

Farmers Markets



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Certified Farmers Markets Are Taking Root With the Public

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Lead:
Valerie Price clutched a bouquet of broccoli in one hand and steered her son's stroller with the other. A pouch on the stroller bulged with blackberries, basil, cucumbers, corn and green peppers.
"I love the fact there's fresh, organic produce," the Dana Point resident said, pausing between vegetable stands at the Farmers Market that opened here in March. "I also like buying from the people who do the work."
Nearby, a farmer described how the European-style markets are helping growers. Farmers can often double their profit by eliminating the middleman, Kevin Yasukochi said.

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"That's the reason we're in it," he said, adding that the markets are financial lifelines for small farmers. "They have to get every dollar they can out of every box they produce."
This market represents a trend that is sweeping the county. Four years ago, there were only two such certified farmers markets in the county. Now there are 10 and more on the way, said John Ellis, the county's deputy agricultural commissioner. Similar ventures will open in June in Garden Grove and Laguna Beach.
"There are markets popping up all over the place," he said. "We're at 10 and we may end up at 20 before the year is out."
Supporters say it is a trend that benefits consumer and farmer alike, allowing them to rub elbows and exchange recipes while creating a marketplace that is custom-fit for a community.

Back-yard growers can unload their avocados and farmers can hawk those perfectly plump tomatoes.
"There's always a part of any crop that's going to be ripe today. . . They won't hold long enough to be shipped to Chicago [or] overseas, or go to a wholesale chain," Ellis said. "If you can harvest that, clean it up a little bit, take it down the street and sell it, you walk

away with money in your pocket. It's cash flow."

To the residents who flock to the outdoor shopping arenas now operating on various days of the week from Fullerton to San Clemente, the markets have transformed the drudgery of grocery shopping into something more akin to a stroll in the park.

At the Dana Point market one day last week, children played on a strip of grass encircled by vendors' tables as their parents sampled turnips, oranges, banana chips and carrot relish.

"Buy the strawberries, they're delicious," Dana Point resident Marion Mahan advised a passerby, adding: "Somebody just tasted the grapefruit and I hear it was wonderful."

And vendors offered far more than fruits and vegetables.

At one stand, Carl Wulf hawked honey, the product of his 30 hives in San Juan Capistrano. Next to him, Mission Viejo resident Mary Tucker displayed potted herbs.

"If I'm not at market, I'm in the greenhouse or planting seeds," Tucker said. "It started as a hobby and turned into a business. I hope to keep going."

Also for sale this sunny afternoon: pasta, fish, cinnamon rolls, spices and flowers. And, of course, mango vinegar.

Farmers markets have been established for varying reasons and under a variety of sponsorships.

For example, the Dana Point and San Clemente markets were both organized to draw shoppers to local businesses. The Dana Point venture is sponsored by the city and the San Clemente market by the Downtown Business Assn.

The Orange County Farm Bureau, an alliance of local farms and related industries, manages five farmers markets throughout the county and will open its sixth in Laguna Beach June 10.

To be a certified producer, growers must apply with the Orange County agricultural commissioner's office. Inspectors visit the production site to confirm that the seller is growing his or her own product.

A grower must then approach the individually managed markets to try to obtain a seller's table.

Certified producers must sell only raw agricultural products, such as peaches, or a simply produced product, such as peach preserves, Ellis said. The key is that the item sold must be transferred directly from the producer to the consumer, he said.

Other items sold in the markets, such as pasta and relish, are not considered "certified" products, Ellis said.

Such products fall under the jurisdiction of the Orange County Health Care Agency. Corn relish, for example, must be prepared in facilities that conform to county health regulations and state law, not in home kitchens, Ellis said.

But the shoppers who roamed from table to table in Dana Point this day didn't worry about such details. And some said they appreciate the sense of community as much as the food.

To Price, strolling through such markets is a flashback to the years she lived in Paris. "That's one of the things I miss the most is this kind of color and community spirit," she said.

Mel Perez, a Westminster resident who will manage the Garden Grove market when it opens June 1, said the markets are simply "magical."

"To me, it's a wonderful place to be," she said. "You create a festival every day, and you pack yourself up and go away."

(BEGIN TEXT OF INFOBOX / INFOGRAPHIC)

Bumper Crop

A listing of Orange County's certified farmers markets as of March, 1995:

Village Certified Farmers Market

* Location: 200 block of Avenida del Mar, San Clemente

* Hours: 10 a.m.-2 p.m. Sundays

* Calls: (714) 361-0735

Dana Point Certified Farmers Market

* Location: The Plaza, Street of the Golden Lantern and Coast Highway *

Hours: 3-7 p.m. Wednesdays

* Calls: (714) 361-0735

Fullerton Certified Farmers Market, Woodcrest Park

* Location: 450 W. Drangethorpe Ave.

* Hours: 9:30 a.m.-2 p.m. Wednesdays

* Calls: (714) 526-5814 or 535-5694

Tustin Certified Farmers Market

* Location: 3rd Street and El Camino Real

* Hours: 10 a.m.-2 p.m. Wednesdays

* Calls: (714) 573-0374

Costa Mesa Certified Farmers Market

* Location: Orange County Fairgrounds parking lot

* Hours: 9 a.m.-1 p.m. Thursdays

* Calls: (714) 573-0374

Seasonal Fullerton Evening Certified Farmers Market

* Location: Wilshire Avenue at Pomona Avenue

* Hours: 4-8 p.m. Thursdays

* Calls: (714) 526-5814

Huntington Beach Certified Farmers Market

* Location: Main Street and Orange Avenue

* Hours: 2-6 p.m. Fridays

* Calls: (714) 573-0374

Saddleback Farmers Market

* Location: 28000 Marguerite Parkway, Mission Viejo

* Hours: 8 a.m.-4 p.m. Saturdays and Sundays

* Calls: (714) 247-3760

Irvine Certified Farmers Market

* Location: Campus Drive at Bridge Drive

* Hours: 9 a.m.-1 p.m. Saturdays

* Calls: (714) 573-0374

Seasonal Orange Certified Farmers Market

* Location: 230 E. Chapman Ave.

* Hours: 9 a.m.-1 p.m. Saturdays

* Calls: (714) 573-0374

Source: Orange County Agricultural Commission

Caption:

PHOTO: COLOR, Pedro Cervantes sells Coachella Valley grapes at Dana Point Farmers Market. Below, a farmer exhibits some of the day's fresh produce.

PHOTOGRAPHER: MARK BOSTER / Los Angeles Times

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