



Written by [Michael Tennant](#) on June 8, 2010

Guns for Butter?

The Austin, Texas, Police Department conducted its first “Guns4Groceries” drive on June 5. Modeled “on programs in Chicago, Los Angeles, Oakland, Calif., and Philadelphia that have successfully removed thousands of guns from the streets,” according to the Austin American-Statesman, the program offered grocery-store gift cards in exchange for people’s unwanted guns, which they could turn in with “no questions asked,” said the paper.



“A \$100 gift card was given for each handgun or rifle, a \$200 gift card for each assault rifle and a \$10 card for air, BB or replica guns,” according to the *American-Statesman*. Yes, you read that correctly: turning in a *fake* gun would have netted someone 10 bucks and allegedly made the streets of Austin safer.

In purely numerical terms, the program was a success. The police, reported the newspaper, “collected 343 weapons: 166 handguns, 96 rifles, two assault rifles and 79 shotguns.” People began lining up an hour and a half before the event began, [according to News 8 Austin](#). The initial \$10,000 in private donations raised for the event by its cosponsor, the Greater Austin Crime Commission, was quickly exhausted, so the commission kicked in an additional \$20,000, and even that was gone in short order. The police continued to collect guns for a few hours longer but had no more gift cards to exchange for them.

The good news is that the taxpayers weren’t forced to fund this feel-good project, aside from paying the officers to administer the program. The bad news is that so many individuals chose to donate to it, apparently oblivious to the fact that it won’t do a thing to reduce crime. After all, are criminals really going to show up at such an event when there are cops all around, and are they likely to turn in guns they’ve used or plan to use in the commission of a crime? More likely, you’ll get people who have old guns lying around that they don’t want, such as Laurie Delong, who told News 8 Austin, “People like me who don’t use them, haven’t taken them out of the case for 25 years. If my house was broken into and [the guns] stolen, then they could be used against somebody else or for a crime.”

A [study](#) of a similar gun buyback program in Seattle back in 1992 bears out these contentions. Published in *Public Health Reports* in 1994, the study found that the “program failed to reduce significantly the frequency of firearm injuries, deaths, or crimes.” Seventy-four percent of those responding to a participant survey reported that they were turning in a firearm because it was a “safe way to get rid of a gun they no longer wanted,” and 21 percent did so “out of fear ‘someone in my home might get hurt.’” Meanwhile, 66 percent of respondents reported retaining ownership of other firearms, and three percent said the money they received (cash rather than gift cards) “would be used to



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purchase another firearm or would be donated to the National Rifle Association.” Nevertheless, public support for the program remained high, reflecting the average American’s typical preoccupation with the intentions of a government program rather than its results.

Speaking of those afflicted with this particular preoccupation, if the donors to Guns4Groceries really want to reduce crime and not just give themselves the warm fuzzies, next time they ought to consider contributing to a program that purchases guns for law-abiding people, for as [John Lott](#) has repeatedly demonstrated, more guns in the hands of non-criminals result in less crime.

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