

Preparing for market



Gynae Davalos/Register-Pajaronian

Amos Espana prepares seedlings Tuesday afternoon for High Ground Organics. The farm will be expanding their acreage this year to grow twice as much for next year's market.

Farmer's Market opens Friday

By GYNAE DAVALOS

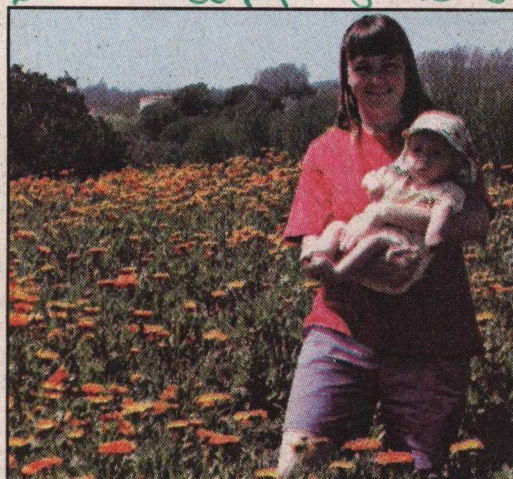
REGISTER-PAJARONIAN STAFF WRITER

Don't just come for the locally-grown fresh produce, or the beautiful bunches of flowers, or the fire department's smokin' barbecue tri-tip sandwiches. Come to the grand opening of Watsonville's Farmer's Market Friday to meet fellow members of the community, spend quality time with the family and revel in the bounty in which our surrounding land provides.

Located exactly where it was last year on Peck Street between Union and Main, the Farmer's Market opens every Friday from 4 p.m. to 8 p.m. starting May 11. The market will end for the season on October 26.

Vasquez Farms, Koumoua Farms, Crystal Bay Organic Farms, Rubalcava Nursery, Cavanaugh Color Nursery and more will be participating this season. For High Ground Organics, this will be its second year at Watsonville's market. According to Jeanne Byrne who co-owns the farm with her husband Stephen Pedersen, their season will start with organic spinach, radishes, baby turnips, arugula and a mix of baby greens. Garlic, green garlic, cilantro, dill and much more will be available later on in the season.

"Some of our most popular produce is the different summer squashes we grow," said Byrne. "We grow a Middle Eastern squash called cousa that people really love. It's great for grilling and it's really good squash. ... Tomatoes were also



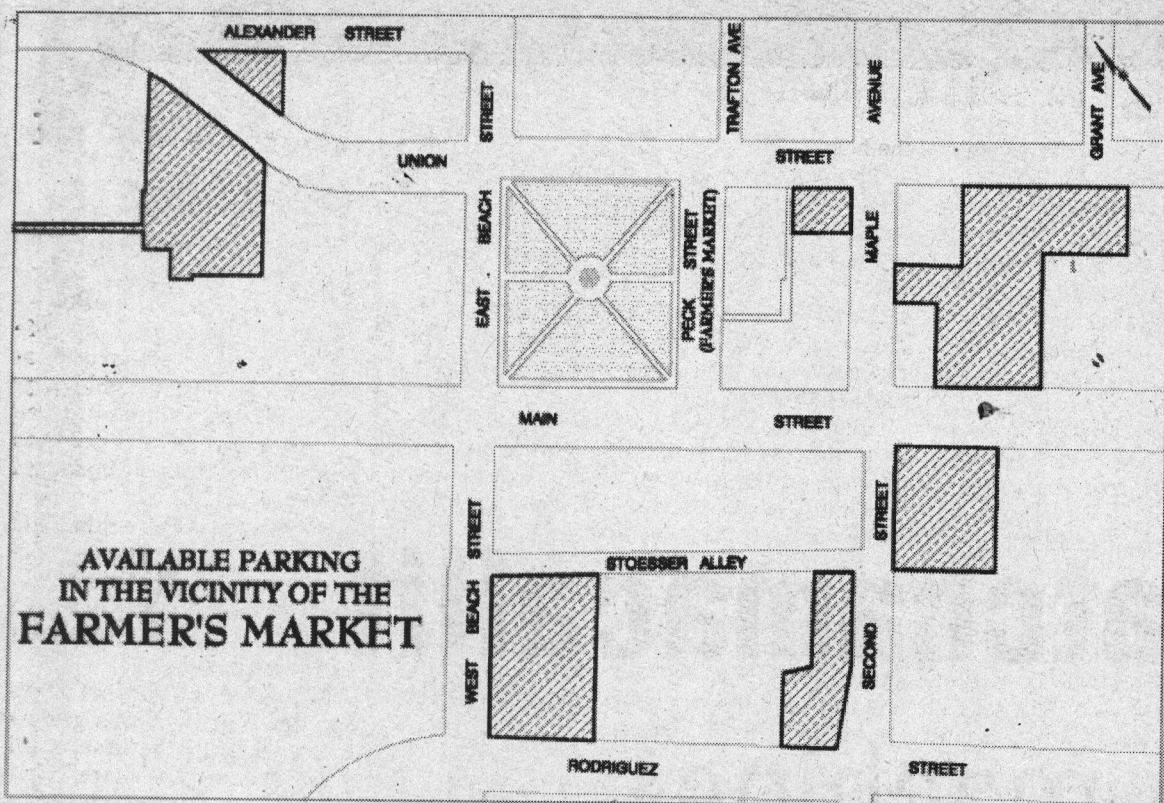
Gynae Davalos/Register-Pajaronian

Jeanne Byrne and her baby girl stand in a field full of flowers on their High Ground Organic farm Tuesday afternoon. A wide variety of their flowers will be sold at the market on Friday.

really popular last year."

In addition to vending at Watsonville's and other Farmer's Markets in the area, High Ground Organics also participates in Community Supported Agriculture programs. The 30

See MARKET, page 9



AVAILABLE PARKING
IN THE VICINITY OF THE
FARMER'S MARKET

The shaded areas on the map show available free parking within walking distance to the Farmer's Market.

MARKET

From page 1

kinds of flowers it grows, including sunflowers, irises, gladiolus and marigolds, are sold at New Leaf, Whole Foods, Staff of Life and Cornucopia markets. Previously known as Thomas Farms, High Ground Organics spent its first year getting everything that needed to be done when starting a new business. With operations at three different locations, it made things especially challenging for High Ground Organics.

Now that most of the produce has been established at its home parcel and the company has more experience with Farmer's Markets, Byrne says he is looking forward to concentrating more on growing and selling.

"We had a great first year. The Watsonville market in particular is a good market. ... It should get better each year as we learn more and people who come to the market will know what to expect from farmers," said Byrne.

Every month, a basket full of fresh Pajaro Valley produce will be given away for free, but the winner must be present to win. Nancy Gammons, who is in charge of promot-

ing the market, hopes to collaborate with the Pajaro Valley Arts Council to exhibit different pieces from local artists. Also new for customers' enjoyment is live music every Friday. "Lots of volunteers are working hard on having that happen," Gammons said.

The Farmer's Market String Band, Mariachi de Eleazar Cortes and Jessica will perform for the grand opening and Sagebrush Swing, a two-women combo playing cowboy swing, is scheduled to perform on May 18. Gammons added, "[The market] changed hands last summer. Now we're looking for a strong market with a balance of farmers and non-profit educational information booths."

Sister Rosa Dolores of Casa de la Cultura will be on hand to do diabetes and blood pressure screenings and Central Lions for Health will have a booth. For Assistant City Manager Marcela Tavantzis, the opening of Watsonville's Farmer's Market has deeper meaning.

"When it first opened, we wanted make sure we could take vouchers, so I did the paperwork to get it incorporated. It's given to the people that are qualified in addition to regular vouchers, but only for fruits and vegetables at a Farmer's Mar-

ket," she said. "I've gotten feedback that families are just so appreciative we do this because the fruits and vegetables they buy with food stamps are nutritious, but limited. This just gives them all kinds of opportunities and children love it, they pick the food out. It makes it really worth it."

Through the federal-funded Woman, Infant, Children program, families can use their special WIC stamps for fruits and vegetables just like money at the Farmer's Market. The program promotes healthier eating for families and anyone interested in it can apply at La Manzana on Main Street. Those turned off to attending Friday's festivities because of parking definitely need not worry. The city has provided a map of available free parking around the market.

Tavantzis assures everyone, "If you get the feeling there's not enough parking, there's plenty of parking. ... There are hundreds of places to park nearby. ... People are there for no longer than 20 minutes. My experience is that turnover is rapid around the market," said Gammons.

For more information, contact Nancy Gammons at 726-7266. For High Ground Organics, call 786-0286.