

Farmer's market looking to grow

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✓ WATSONVILLE — With gratitude for adding to Watsonville's downtown flavor, city council members praised Farmer's Market manager Lea Goodman for her work Tuesday and gladly approved her request for the city to apply for a \$20,000 grant to expand the already successful program.

Since its two years in operation in the city plaza area of Peck Street, the Farmer's Market has promoted local growers and allowed residents to keep commerce flowing in the city. However, Goodman said there are still many people who aren't aware of its existence.

"We really need to reach people better and let them know we're here," Goodman said. "We've been around two years already and a lot of local residents don't know the market is going on."

That's precisely where the U.S. Department of Agriculture Rural Business Enterprise Grant comes in, Goodman explained. She hopes to increase the number of growers and attendees, achieving more advertising and exposure, expanding market activities and promoting Watsonville High School students.

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Planning family fun day festivities, complete with bounce houses and go-carts, Goodman expects the grant to also fund health fairs advertising local services to patrons.

High school students interested in business or agriculture will also be utilized. Through Watsonville High School's Business and Agriculture Academy and Future Farmers program, students have done telephone surveys on the market, tabulating the results and presenting them as part of course work. Goodman said students have also conducted a Power Point presentation on the market, presenting it to local businesses to showcase the market's value to the community.

"It was fabulous," Goodman said. "Right up there with professionals, but right now we don't have the money to promote those extra things that really get the community involved."

Typical market revenue averages around \$12,000, with an additional \$11,000 spent on basic expenses. Goodman said the grant will also pay for needed extras such as portable toilets and telephones, in addition to promotion and advertising.

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The grant would also function to declare the Farmer's Market a non-profit organization, giving certain rights, privileges and responsibilities separate from group affiliation. When the market began, it was part of the Main Street Watsonville group, which is now defunct. Goodman said the new status will change the structure of the market for the better.

Some concern was relayed at the council meeting concerning Wells Fargo Bank's reservations about the market. Apparently, feelings were expressed to council members from bank employees about parking

problems from market patrons. Councilwoman Judy Doering-Nielsen said lack of market parking was causing patrons to park in bank lots during peak rush hour periods.

Goodman reported that everything was being done to ease parking woes, including allowing sellers to set up after Friday rush hour periods, using a security guard to monitor parking and possibly funding a crossing guard to allow folks to cross streets safely from further lots.

"There's a lot of parking in the city, it's just that people aren't willing to walk a block," Goodman said. "But the grant should really ease a lot of problems and give us the opportunity to grow within our means and expand community involvement."