

Farmers market losing sponsor

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■ **Santa Cruz:** Rather than switch to Sundays, growers hope to continue the Wednesday schedule.

BY JOHN WOOLFOLK
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Downtown Santa Cruz merchants have dumped the weekly farmers market they have sponsored to lure shoppers since the 1989 earthquake, leaving growers to carry on the event themselves.

At a meeting Monday, the Downtown Association of Santa Cruz told growers

and city officials it would drop sponsorship of the Wednesday market unless it was moved to Sunday and a new site.

Growers feared the change would kill the market by confusing and alienating customers and vowed to try to continue sponsorship on their own at the same location, said Sandra Ward, owner of Greensward Nurseries.

Downtown Association board member John Lisher confirmed the decision but said the group had no further comment. The Downtown Association will continue sponsorship through the end of the month.

Held in a city parking lot at the corner of Lincoln and Cedar streets, Santa Cruz's farmers market has become a victim of its own success.

The Downtown Association of Santa Cruz, which represents more than 500 businesses, began sponsoring the market

to expose shoppers to the downtown area as it was being rebuilt after the Loma Prieta earthquake.

But in recent months, many merchants complained they had created a monster. In addition to health-food fans and organic-only adherents who are its main clientele, the market has become a popular hangout with street people and young hippie wannabes.

Some neighboring store owners said their business dropped and thefts rose on market days, and Downtown Association

officials began talking of backing out of the event.

The 45 growers who regularly participate in the market hope to set up their own management association, a nine-member board to be called the Santa Cruz Community Farmers Market, Ward said. The board will include city officials and merchants, she said.

Among the new organization's first tasks will be to find a permanent location for the event.