

Law aims to rid farmers markets of cheaters

By David Karp, Los Angeles Times

Bringing to fruition a decade-long campaign by farmers market stakeholders, Gov. Jerry Brown signed AB1871, which for the first time provides what supporters say is adequate funding to ensure that growers at certified farmers markets produce what they sell.

“This is the single-most significant change to farmers market laws since they were established in 1977,” said Ben Feldman, chair of the California Alliance of Farmers’ Markets.

Starting Jan. 1, 2015, the bill will increase the state fee paid by markets for their vendors from 60 cents to \$2 daily. Currently only farmers pay the fee, but next year it will extend to all vendors, including food and crafts sellers in non-agricultural sections.

Legislative analysts have estimated that the bill will raise \$1.35 million annually, including more than \$1 million in new revenues, which will go to the California Department of Food and Agriculture. It will be used chiefly for hiring new state inspectors and reimbursing counties for local investigative work, as well as maintaining a database of markets and growers.

Across the state, consumers should see more inspectors at farmers markets. As cheaters are caught and fined or suspended from participation, shoppers will have greater confidence that the farms they buy from really grew the produce. In the short term, they may also see a reduction in the quantity and variety of produce at certain markets, as cheating becomes more difficult.

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