

# Farmer's market heading to Watsonville

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WATSONVILLE — Watsonville is ready for a certified farmer's market. Organizers are still in the process of discussing details with the city government and other regulatory agencies, says Lia Goodman, manager of the Santa Cruz Community Farmer's Market, who was hired as a consultant for the Watsonville market.

"We are definitely going to have a farmer's market," Goodman says. If everything will go as planned, the market will be kicked off June 5 on Peck Street, which is adjacent to the Plaza. The market will be open every Friday afternoon and run until the weekend before Thanksgiving. Certified local farmers will be en-

couraged to sell their high quality produce. The goal of the market is to promote interest in the downtown area, as well as to bring the community together.

"We want to make sure that the market is diverse and appeals to the entire population," says Goodman.

At the market in downtown Santa Cruz on Wednesday afternoons, nine Watsonville farmers sell produce and one has a space for plants and flowers. Half of these growers also attend the Cabrillo College market on Saturday mornings.

Prevedelli's family-run apple and pear business in Watsonville has loyal customers who even come to shop at the market in the rain, says Thomas Prevedelli. Many people ask for organic fruits and the

Prevedellis are considering transforming their farm to fully organically grown produce. "There is a market for it, and also for health reasons it's more feasible. My parents work on the orchards," he says.

Tom and Laurie Coke of Watsonville have enjoyed selling organically grown vegetables at local farmer's markets for 10 years. Organic produce falls prey to more damage and has higher labor costs, but, says Tom Coke, "We are retired and we're not trying to make a living of it."

Tate Edwards, who owns a nursery in Watsonville and sells at local markets, says, "Farmer's markets are the best places to shop for high quality goods because store purchasers buy the cheapest products they can get to maximize their returns. It is also a nice social event for the community."

Farmer's markets, however, might be doomed to become a reminiscence of the 20th century. Small farm businesses are in jeopardy with proposed new laws that address potential food safety problems for the growing, processing, shipping and marketing of fruits and vegetables in the U.S., says Sandra Ward, a Watsonville organic sprout farmer.

These proposed regulations, that are scheduled to be defined by Oct. 1998, will be the first-ever specific safety standards for fruits and vegetables in the nation. A few weeks ago, authorities of the Food and Drug Administration inspected Ward's facilities and took samples. "I anticipate more regulations and fees," she says.

The new safety standards appear



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Sandra Ward sells her organically grown sprouts at the Cabrillo College Farmer's Market. Husband Ken Kimes is in the background.



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Gerri Prevedelli selling her family's apples at the Cabrillo College farmer's market.

to emphasize sterilization, she says, and farmers might be obligated to process their produce in a screened kitchen more in line with food processing before it will qualify to be released on the market.

"Small growers who can't afford these facilities could be eliminated. If this regulation gets out of hand there will not be any farmer's markets because it's the small growers who sell at the markets," says Ward.

All the attention and publicity that the new regulations are attracting might influence the public in believing that fresh food is dangerous, with the result that small growers wouldn't be able to sell their produce directly to the consumer, Ward says. When asked if she will find it worthwhile to

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stay in business, she says, "Only if I can maintain my growing standards. I don't want to grow food that has to be rinsed with chlorine before I can sell it."

Besides the threat of increased regulations, the storms also took a toll on local farmers. Ward, who has been

in the sprout business since 1982, and sells at six markets a week, says she doesn't remember missing so many markets as in the last two months. Despite all the obstacles, she has faith in Santa Cruz County residents, saying people in this area appreciate organically grown food.