

Program Brings Fresh Produce To CoCo Residents

RICHMOND (BCN)



A new program will give Contra Costa residents more access to fresh produce.

The Richmond Children's Foundation and Contra Costa County Supervisors John Gioia and Mary Piepho unveiled a new program Thursday that gives low-income families in West County access to fresh produce grown in East County.

The Richmond Children's Foundation manages the program in partnership with EcoVillage Farm Learning Center, the Brentwood Agricultural Land Trust, Contra Costa Health Services, the city of Richmond and supervisors Gioia and Piepho.

Twice a month, organizers receive fresh produce from farmers in the Brentwood area, sort and box it, and deliver it to several locations in the Richmond area for pickup.

Each box contains six to eight different kinds of seasonal fruits and vegetables, along with recipes for how to cook them and a community newsletter, said Terrance Cheung, chief of staff for Gioia.

Families that can afford it are charged \$50 per month and receive two boxes of produce each month. Part of that money goes to subsidize boxes for lower-income families, who pay between \$5 and \$15 per box, depending on their income, said Jim Becker, director of development at the Richmond Children's Foundation.

The foundation, a non-profit agency that works to enrich the lives of local children and their families, also subsidizes some of the boxes.

There are currently 40 subsidized families and 20 non-subsidized families signed up to receive the boxes, Cheung said.

"Our goal is to get at least 100 (families signed up to receive) boxes within the next two months," Becker said.

The program currently has the capacity to distribute as many as 300 boxes of produce twice a month within the first year, Becker said.

Organizers have also arranged to have a chef come to the Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Community Center in Richmond, where most of the subsidized families pick up their boxes, and give demonstrations on how to prepare the produce, Becker said.

According to a study conducted by Contra Costa Health Services, blacks and Latinos living in Richmond are the county's most at-risk groups for obesity and diabetes. One out of every four children in the Richmond area is overweight, putting them at risk of diabetes and other chronic diseases, according to the foundation.

Development for the program started about a year ago as a way to improve low-income families' access to fresh produce.

"In many low-income communities, we know families want to eat healthier but have limited access to fresh produce," Gioia said. "This program will give families an option they didn't have before."

Organizers spent the first month working out the kinks in the program and made sure they were able to deliver the food before announcing it to the public, Cheung said.

They are now doing outreach at local elementary schools, neighborhood council meetings and local farmers markets to get the word out about the program.

Families in Richmond and surrounding neighborhoods can sign up for the program, called "Farm 2 Table" at the Richmond Children's Foundation Web site at www.richmondchildren.org or at www.localharvest.org.

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