

On a nightly basis she and her troupe (some of whom have worked at the restaurants for 20-plus years) curate an energy that is both professional and joyful, exciting and homey, confident and warm.

All of these labels could also be attached to the lady of the house. Born and raised in Alabama by Iranian immigrants, Pardis is a disarming and inviting hostess, whose style might be labeled as much Parisian as Persian.

She also happens to be a vegetarian, married, counterintuitively, to this region's crown prince of pork. Though she occasionally sops the glistening juices that collect beneath a roasted haunch of pork, and she relishes the aroma of a freshly grilled beefsteak, she has not eaten flesh since she was 14, when she read *The Jungle*, Upton Sinclair's muckraking exposé of the meatpacking industry.

Pardis is not a hectoring vegetarian. In fact, she admits, "I'm kind of in the closet about it." What's more, she understands how her choices impact her husband. Of Frank, she says, "It's hard for him when we get the rare chance to cook at home together. I mean, paella for one is not a lot of fun."

Yet her passion for food remains, no matter such self-imposed restrictions, unbridled: "I blame this whole restaurant thing on my mother, who is incapable of cooking for fewer than 20 people. I learned to set the table early."

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*A onetime newspaperwoman, Ashley Hall of Atlanta sells juice for Kermit Lynch.*

## PUTTING THE "FAIR" IN GOOD, CLEAN, AND FAIR



*By Judith Winfrey*

Throughout the South, we are witnessing a renewed interest in local food and small farms. Folks who are hungry for good eats and meaningful community are thronging weekly farmers markets. In response, such markets are popping up in parks, town squares, and church parking lots. Paradise, it seems, may not be paved over yet.

But has the revolution bypassed the underserved?

One of the tenants of this good food movement is that the harvest should not only be delicious and safe. It should also be fair.

The meaning of "fair" in this instance is two-fold: Farmers have a right to a sustainable return for their crops. And all eaters, regardless of purchasing power, have a right to good, clean food.

How can we pay farmers a fair price for good food and put that good food in the hands, and on the tables, of our friends and neighbors with the smallest food budgets?

The US Department of Agriculture has a program that may help. Most of us know this program, in existence since the 1930s, as Food Stamps. Here's the thing, though. Stamps are a thing of the past. Funds are now disbursed through debit cards, known in the jargon-heavy social services world as EBT cards, as in electronic benefit transfer.

Of late, savvy, social-justice-minded farmers markets have begun to accept EBT funds. Ditto other state-run nutrition enhancement programs like WIC (Women, Infants, and Children) and Seniors coupons.

The program now distributes around \$34 billion annually. In addition to funds from the USDA and state programs, organizations like Wholesome Wave—a non-profit based in Connecticut with a Southern beachhead in Georgia—are, in an effort to encourage healthy purchases, running programs that double the value of EBT dollars spent at farmers markets.

At the East Atlanta Village Farmers Market, Wholesome Wave Georgia has turned \$300 EBT dollars into \$600 market dollars in a few months—not bad considering the average market purchase is somewhere around \$6.



EBT funds can be leveraged to help everyone gain access to good and clean food, while boosting the revenue stream at your local farmers market.

I hear you asking, “How do we do it at our local market? How does a farmers market go about accepting food stamps?”

Not surprisingly, it’s somewhat complicated to access this government program. The best thing to do is start on-line with the USDA and complete the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program Application for stores. Concurrently, reach out to your local USDA office and tell them what you want to do. Eventually, they will come and inspect your market.

Meanwhile, you’ll need to start thinking about how to accept EBT cards. Merchant Source has a program offering free WiFi card swipes to anyone accepting EBT. This same system will also allow individual farmers to accept credit cards. The system may be free, but there will be processing fees of \$60 per month, at a minimum.

Even with swipe technology, you need a way to convert the electronic funds to market-spendable currency. Here’s the hitch: it’s illegal to exchange EBT funds for US currency. Some markets have had success with a token system in which the shopper swipes the card at the main market booth and receives tokens to be spent only at market. The token system works well, but also requires funds to print, distribute, and manage the tokens.

Once you have everything in place, you’ll need to have some way to get the word out to the EBT recipients. They need to know you’re ready to accept their form of payment. Find out who administers EBT in your state (in Georgia, it’s the Department of Human Resources) and ask them if they can help you by posting signs in offices near your market or including flyers in their monthly mailings.

It may take a little while to attract these new consumers. They may not come right away, but don’t lose heart. This is a long-term project with a big vision. Even seemingly spontaneous revolutions take a bit of planning.

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*A full-time farmer in Atlanta, Georgia, Judith Winfrey is the leader of Slow Food Atlanta.*

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**THE MISSION** of the Southern Foodways Alliance is to document, study, and celebrate the diverse food cultures of the changing American South.

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