

Food Tokens Boost Buying Power

For low income at King Farmers Market

The Northeast Coalition of Neighborhoods, with the support of the Portland Farmers Market, has launched an incentive program to improve the access of low-income residents to the new King Farmers Market.

The Sunday market opened last May at King School Park through a partnership with NECN, an umbrella organization for 12 neighborhood associations and more than 30,000 households located in inner north and northeast Portland.

The market is open 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. Sundays through Sept. 27, near the intersection of Northeast Seventh Avenue and Wygant Street. More than 4,000 people — twice as many as expected — visited on its opening day and market attendance continues to surpass expectations.

The new Foodshare Fund Northeast incentive program will enable low-income residents of north and northeast Portland, who receive benefits through Oregon's Food Stamp Program, to make their dollars stretch with special tokens paid for by donations from local residents and businesses.

Paige Coleman, the coalition's executive director, says the market has already become a vibrant celebration of local food in our community. Yet, not everyone in the area is able to afford the healthy local foods, she said.

"We envision Portland as a place where every resident has access to high quality, nutri-



PHOTO BY MARK WASHINGTON/THE PORTLAND OBSERVER

Shoppers sort through the fresh produce and other locally-produced foods at the new King Farmers Market in northeast Portland.

tious, locally grown food, and where farmers' markets are accessible to all neighborhoods," says Ann Forsthoefel, executive director of Portland Farmers Market, the nonprofit organization that oversees five weekly farmers' markets.

All of the locations participate in the state's food assistance program. But instead of having each vendor make the electronic transfer and complete the subsequent paperwork, Portland Farmers Market processes all Oregon Trail Card transactions at the Information Booth at each location.

At the King Farmers Market, Foodshare Fund Northeast will supplement the electronic food stamps with a dollar-for-dollar

match. The program's first-year goal is to provide up to \$5 per person per week in matching funds.

For example, an Oregon Trail card user purchasing \$10 would receive an additional \$5 in special FoodShare Fund Northeast tokens to spend with King Market vendors.

The idea for the fund grew out of a pledge of \$3,000 by the Alberta Co-op Grocery. NECN and its King Farmers Market Community Advisory Council decided to match the contribution and turn the generous donations into the foundation for the fund.

"We were so excited to hear that the King Farmers Market was opening in our neighbor-

hood, and wanted to find a way to support it," says Jocelyn Furbush, marketing manager at the Alberta Co-op. "Investing in affordable access to local food for everyone in the community is a perfect fit with our mission and our cooperative values. We hope that our contribution helps inspire others to participate in this opportunity."

David Sweet, co-chair of the advisory council, adds, "Every dollar donated to the Foodshare Fund Northeast puts fresh, local food on the table of members of our community who are struggling. Plus, the initiative supports our local farmers and enhances our community's food system. This truly is an incredible program."

In the future, organizers will look for additional ways to support the program and possibly raise or eliminate the \$5 limit on the match.

The foodshare tokens have the same limitations as the electronic food stamps. Both may only be used for fruits, vegetables, meats, fish poultry, dairy products and seeds and plants intended for growing food. They cannot be used for non-food items, ready-to-eat foods, and hot foods.

Several farmers markets around the country have created food stamp matching programs. Last July, the Lents International Farmers' Market in southeast Portland piloted a match program.

Foodshare Fund Northeast is supported by the community it serves and represents a unique opportunity for local businesses and individuals to support food access for people of all income levels.

Those interested in contributing financially or through volunteer support are invited to stop by the Foodshare Fund Northeast booth at the King Farmers Market. Checks can be made out to the Northeast Coalition of Neighborhoods-Foodshare Fund Northeast and mailed to 4815 N.E. Seventh Ave., Portland, OR 97211.

Online contributions can be made by clicking the link for FoodShare Fund NE at necoalition.org.

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