

# DAILY NEWS

## Young, unemployed and hip, some food stamp users opt for upscale choices at the market

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Not inclined to fish for bargains, some food stamp users pay top dollar at upscale markets for organic salmon.

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Fresh rabbit, wild-caught fish and organic vegetables might sound like items on the shopping list of an upscale cook planning an over-the-top dinner party. But some food stamp users are opting for such choice items these days, along with fresh herbs, triple-creme cheese and raw honey, [according to a Salon.com report](#).

The changing preferences in food choices bought with food stamps reflect the influx of young singles around the country who are now eligible for help buying with their groceries, says Salon.com.

As part of last year's stimulus package, recent changes in the food stamp program have made it easier for able-bodied adults without kids to collect food stamps.

"There are many 20-somethings from educated families who go through a period of unemployment and live very frugally, maybe even technically in poverty, who now qualify," said Tufts University food economist Parke Wilde, who has written a lot about food stamp use and policy, according to Salon.com.

Cities that draw creative types and young professionals in their 20s and 30s tend to have food markets that offer items such as grass-fed beef, gourmet ice cream and artisanal bread. And food stamp purchases have doubled in the past year at some stores in upscale areas that sell gourmet food products.

"The use has gone way up in the last six months," Eric Wilcox, a cashier at Rainbow Grocery in San Francisco's Mission District, told Salon.com. "We're seeing a lot more young people in their 20s purchasing organic food with food stamp cards.

"I wouldn't say it's limited to hipster people, but I'm certainly surprised to see them with cards."

Those familiar with the New York City food stamp program say they doubt all that many hipsters here are cashing in their food stamps for wild-caught salmon and organically grown raspberries.

"I am sure there are a lot of people here who fall into the category of hipster, but it is a small proportion relative to the whole population of food stamp users," says Terence Kelly of the New York City Coalition Against Hunger. "The overwhelming majority of food stamp users are people who are budgeting themselves and trying to stretch every food dollar."

Some 1.6 million New Yorkers get food stamps, which works out to 1 in 6 people in the city, says Joel Berg, executive director of New York City Coalition Against Hunger. The average family gets about \$250 a month in food stamps, he says. The program here is administered by the city's Human Resources Administration.

"Most families would not be able to afford to buy expensive foods with food stamps," Berg says. "And as for hipsters, just because they have tattoos doesn't mean they can't face hunger. They could still qualify for food stamps."

While it's difficult to say just what New Yorkers are spending their food stamps on, one area is fresh produce bought straight from the farmers. [The New York City Greenmarkets](#) program is definitely more of a go-to source for fresh produce for food stamp users.

Four years ago, just three Greenmarkets took food stamps and total sales were \$1,000. Last summer, 28 Greenmarkets accepted food stamps, and sales were more than \$200,000.

"Primarily the food stamp users buy vegetables, which accounted for 62% of sales last year," said Sabine Hrechdakian, special projects and publicity manager for the Greenmarket. "But baked goods accounted for 6%, and meat and fish accounted for 6%."

Then there are food stamp users like Gerry Mak, 31, who had very little in terms of a job besides a meager part-time blogging job when he moved to Baltimore last year.

After applying for food stamps and qualifying for \$200 a month, he recently prepared roasted rabbit with butter, tarragon and sweet potatoes.

"I'm sort of a foodie, and I'm not going to do the 'living off ramen' thing," Mak said, according to Salon.com. "I used to think that you could only get processed food and government cheese on food stamps, but it's great that you can get anything."