

TRADITIONS

QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER OF SLOW FOOD SONOMA COUNTY CONVIVIUM

It is spring and seasonal farmers' markets are beginning!

This issue of Traditions is dedicated to those who grow our local “good, clean, and fair” food, and to the co-producers who consume it.

SERVING THE COMMON GOOD

*Mary Kelley, Manager,
Healdsburg Farmers' Market*

I JUST RETURNED from London and I thought you might enjoy this,” the Sonoma State University professor said as he handed me a beautiful coffee table book, *The Borough Market Book: From Roots to Renaissance*. Healdsburg farmers’ market customers and visitors often return from travels with pictures and stories of markets around the world, but this book told a tale that especially resonated with me.

It relayed how Borough Market, after centuries of serving the people of London, fell into disrepair. Eventually, a group of citizens came together to restore the commercial trade center, and proclaimed the fruit and vegetable growers to be the heart and soul of the market because they provided a “social good” with their produce.

Our Healdsburg area farmers may not think of themselves as providing a social good, but when I think about all the work that is involved in preparing the soil, planting, cultivating, harvesting, packing, trucking, then selling the produce directly to the customer, I recognize that providing fresh, local, produce is, indeed, serving the common good. The work of the farmer is a labor of love, and few people are cut out for a job that requires physical labor and faith in such a risky venture.

As the market manager, I try to keep a balance of the varieties of crops that farmers

bring to the market so that customers have a good selection of produce. I look for vendors who have crops from May to November: asparagus in May, pears in November, and a variety of summer vegetables in between. In June, I get calls from aspiring farmers who anticipate a bumper crop of summer squash. As much as I want to include as many local farmers as possible, I have to make sure the market is not flooded with zucchini all at once! That would hurt the farmer who has brought a variety of produce throughout the life of the market.

The morning of the Saturday market, I can always count on certain farmers for good company at 7am. Ramon De La Herran has already finished unpacking as I arrive. The Finchers are cheerful early birds rolling in just ahead of me. Before long, the Kiffs arrive. All of those farmers, by the way, are at least in their late 60s and 70s, and attend nearly each market between May and November. By 9 we are ready to ring the opening bell.

I can also count on certain dedicated customers to arrive early. These customers keep the market thriving, and we look forward to seeing all the familiar faces on Saturdays and later on Tuesdays in June on the Plaza. I am grateful for their support of this “social good” that we call the Farmers’ Market.



Yael Bernier *Bernier Farms, Geyserville*

Healdsburg Market, Saturday
Santa Rosa Market, Wednesday



FARMING NOURISHES me in many ways—fresh food on our own table, appreciative customers whom I get to know over the years, and contributing to a better world.

I grow 12 varieties of garlic as well as vegetables and fruit. I start putting aside seed for garlic in August. The fall is very busy planting it as well as maintaining the fall and winter crops. In January, I start planting spring and summer vegetables in the greenhouse. By the opening of the Healdsburg Farmers' Market, I have greens, lettuces, green and spring garlic, asparagus, and snap peas. I start picking early the day before the market and often I'm not finished until 10 at night. Greens I pick the night before or in the morning.

Last year I became involved with the Food Pantry gleaning project. Melita Love organizes the volunteers who harvest the surplus for the Healdsburg Food Pantry. I always enjoy working with these generous people, and it provides a home for veggies that don't sell and surplus in the field.

This year, my son, Zureal and I are going to participate in both the Santa Rosa and Healdsburg markets so we can cover a broader customer base.

I would love to see more people shopping at the farmers' markets. The costs are comparable to most stores, and the benefits are products that are fresh, local and supportive of the area's farmers.

Zureal Bernier *Bernier Farms, Healdsburg*

Healdsburg Market, Tuesday
Santa Rosa Market, Saturday

EVERYTHING I GROW is on $\frac{3}{4}$ acre, and I do all the farming and harvesting myself. When I was first deciding what to grow I talked with chefs about what restaurants wanted and studied seed catalogues for what appealed to me. One vegetable



I chose on a chef's advice is *pimientos de padron*, a Spanish specialty. Otherwise, I'm growing the "seasonal hard-hitters" (beets, carrots, broccoli, lettuces) so I have vegetables from May through November for the market.

I pick about 80% of the vegetables the day before the market. At the height of the season, I sometimes work for 15 hours. "Picking" involves more than you might think. I pick the produce, then clean it, bundle or bag it, put berries in baskets and pack it into my truck. Flowers I pick in the morning. I also need to pack up sawhorses, table, scale, change, canopy, and boxes or baskets for display.

It helps farmers if people buy larger quantities of vegetables. I've noticed that people often shop just for that evening—they may not understand that when the produce has just been harvested it will keep for the entire week. And, beets will last three months in the refrigerator!



Nathan Boone *First Light Farm, Sebastopol*

*Healdsburg Market, Saturday
CSA boxes*

RUNNING A FARM is managing a lot of pieces with different timelines and realities that must all come together like a symphony in order to work. I'm constantly thinking about planting—succession planting, irrigation, fertility, transplanting, fixing things—and it all happens all the time. Farming requires the whole show to be functioning. Then, you still need energy



to take it from the field and prepare it for the end market, whether

it's a farmers' market, CSA (Consumer Supported Agriculture) or a restaurant. California agriculture is year-round.

Last year I grew 100 varieties of vegetables, but I found that most people weren't as passionate or interested in this diversity as I was. They liked to look at my produce but didn't buy much because they didn't know what it was. This year I'll simplify—you should only grow what you sell. I focus on the crops that do well in the Sebastopol microclimate.

My dream customer would show up with her own bags and buy \$20–40 of produce. Most people buy much less. I enjoy the market because of the people, but the numbers don't make it. One problem with our farmers' markets is that our friends and neighbors who don't have local food in their lifestyle need to be showing up. There are many people on assistance, but they're not showing up, even though we take WIC coupons.

I'm enjoying exploring what can go in my year-round CSA box, what people want, what is good nutritionally. I am the hunter-gatherer for 70 families and want to select what's best for them. That's my guiding compass. I aim for a balance of

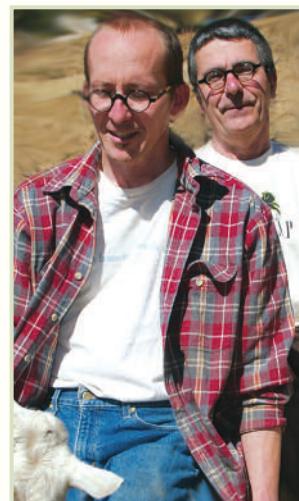
salad, onions, garlic, leeks, scallions, starch. I'm thinking of growing the Ozette potato which is on the Slow Food Ark of Taste, and perhaps doing an Ark gift box of a variety of potatoes.

Pascal Destandeu & Eric Smith *Pugs Leap Farm, Healdsburg*

*Marin Market, Thursday and Sunday
Grand Lake Market, Oakland, Saturday
Healdsburg Market, Saturday*

ON OUR FARM, Pascal makes the cheese and Eric takes care of the goats. For market day, sometimes Eric is up at 4am to milk because milking has to happen every single day. Making the cheese is a two-day process, and needs to be done when we don't have to go to a market. After it's made, the cheese must age at least 10 days. Lately, we are trying a process where Eric stays at the farm to ladle the cheese into individual molds while Pascal goes to the market. For market, sometimes we're up at 3am to pack the cheese, which involves wrapping, labeling, and putting it in coolers.

At the market, people have to be able to taste the cheese, and that means you have to have a hand wash station and gloves. People aren't even supposed to just take a taste—it has to be handed to them on a small piece of sampling paper. We spend a lot of money on the health permits, sampling paper, and gloves.



Recently we started going to the Marin and Oakland markets because they are year-round, and we produce cheese throughout the year.

Lou Preston

Preston Vineyards & Winery, Healdsburg *Healdsburg Market, Saturday*

Q UITE A WHILE AGO we decided that a grape monoculture wasn't using the land well. The early transition to more diversity was easy and made sense from the point of view of a grape grower—olives seemed to be an appropriate next crop. That was partly inspired by trips to Europe where it became obvious wherever fine wines were grown, olives were grown also. So about 20 years ago we decided to reintroduce olives to the property. I learned how to cure them from my Italian neighbors in Dry Creek Valley. Now we have our own olive press and make our own oil.

We'd been growing vegetables for ourselves, and as we developed more of a presence in the wine retail area we began to offer vegetables to our customers in the tasting room. We follow the Mediterranean Muse on typical summer vegetables—tomatoes, peppers, eggplant. And in the last 9–10 years, when we decided to become certified organic growers, we began to plant fruit trees going back to what the original Italian families grew. Most recently, we are raising 14 goats for meat.

To get ready for the market, our field crew helps to pick the produce the day before. Then we hose it off, sort out whatever is substandard, and box the best attractively. At any given time there might be apples, pears, peaches, lettuce, spinach, carrots,

tomatoes—each needs its own attention and is boxed separately.

We also sell our pickles,

cured olives, olive oil, and vinegar. Then we load the van with the products, tables, canopy, signage, and licenses for the market. We start this beginning after lunch on Friday and work til 7pm, and I get up around 3–4 in the morning to bake.

Because we sell fresh produce and processed foods (e.g., pickles and olives), we need a permit for produce, a commercial kitchen health department certificate, and a state certificate for organic produce. You have to have a hand wash station for processed food, and gloves.

The market isn't attracting people who need nourishing food and I don't know how to get them there. Maybe WIC coupons, some sort of subsidizing; we need to think about ethnic diversity and appealing to our Latino population. For example, I offer my vegetables free to my employees, but they won't touch chard, so we need an awareness of cultural preferences.

It's hard work but the personal side is so uplifting, networking and sharing thoughts with customers about nourishing food.

Gayle Okumura Sullivan

Dry Creek Peach & Produce, Healdsburg

Healdsburg Market, Saturday

Santa Rosa, Wednesday

Sebastopol, Sunday



WE HAVE 30 VARIETIES of yellow and white peaches, Fantasia nectarines, and Santa Rosa, Howard Miracle, and Elephant Heart plums. We also grow figs, persimmons, and Meyer lemons. We have about 1,000 trees, and everything on the farm is certified organic.

We have a crew that picks the fruit for us and we get 40 tons of fruit! But it's an



effort that goes on throughout the year. All the trees are pruned by hand; in winter we spray (with certified organic materials). We are constantly testing the soil, working on cover crops according to soil needs. If we have a good set (the end of February and March is the critical time), we thin the fruit in April—

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Gayle Okumura Sullivan

Dry Creek Peach & Produce, Healdsburg

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we can remove 90% of the fruit, by hand. It's one of the key processes.

People who come to the market and local chefs are incredibly supportive. Many chefs use the fruit throughout their menus. Often people only think of peaches as dessert, but there are so many ways to use them—in drinks, salads, with pork or duck. I encourage people to take what you have when it's in abundance and enjoy it throughout the

year. I make a frozen bellini mix, can the fruit, make jams. We're not a big operation, but we try to use everything, including the tree prunings for wreathes.

At the market, peaches are so fragile that they shouldn't be squeezed; when you pick them up you can feel a "give" to the flesh. We place our peaches in green liners according to size. To get the peach out, press down on the liner first.

FRESH, DELICIOUS & FRIENDLY: Consumers' Reasons to Shop at the Farmers' Markets

Chris and Phyllis Baldenhofer

Healdsburg

THE BALDENHOFERS' reason for shopping at farmers' markets is "a no-brainer." They want fresh, local food, period. And, it's good to run into friends doing the same thing. Chris and Phyllis attend the Santa Rosa market in the winter and Healdsburg market in the summer. Phyllis says they make the circuit first before making their purchases. "Even though we have our own garden, who can resist Villemaire's good lettuce, Yael's garlic, Emmet's Foggy Bottom produce, Deergnaw's olive oil, Fandango's preserves, Full Circle breads and David's fish?"



Chris and Phyllis remind us that "above all, we are supporting local farmers when we shop at our farmers

market. They are our neighbors and the future of our food. They could not be more important to the quality of our lives."

Annie Bone

San Francisco

I LIKE TO GET TO THE MARKET when it opens—the best things go fast. I like the flowers, the fresh fish (the scallops are amazing), Santi sausage, Yael's garlic and eggs, tomatoes from Dan the tomato man. I also like seeing people who do early shopping every week; it's a good time to visit and then have breakfast at Mateo's truck. I don't go to Santa Rosa that often, but when I do I shop from Brock's Black Sheep Farm, and the fish market which is excellent. I shop the Ferry Plaza market when the Healdsburg market isn't open and buy dried beans, flowers, coffee (Blue Bottle), eggs on occasion, and meat from Golden Gate Meat Company.



I don't buy many veggies at the markets because every two weeks I get a "Gorilla Vegetable" delivery from Marquita Farms. This has forced me to try things I wouldn't normally buy and find recipes to use them.

Marcia Silver

Santa Rosa

MARCIA SILVER HAS BEEN shopping at farmers' markets since before they were fashionable, a habit she developed growing up in Stockton. Her father ran a hardware store selling locally-forged tools to the farmers, and often they traded tools for asparagus and grapes. They also bought fresh produce from a door-to-door truck. Because her mother worked, Marcia learned to cook this fresh food for the family when she was in the 6th grade.

Another strong influence on Marcia was her work in the late 60s with Weight Watchers.

In those startup days, founder Jean Neiditch insisted everything had to be made from scratch...soup stocks, salads, even ketchup!

At the market now, Marcia tries to spread out her purchases to support all the growers, especially those from Sonoma County. She spends \$60 to \$70 on produce weekly. "I cook it the day I buy it while it's fresh, even the fish."



TIPS FOR MARKET SHOPPING:

EVEN THOUGH THE EARLY markets are hard, I think going early you have the best choice. You can cruise while people are setting up and get the best of everything in terms of price and diversity.

Having change is always nice—especially quarters. Bring small change. With cheese at \$5.75, if 10 people pay with a \$20, I'm handing out over \$140 in change.

Be aware of who's in line behind you—sometimes someone will buy a cheese and then talk with us, and there may be someone waiting behind and they'll give up and go away. There is a sign on Muni buses:

"Information gladly given but safety requires avoiding unnecessary conversation." To me, that's true for the market. We need to interact and I want to remember I'm there to serve a large number of people cheese—both in sampling and selling.



From the Farmer's Perspective

Comments compiled from various farmers in Sonoma County

I try to have a brief, pleasant interaction with a number of people as opposed to one magnificent conversation with only one person. Customers should be aware of not blocking the stand when they are in conversation with someone. It works best if people are patient, if they understand that it's hard work and everybody's tired.



I love it when people bring their own bags; we don't need all that plastic! People have totally changed their mentality about bags. Healdsburg is picking it up, but in Marin at this point, people are insulted if you offer them a bag. I've noticed that people express their personalities through their bags.

I appreciate it when people bring back the fruit baskets so I can reuse them.

From the Chef's Perspective

Jeff Mall, Chef/Owner,
Zin Restaurant and Wine Bar, Healdsburg
Farmer/Owner, Eastside Farm, Healdsburg

GET THERE EARLY. The best produce is sold first and fast. Until you are familiar with the individual farmers, walk through the market to compare the quality and price of the produce. Come back to the stands that have what you want at the price you like. An exception to the rule: if you see something that is not readily available, such as the first tomatoes of the season, go ahead and buy them because they may be gone by the time you get back!

Ask the farmer how he or she best likes to prepare what they are selling. Some farmers will provide recipes. Ask if the produce is local.

When purchasing, let the seller know what use you have in mind. They will be able to better assist you in your selection. Ask the seller the best way to store the item.

Farmers are proud of what they grow and are often willing to share their knowledge. If you have your own garden, ask the farmer for tips and advice on growing your own produce.

It is a market. Ask for a better deal if buying a large quantity or buying right before closing.

Ask the farmers if they sell to local restaurants or stores. Frequenting those establishments helps in supporting the farmer and lets you know which places support their local farmers.

Shop farmers' markets often, and buy everything you need until the next market.



WELCOME NEW MEMBERS!

David & Cathy Anderson, Geyserville

Ken Gradek, Healdsburg

Karina Joachin, Healdsburg

Dick Ryerson & Pat DeMartini-Ryerson, Larkspur

Diana Samour & Thomas Paine, Santa Rosa

Marsha Sendar, Santa Rosa

Amy Tuthill-Strachan & Daniel Poling, Larkspur

NEWS & EVENTS

Slow Food

Sonoma County Convivium News

Our Annual Meeting was held on March 21, during which we unveiled two new projects: Gleaning and Food Justice. We are continuing our School Gardens, Guatemala-Sonoma Food Culture Exchange, and Heritage Seed Grow-out projects. All members are warmly invited to join these projects as a leader or committee member, on a one-time or long-term basis. Look for e-mails about each project.

EVENTS

Please watch for e-mailed information for the following events approximately 3 weeks before each event listed below.

MAY

- May 26, 7:15PM

Slow Night at the Movies/Meet Up
Saint Rose Restaurant
Sebastopol

JUNE

- June 14, 2PM

Biodynamic Winery Tour & Tasting
Montemaggiore
Healdsburg

JULY

- July 8, 10 AM

Peach Picking & Baking
Dry Creek Peach & Produce
Healdsburg

- July 19, Time: TBA

100-Mile Dinner
Location to be Announced

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