



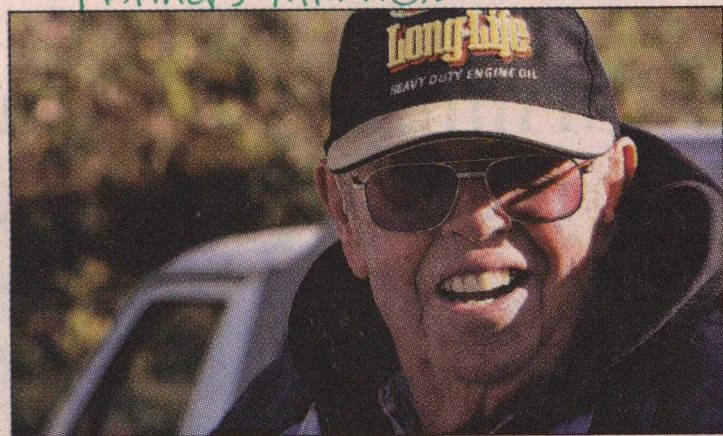
BILL LOVEJOY/SENTINEL

Manuel Netto and his wife Maria have been dispensing produce and a homespun vibe at the Aptos Farmers Market for 35 years. They retired from the weekly venue Saturday.

Longtime Aptos Farmers Market vendor retires after 35 years

Farmers Markets

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BILL LOVEJOY/SENTINEL

Manuel Netto gives a smile to visitors to his Aptos Farmers Market stand at Cabrillo College on Saturday. Netto is retiring after 35 years at the market.

Manuel Netto was one of the market's first sellers

By JESSICA M. PASKO

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APTOS — Manuel Netto has been farming long before it became trendy and long before there was a farmers' market in every town. Born into a farming family, Netto was one of the original vendors at the county's first farmers' market, then located at the Live Oak School before it moved to its present location at Cabrillo College.

On Saturday, after 35 years of being a vender with the farmers' market, Netto was honored for his longtime service with a cake and a hot dog luncheon Saturday at Cabril-

lo College. It marked his official retirement from the Aptos Farmers Market, although that doesn't mean the 79-year-old plans on settling into a life of total leisure just yet.

"We've got a lot to do," he said, as market-goers came over and wished him good luck.

The Nettos have leased their farm to another grower, but Netto said he'll be helping him out — at least for a little while. He's also busy raising a small herd of sheep.

For years, Netto has hauled peppers, tomatoes, zucchini and other produce to the market in his light-

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blue vintage Ford pickup, often accompanied by his wife Maria. He learned to farm from his father, who emigrated from Portugal and purchased a farm in San Juan Bautista. Netto purchased his own land, a 21-acre apricot farm in Watsonville. In the early 1990s, he switched to an assortment of vegetables and eventually more unusual fruits such as passionfruit, strawberry guavas and prickly

pears.

"We're going to miss his words of wisdom," said Catherine Barr, executive director of Monterey Bay Certified Farmers Markets, who has known Netto for 18 years. "He's just an old-time farmer — you don't see a lot of those anymore."

The Nettos are kind-hearted, generous people, in a sort of old-world way, always willing to share, she said.

Darrell Bradburn of Bradburn Farm has been setting up shop at the market next to Netto for about five years.

"He's always somebody who's good to talk to," said Bradburn, "He has lots of

stories."

When Netto first started selling his wares at the farmers market, it was still a small affair, nothing like the large, varied markets we've become accustomed to do in recent times.

"There weren't many of us," he recalled, "It was kind of like a family."

Although Netto won't be running his own stand at the market any longer, visitors can still count on seeing him around for a while as he helps Ron Borba, the grower taking over for him, adjust to the market and teaches him the ropes.