

Healthier choices

MARKET: Children love sweet, fresh produce

BY SARAH REINECKE, Californian staff writer
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County employee Rudy Cordero spends every Wednesday buying locally grown fresh produce during his afternoon break. And he doesn't even have to leave work.

The Kern County Department of Public Health holds a farmer's market for the general public every Wednesday from 3 p.m. to 6 p.m. on the lawn outside of the Juvenile Justice Center Building.

Cordero, a public health aide, says he likes the market because it's convenient. He usually buys fruit, and his kids eat most of it the same night he brings it home.

Vendors sell a variety of fresh fruit, vegetables, herbs and all natural fresh-squeezed juice. Avtar Nijjer-Sidhu, community health specialist and market organizer, said the goal is to support local farmers and agriculture and promote healthy eating by providing a convenient site to shop for fresh produce.

"How better than to support the health of the community than to bring something healthy like a farmer's market to our backyard?" Nijjer-Sidhu said.

Public Health Director John Nilon said the role of the department is to give the community opportunities to be healthy. Instead of simply holding classes to educate, it's providing easy access to healthy foods.

Mike Forse, a bailiff for the juvenile justice system, said the trick is coming toward the start of the market, otherwise you run the risk of not getting what you want. He doesn't mind waiting in line because he likes buying the local vine-ripened fruit, which is filled with more nutrients.

Marcello Rodriguez works at a booth selling organically grown fruit. He said the prices are comparable to grocery stores, but the quality is much better.

"It doesn't even compare to the grocery store," Rodriguez said.

Nijjer-Sidhu said the produce sold at farmer's market has a higher retention of nutrients than what can be bought in stores because it is generally picked, cleaned and sold within a day or two.

It was Tania Guillen's first time at the market Wednesday, and she plans to come back often. Guillen heard about it through the Women, Infants and Children's Program, which issues farmer's market coupons.

Carrying about six bags filled with corn on the cob, broccoli, cucumbers, nectarines and tomatoes, Guillen said her kids, ages 5, 4 and 3, will be happy.

"With the economy we're in right now, it's not easy to buy fruits and vegetables and sometimes it's expensive," Guillen said.

Maribel Ortega stood in line with her three kids, ages 11, 8 and 2, also waiting to redeem her WIC coupons. Her daughter, 11-year-old Berenice, was begging her for blackberries. When she got them, she said they were juicy and good.

"It tastes so good even though it's healthy stuff," she said.



Henry A. Barrios / The Californian Alexas, left, and Annabel Lopez are ready to haul away a watermelon their family purchased at the Farmers Market sponsored by the Kern County Public Health Department. The Farmers Market is open to county employees, WIC families, and community members. It is held Wednesdays 3-6p.m. on the on the campus at 1800 Mt. Vernon Avenue.



Henry A. Barrios / The Californian Rudy Cordero, far right, is loaded up by Marcello Rodriguez from Murray Family Farms at the Farmers Market sponsored by the Kern

County Public Health Department. Cordero was helping co-worker Nancy Sanchez carry heavy items from the market. The Farmers Market is open to county employees, WIC families, and community members. It is held Wednesdays 3-6p.m. on the on the campus at 1800 Mt. Vernon Avenue.



Henry A. Barrios / The Californian Leng Xiong arranges vegetables for his customers at Farmers Market sponsored by the Kern County Public Health Department. The Farmers Market is open to county employees, WIC families, and community members. It is held Wednesdays 3-6p.m. on the on the campus at 1800 Mt. Vernon Avenue.

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