

New farmers market opens

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Alita Bustamante of Just Food gives a cooking demonstration at the newly launched South Bronx Farmers Market.

Upstate farms and a Mexican restaurant supply the goods

As Joseph Pacheco walked along 138th St. on a Saturday afternoon in late June, he caught himself doing a double take. He saw tarps standing near the corner of Alexander Avenue, and vegetables on tables, ready for sale.

It was the first time he remembered seeing a farmers market in the Bronx.

“I was surprised,” said Pacheco. “You usually see farmers markets in other areas like Manhattan or Queens.”

The South Bronx Farmers Market, which opened on June 14 selling fruits and veggies from nearby farms and one Mott Haven restaurant, is eager to sell its produce to local residents like Pacheco. Vendors so far include the Wassiac Community Farm, Sweet Freedom Farm and the local Mexican restaurant La Morada.

Lily Kesselman, who directs the market, was pleased with the opening day turnout.

“It’s been an amazing day,” said Kesselman. “It’s only been two hours and we’ve sold out eggs, kale and cilantro.”

Residents from Mott Haven and other neighborhoods circled the tables—some to buy the produce, others out of curiosity.

“It’s a great social experience,” said local resident Danielle Beiling. “I get to meet my neighbors and new people. You don’t get that experience in a grocery store.”

“There were so many things to choose from,” said Victor Cabrera. “It was hard to decide what to buy.”

Local vendors and farmers were similarly encouraged. Yajaira Saavedra, of La Morada, almost ran out of the hibiscus juice she had been selling all day. She had come to the market both to promote her family’s restaurant and to help dispel stereotypes about food from other cultures.

“Ethnic food is often seen as unhealthy,” said Saavedra. “We want to break this stereotype with healthy food options. This is a diverse community, and we want to share our culture and our food.”

Kesselman said she started the garden as a way of offering residents access to healthy food that is hard to find in Mott Haven.

“There are tremendous health issues in the Bronx, like obesity,” she said. “The market gives residents a chance to buy healthy local vegetables at affordable prices.”

Mott Havenites eligible for food stamps can pay for locally grown produce with EBT/SNAP cards, WIC, and farmer’s market checks.

The Market will also offer weekly cooking demonstrations, featuring ingredients sold by its members. Alita Bustamante, a chef who cooks for nutritional advocacy organization Just Food, said the lessons are geared to teach people in the neighborhood how to use what the market grows, in their own kitchens.

“I want them to know where the food comes from and how to make these healthy foods,” said Bustamante. “Residents can now have a chance to get food that they can’t find in their local grocery stores. They can make these great dishes and come back each time for new ingredients.”

City Councilwoman Melissa Mark-Viverito, whose district includes Mott Haven, attended the opening. She told Kesselman she shared her hopes the garden will expand to cover more of the area between Alexander and Willis avenues along 138th St.

“There are issues with access to fresh produce in the community,” said Mark-Viverito. “This market has fresh produce and it is teaching people.”

The South Bronx Farmers Market will be open every Saturday through November, between 10 a.m. and 4 p.m.

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