

Local growers find support at Watsonville Farmers Market

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Farmers Market

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In the summer, the Watsonville Farmers Market is alive with flowers.

Colorful Gerbera daisies compete with showy sunflowers and exuberant pink naked ladies at Nick and Anna Ruvalcaba's booth.

"People really love the country flowers," Anna said.

The Ruvalcabas have been growing mostly organic flowers near Prunedale for the past 17 years. They grow a variety of seasonal flowers, but their specialty is alstroemeria — tall, trumpet-shaped flowers also known as Peruvian lilies. They own and live on 20 acres, and farm about a quarter of the property — the rest is hills.

"One acre gives you a lot of flowers," Anna said.

The Ruvalcabas, who immigrated from Mexico more than 40 years ago, work the farm themselves with occasional help from their four children. The youngest, 16-year-old Annette, attends St. Francis High School in Watsonville. When she's not in school, coaching basketball or playing sports, she helps her mom arrange bouquets.

"When I was little, we lived in town, so going out to the farm with my dad was like a treat," Annette said.

The Ruvalcabas once had dreams of expanding their operation, but competition from South American flower growers squelched that idea. Now they rely on local wholesalers and several farmers' markets to sell their bounty.

"My husband sells flowers wholesale, but it's the farmers' markets that put food on the table," Anna said. "We're very lucky because our community supports us — thank God for farmers' markets."

Anna says their success is partly because of her husband's passion for the soil. Before starting his own farm, Nick worked in flower fields.



Kate Falconer/Sentinel

Anna Ruvalcaba grows flowers on her land near Prunedale and sells them at the Watsonville Farmer's Market.

"He's in love with nature and he loves the soil," Anna said. "You have to love what you do to work this hard."

Over the years, Anna has come to share her husband's love of growing things. She recalled a day when she went out

to the greenhouse to find Nick. He wasn't there but suddenly the new seedlings started shedding the seed shells that bound their first leaves.

As each shell came off, there was a tiny popping noise.

"It was like music," Anna said. "Not many people have the chance to see that."

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