

Marking a decade

Watsonville
farmers market
has steadily grown

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OF THE REGISTER-PAJARONIAN

It hasn't been easy and though she says it is still a work in progress, Nancy Gammons, manager of the Watsonville Certified Farmers' Market, says she is happy she took on the job nearly 10 years ago.

On Friday, the market will celebrate its 10th anniversary of operating under its current manager, Gammons — an organic farmer herself — has been at the helm since starting her employment in September of 2000.

When it first started, I practically had to beg farmers to come," Gammons said. "They don't want to stand at a farmers market where they are not going to make money. I spent a lot of time cajoling my friends to come sell."

Assistant City Manager Marcela Tavantzis, whom Gammons credited for the market's founding and eventual success, said she had been trying to establish a market for four years before she found Gammons. After a few failed attempts to establish a viable market, Gammons was hired. Since then, the market has continued to grow. Originally set up along Peck Street along the plaza, it has expanded to take up Union Street as well and regularly hosts more than a dozen farmers and at least another half-dozen food vendors.

"She (Gammons) is a farmer and, at the time, she was selling at the farmers markets,"

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Tarmo Hannula/Register-Pajaronian file

Zac Peixoto (left) sells several pounds of apples to customers at the Watsonville Certified Farmers' Market on Peck Street in this undated photo.

MARKET

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Tavantzis said. "She knows what the vendors need and are looking for. She was able to bring it to what it is today."

In 2005, the market made another major change, expanding its schedule to be year-round.

"We have a lot of people who sell prepared foods and they needed a consistent income through the market," Gammons said. "We're very slim on farmers in the winter-time, but the prepared-food section never really changes."

The market is a member of the California Federation of Certified Farmers' Markets, but Gammons said it is unlike most other farmers markets.

"The original idea, from my point of view, since we have such a unique community, it couldn't be a model like others farmers markets," Gammons said. "To make it comfortable and familiar to the community, we modeled it after a mercado, with the idea of bringing in as much fresh produce as we could."

Tavantzis said the city wanted to establish the market primarily because the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children — better known as the WIC Program — had established a special program for cities with farmers markets where residents could purchase local produce with their WIC coupons.

"That was very important to us, because we wanted to

make fruits and vegetables available to families," Tavantzis said. "It was exciting to see children, for the first time, asking their mother to buy fruits at the market and the mom being able to buy that fruit with their WIC coupons."

Besides the nutritional aspects, Tavantzis said the market also serves as a community gathering point. Many nonprofit organizations set up booths at the market, free of charge, to inform the public about an issue or special program. Many families attend the market and socialize as well.

"It's really a multifunction market that goes beyond just trying to sell produce," Tavantzis said. "It provides space for nonprofits to reach out to the public, it's a resource for local farmers and it creates an atmosphere of fun on Friday afternoons downtown. I know families that consider it their family outing with the kids."

Gammons hopes for continued growth and expects to have more farmers and produce year-round. Her goal is to have about a dozen farmers selling at the market in the middle of winter.

"It has been a tenacious labor of love to do this market, and so far I am cautiously happy with the way it is growing and responding to the community," Gammons said. "From the first day it has been for the community, and the optimism and determination of Marcela Tavantzis and the City of Watsonville has helped it to grow and prosper."

The market will run on Friday from 2:30 to 6:30 p.m.



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Shoppers peruse the aisles of the Watsonville Certified Farmers' Market in this undated photo.