 10:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m. on Tuesdays and will be located at 5315 Ed Bluestein Blvd at the YMCA East location.

Sustainable Foods Center: <http://www.sustainablefoodcenter.org/>

Wholesome Wave: <http://wholesomewave.org/>

USDA Food Desert Locator: <http://www.ers.usda.gov/data/fooddesert/fooddesert.html>

Reporters who wish to schedule an interview with Celia Cole may contact Brian Stephens ([stephens@cphp.org](mailto:stephens@cphp.org) or 512.320.0222, ext. 112).

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### **About the Center**

The Center for Public Policy Priorities is a nonpartisan, nonprofit policy institute committed to improving public policies to make a better Texas. You can learn more about the Center at [www.cphp.org](http://www.cphp.org).

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