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Oak Park: Produce oasis blooms Sundays in 'food desert'

HIGHLIGHTS

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By Stephen Magagnini - smagagnini@sacbee.com

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Every Sunday from noon until 3 p.m. through September, Sam's Market at 4143 23rd Ave. at the corner of 42nd Street will host several farmers stalls offering locally grown seasonal produce such as strawberries, blackberries, cherries, peaches, apricots, nectarines, onions, asparagus and spinach.

"This is a poor neighborhood. Many people don't have cars, and they should have a place they can get fresh, healthy food," said Sam's owner Parminder Grewal. "I'm just providing them a place - I don't take any money from them."

His market will allow customers to pay for the produce with food stamps.

Grewal, a Sikh from Punjab, India, said he bought Sam's five years ago.

He gets fresh produce once a week and sells juices and fresh fruit, not soda and candy. "Fresh fruit is cheaper than candy," he said. "I live in this neighborhood, and people really need fresh fruit and vegetables."

The mini-farmers market was launched by the Alchemist Community Development Corp. with a grant from the California Endowment, said executive director Davida Douglas.

"There are nearly 220,000 food-insecure residents living in Sacramento County," she said. In south Oak Park and other low-income neighborhoods, she said, fresh produce is hard to find and convenience stores "tend to stock less healthy foods that have more sodium, fat, sugars and other negative influences on health. Sam's is bucking this unfortunate trend."

Anthony and Hermalinda Garcia sampled the fresh strawberries going for \$1.75 a basket Sunday. "They're sweet and delicious," declared Hermalinda Garcia, who bought three baskets while her husband snapped up the fresh zucchini and some green onions to prepare a Greek dish.

"Before this, I had to go to Food Source on Stockton Boulevard, which definitely isn't within walking distance," she said.

The mini-farmers market also featured a cooking demonstration on how to make cold pasta salad with veggies, and a doctor who could discuss anything from diabetes to

nutrition.

Aretha and Adonis Peters, who live down the street, came by with their four sons, William, Adonis Jr., Hensum and Donzellie, who were given starter melons and peppers to plant. "We don't have a farmers market close by," Aretha Peters said. "We've needed something like this in the neighborhood."

Her brother, Angel Soto, 27, said, "We see a lot of overweight people not eating healthy, and kids eating junk food. If they knew more about their bodies, I'm sure they would eat healthier."

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