

AT THE FARMERS MARKET

How a market is put together

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The Aptos Farmers Market will celebrate our 25th year in May with free cake to mark the festivities.

A lot of you probably don't know this, but the market started out in Live Oak back in the late '70s. It wasn't 'til the early '80s, during the Med Fly thing, that the market moved over to Cabrillo College.

A few of the original farmers still sell at the market. Can you guess who they are?

The market has been year-round for about 13 of those years. We used to shut down after Thanksgiving and start up again in May. With a lot of California produce growing year round, we said what the hey. People keep coming, we'll stay open.

People always ask me, how do you get into a farmers market? There are 450 certified farmers markets in California. Certified means the plants, eggs, vegetables and fruit are all grown in the state. The state Agricultural Department goes out to each farm, twice a year to inspect the crops. They give the farmer a certificate that all the stuff they bring to the market is actually grown by them.

What's unique about farmers markets: You can talk directly to the farmer who grows your food.

The markets are a great place for farmers to test new varieties of fruits (such as *pluots* — a cross between an apricot and a plum), a new variety of lettuce or heirloom tomatoes that you may not see in your local grocery stores.

The Monterey Bay Certified Market organization has about 75 farm family members. You won't see all of them at the Aptos market because

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some go to the other local markets.

I manage four other markets (no, I don't do the one in downtown Santa Cruz), and each has a distinct personality and clientele. What may sell in Aptos may not sell at the Monterey market.

All farmers who sell organic must have an organic registration number from the state, which tests the soil and the plants.

Some farmers take it a step further and become certified by one of the nine organic-certifying organizations. You'll see the big green-and-white CCOF sign they hang on their trucks.

It's hard but not impossible for a farmer to bring produce other than what he grows to the market. The state imposes heavy fines for that

and may even take a farmer's certificate away, so they won't be able to participate in any farmers market in the state.

At the Aptos market, we have the same farmers year after year. They're like family, and their integrity is high.

As you may have noticed, we also have (on top of the college garage) what we call the non-ag section, or non-farmers section for your bakeries and fish people and even the meat boys (OK, one meat girl; Dave's daughter Ryan will help out this summer).

We allow 10 percent of our membership to non-farmer types. It rounds out the market so you can do one-stop shopping.

The Aptos Farmers Market is located at Cabrillo College, every Saturday, rain or shine from 8 a.m. to noon.