



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

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Loma Linda offers healthy, homegrown alternatives to record-high food prices

Attention journalists: Please contact us if interested in interviews with sources quoted in article and high resolution photos.

Caption right:

Marge Flathers of Highland - fresh food and deals at Loma Linda Farmers Market

caption middle:

Juan Buenrostro sells Redlands-grown strawberries at the Loma Linda Farmers Market. Lower transportation costs means a good deal on strawberries at three boxes for \$5 on a recent Sunday.

Caption lower:

Hans Martin of Loma Linda saves on food expenses with his community garden plot.



(LOMA LINDA) -- Hans Martin of Loma Linda grows vegetables at the city community garden mostly as a hobby. Marge Flathers of Highland shops for fresh produce at the Loma Linda Farmers Market for her health.

Now both can add lower food bills to the benefits they receive as consumers of locally-grown food. Rising fuel prices have been pushing up grocery prices to record levels

making locally grown food a less expensive alternative.

"Already the vegetables in the supermarket are practically unaffordable," said Martin, a retiree who estimates that he saves \$25 a week for his family by growing squash, zucchini, Swiss chard, beets, tomatoes and lettuce at the community garden. His gardening costs are minimal. The water is supplied by the city for free. Eight foot by 12 foot plots rent for \$20 a year.

The fresher food at farmers markets can be more expensive than trucked-in produce at grocery stores, especially when compared to supermarket sale items. But on a recent Sunday, Flathers noticed lower prices on fruits and vegetables at the farmers' market. Cartons of strawberries were selling for three for \$5. "I don't think the prices would be that low in the supermarket," Flathers said. She also found bargains on lettuce, carrots, celery and radishes and the produce was picked fresh that morning or the day before.

Consumers nationwide are experiencing the highest inflation for food prices since the early 1990s. Last year, food prices rose by four percent and the U.S. Department of Agriculture predicts they'll increase by as much as 4.5 percent in 2008.

The push in Loma Linda for residents to grow their own food and buy from local growers began six years ago this month. In May 2002, the city opened a \$35,000 community garden using part of a \$100,000 grant from the publicly-funded California Healthy Cities and Communities Project. Then last November, the city and Loma Linda Chamber of Commerce opened a weekly Farmers' Market on Sunday mornings outside the Civic Center on Barton Road. Both programs are designed to promote good health and nutrition, said Joanne Heilman, executive assistant to the City Manager of Loma Linda. The grant also funded a tool lending library and ongoing nutrition education programs taught by nutrition and public health students at Loma Linda University.

The fenced-in community garden sits on two vacant lots between Van Leuven Street and the San Timiteo Trail. It has parking spaces and 57 plots. The city equipped each plot with a wooden border and soil.



The garden borders north central Loma Linda - a lower income neighborhood of one square mile, which the city and residents are working hard to revitalize. A good number of residents live in apartments without access to land for gardening. "The community garden is centrally situated to help people with low income offset food costs," Heilman said.



In addition, seniors on fixed incomes have benefited from a raised-bed patio garden that the city installed at the Senior Center four years ago. Both efforts have cultivated friendships, community involvement and neighborhood improvement, Heilman said.

Because of the garden's growth in popularity, the city may seed a second one in another part of town. "Higher food prices will likely attract new gardeners and we do have a waiting list now," Heilman said. "Not only are people save money now, growing and buying locally-grown produce is good for you."

For more information, visit the [City of Loma Linda website](#) or contact Joanne Heilman at (909) 799-2810.