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Brooklyn Produce Exchange A Win-Win, Residents Say

By: Jeanine Ramirez



A budding program that brings fresh upstate produce to low-income city residents is already getting rave reviews from one Brooklyn community. NY1's Jeanine Ramirez filed the following report.

The produce was picked fresh in the morning at an upstate farm and delivered to the Hebron Church in Crown Heights. It's the first truckload to the area, part of a program to help bring healthy food to low and middle income neighborhoods.

"Our borough has more food pantries and soup kitchens than any other borough. And especially in this congressional district they have the largest number of people who are food-challenged," said Deputy Brooklyn Borough President Yvonne Graham.

The program, called the Farm Fresh Project, is organized by the New York City Coalition Against Hunger. The way it works is residents pay in advance for the food with the price depending on their income. For many, the fruits and vegetables are subsidized through grant money or food stamps, and then residents pick up their share weekly. It's a 22 week program and organizers say it's been a success in three other neighborhoods including nearby Flatbush.

"Ninety percent of the people in the Flatbush projects said they increased their produce consumption. But even more amazing, we asked them if they increased their produce

consumption throughout the year following the project when they stopped getting the direct distributions. Eighty percent said that because this program made them more aware of the need for more fresh produce in their diets they improved their diets throughout the year," said Joel Berg of the New York City Coalition Against Hunger.

Hebron Church pastor Roberne Saint-Louis says many of his parishioners have signed up. He says they're mostly Haitian and are used to food from the land.

"They used to pick up the fruits, send rocks to get the mango directly from the trees and plant their own vegetables," Saint-Louis said.

The pastor also says there's a great need in the neighborhood. The church already has a food pantry on Wednesdays and a soup kitchen on Sundays.

"On Sunday we come early in the morning. Like five o'clock or six o'clock in the morning we start cooking for them and 12 we give them food. You see them, hundreds come in," said volunteer Jacqueline Pharuns.

Not only do the residents benefit from the Farm Fresh Project, but so do the suppliers. One farmer who spoke with NY1 says he benefits because he receives money in advance, which allows him to keep his farm operating efficiently all season.