

# Thousands of New Yorkers on food stamps sending welfare-funded groceries to Jamaica, Dominican Republic.

By: Ethan Huff -August 3, 2013

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The more than half a billion taxpayer dollars the federal government sends to impoverished Caribbean countries every year as foreign aid is apparently not enough to fulfill the needs and desires of the people who live there, many of whom are now indirectly taking advantage of the American food stamp program as well.

The *New York Post* (NYPost) reports that thousands of New Yorkers living on welfare regularly send their food stamp-purchased groceries to family members and other loved ones living in countries like Jamaica and the Dominican Republic, where living conditions are generally poor. Large barrels filled with subsidized goods like rice, beans, and sausage are routinely shipped to the Caribbean on the taxpayer's dime, which has caused considerable controversy.

The way it works is that individuals who qualify for federal food aid here in the states are basically buying up as much food as they can with food stamps and saving the extras for their relatives. When they reach a high enough volume to fill an entire food barrel, these same individuals seal it up and send it overseas, effectively diverting resources that are intended for Americans to non-Americans.

"Welfare recipients are buying groceries with their Electronic Benefit Transfer (EBT) cards and packing them in giant barrels for the trip overseas," wrote Kate Briquet and Isabel Vincent for the NYPost about this phenomenon. "The practice is so common that hundreds of 45- to 55-gallon cardboard and plastic barrels line the walls of supermarkets in almost every Caribbean corner of the city."

## **Millions of dollars' worth of EBT food being shipped to Caribbean every year**

A typical food barrel, according to this same report, contains anywhere from \$500 to \$2,000 worth of storable food, which is hardly a paltry amount. When multiplied by thousands of New York food stamp recipients sending out even just a few barrels per year to the Caribbean, the total value of this welfare food scheme easily enters the tens of millions of dollars per year range.

"I don't want food stamp police to see what people do with their rice and beans, but it's wrong," says Michael Tanner, a senior fellow at the *Cato Institute*, who sees the whole thing as just another abuse of a federal welfare program. "The purpose of this program is to help Americans who don't have enough to eat. This is not intended as a form of foreign aid."

As far as those who are abusing the food stamp program in this way are concerned, many of

them insist their families desperately need the help. Finding common and inexpensive food staples in most Caribbean nations is difficult, they claim, while it is much easier here in the U.S. Thus, they see no problem with riding the backs of American taxpayers in spreading around the wealth.

"Everybody does it," said a worker from the Associated Supermarket in Prospect Lefferts Gardens, Brooklyn, to the NYPost. "They pay for it any way they can. A lot of people pay with EBT."

Even so, the intended purpose of the federal food stamp program is not to ship food purchased with it to foreign countries, but rather to meet the needs of those less fortunate living in the U.S. Shipping food stamp-purchased goods overseas, in other words, is technically fraudulent, regardless of whether or not abuse prevention authorities decide to take action against it.