

As the past sets, the future grows



The coldest hour of the day is right before and right as the sun breaks the darkness that has set silent and still for nine hours. It is 4 a.m. on what will become a busy Tuesday. What day isn't for her? Her alarm clock begins to buzz, time to take a shower, get dressed, wake up the kids, all three of them, get them ready, brush their teeth, and feed them breakfast. Breakfast was toast and two apples. A single tear, filled with the emotion of being overwhelmed, slowly streams down her face. She quickly dries her eye. The time has come to start making the three mile walk pushing a stroller so she can feed her family this upcoming week.

The Department of State Health Services (DSHS) is guiding this new mother as she becomes a responsible and providing parent. Women, Infant, and Children, or WIC is a program that essentially assists women with raising their children. The average WIC client is a new mother burdened by financial hardship.

United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) each qualified WIC client receives \$20 in vouchers to be used at Texas Department of Agriculture (TDA) certified farmers market, for fresh local produce. Texas farmers are selling fresh fruits and vegetables, and WIC offers information for their clients to find these certified farmers' markets.

The DSHS budgets money to be provided through this program to the approximate 80,000 WIC clients in the South Plains Area. Due to recent state budget cuts, this past year, WIC was no longer able to provide their clients with vouchers, to be used for \$10 worth of fresh fruits and vegetables.

However, USDA rolled up their sleeves and lent a helping hand by offering a grant to Texas. Next year if USDA does provide funding again, WIC clients may see an increase in the farmers' markets voucher and may receive up to \$30 worth of fresh produce

Twenty miles East of that single mother mentioned from before, another person wakes up at around 5 a.m. She is not a WIC client but is connected to many of the WIC clients in and around Lubbock, Texas. The key link between them is none other than agriculture. Through the TDA, local farmers and WIC clients have been brought together once again in a marketplace.

Not only has the Texas Farmers Market Nutrition Program helped lighten the load for mothers caring for children. This program has, also provided a great

service to our local farmers who are trying their hardest to harvest a nutritional product. That mother might never forget the ideals instilled by this program which may help her understand nutrition a little better, when she is no longer a WIC client.

"Farmers Markets are filled with extraordinary sights and smells, curiosity of what the funny looking vegetables and the weird looking fruits are, children learning for the first time what some of the fruits and veggies are that they eat, and adults in search for healthy items for the night's supper," as Lucinda Mann- Lubbock Farmer, described the farmers market.

Mann gets to interact with all kinds of customers, from those who know all about the items they are consuming to those who this might be there first time at a farmers market.

"For whatever reason you stop by Juicy Lucy's table at the Lubbock Downtown Farmers Market, thank you for giving the opportunity to me to do what brings most joy to me, which is working the land and providing tasty food," Mann Genuinely shared her gratitude. "It's a flat out win-win situation the way I figure; giving those who need help, help."

The South Plains Food Bank, is a Non-Profit Organization that assumed the responsibility for voucher distribution and voucher redemption. The SPFB has been on a mission to help fight hunger on the South Plains since 1983. It is apparent that they would be included in a program that is focused on helping those who need help.

Jokingly critiquing the program as a paperwork nightmare, Susan Horkey- Chief Financial Officer at South Plains Food Bank later assured, the program as being, "so worth it."

The food bank has agricultural ties themselves.

The food bank operates a 5.5 acre farm on the south side of Lubbock near Loop 289 and Highway 84. The farm is set up to have community members pay for a share of fresh produce each week, and to provide the rest of the produce to the food bank to give away. The farm has a dual purpose, production of fruits and vegetables and also acts as a setting to teach life and job skills to underdeserved teens.

“It feels really good; we redeemed 17,762 vouchers, which means we helped 3,552 people with \$20 worth of fresh, tasty local fruits and vegetables. Our mission at the Food Bank is to provide for those who are affected by hunger, and this program fits directly with what we are about,” shared Horkey.

Pink and orange accents mix with blue scattered across clouds that float across the sky as if they were mountains. Another West Texas sunset paints the setting, as this mother exerts the last of the energy needed from her excursion. She follows behind all three children as if she were a tractor with a front end loader clearing an area of land that has been chosen to become a productive farming plot. Her legs tremble as she makes it to the door, and although the coldest hour is soon to be on its way, the warmth of a mother's passion will never grow cold again. She pauses, looks back at the majestic sunset. One last tear will whelp up in her eye that day, not a tear of sadness or of being overwhelmed, but a tear of joy and of understanding the importance of making healthy and responsible decisions for herself and for her new responsibility. A tear celebrating a healthy life and surrounded by relief, rolls off the cheek of the mother and quenches the thirst of a single blade of grass lying patiently by her feet, for a drink **T**

James Marcuse
Round Rock, Texas



Lucinda Mann shares the fruits of her Labor at the Downtown Farmers Market in Lubbock, Texas at the intersection of 19th and Buddy Holly, as families explore the fresh local produce.