

# Live Oak farmers' market

By CAROLYN SWIFT

Baby organic carrots, strawberries, ollieberries, eggs and peas were some of the fast-disappearing produce items Saturday morning at the Farmer's Market, Santa Cruz County's direct market outlet between farmer and shopper.

Several farmers who prepared goods Friday night had underestimated the size of the crowd that appeared the next morning at Live Oak School — and a number of trucks were posting signs that read "back next week," less than an hour after the 9 a.m. opening.

Christine Scherer and her husband, Tony, own a bushberry farm on Spring Valley Road, and have worked with local farmers since February to help start a Santa Cruz County-based market that will allow sale of produce between farmer and consumer. Mrs. Scherer said the Santa Cruz Market was started with assistance from Rachel Spencer of Santa Cruz, who worked last year at a similar market in San Jose. The market there was started with a funding grant and was designed from the viewpoint of the consumer.

Farmers in Santa Cruz County were contacted in early spring

and three meetings were held to arrange farmer recruitment, publicity and business matters. But actual plans for a market were started after the group talked with Mark Seamark, director of the Live Oak Community School.

"He has been very enthusiastic and supportive from the beginning," Mrs. Scherer, "And it was Seamark that helped us obtain Live Oak School as a market site."

In order to sell their crops, Mrs. Scherer said, the farmers each pay a seller's fee of \$5, and must be certified to sell specific crops. The certification process is completed through the county agricultural commissioner, and fixes specific items the grower is allowed to sell.

"Farmers with the market have insisted on certification to insure that all crops are grown by farmers and not brought in by middlemen," she said, "And they have agreed to insist on high quality among themselves. If the produce turns out to be poor quality, the seller will be asked to withdraw the goods."

The Farmer's Market is operated with a board of directors comprised totally of

farmers, and all participants in the enterprise have volunteered their time toward its organization.

"Most of us are small farmers," Mrs. Scherer added, "There are some who do have other outlets, but who previously could only take their produce to a broker or food processor. There was no other alternative."

A majority of the farms are five acres or less, and most are in Santa Cruz County. A few farmers bring their goods from what is actually a large garden — and nearly all are specialized crops.

Mrs. Scherer listed some of the directors and their crops as examples. Jerry Kay of north Monterey County raises organic garlic, corn, snow peas and raspberries, Barney Bricmont of Live Oak specializes in flowers, tomatoes and herbs, and Nick Pasquale of Aptos will offer a variety of row crops.

Others are Larry Delaney of La Selva Beach, bushberries, zucchini, peas and beans; Jerry Thomas of Corralitos, apples; June Molina of Corralitos, strawberries, cherry tomatoes, baby's breath and plants. Dick Hill of Hollister will provide one of the

market's more unusual features — wool fleece. He will also present a sheep-shearing demonstration June 18.

Some of the farmers have worked toward the market's opening, but now must wait for their crops to come in season. Some of these later crops, Mrs. Scherer said, will be the well-known ones like apples, while others are highly specialized such as jicama, a Mexican root similar to a potato; napales, a cactus that is much like a sweet pepper when it is cooked; chili peppers and horseradish root.

Each farmer sells produce "off the back of his truck," and most are willing to provide details about conditions under which the crops were grown. Consumers will be able to find out which items are grown without chemically-treated soil or sprays, for example.

Prices are set by individual farmers, and Mrs. Scherer said there may be differences from truck-to-truck. Each month, a calendar will be prepared listed tips on food preservation and recipes for "specialty" items. Featured this month are bushberries and cherries.

Saturday will be the market's

"official opening," guests for the ceremonies will include Richard Spohn, head of the state department of consumer affairs in Sacramento; Assemblyman Henry Mello and Congressman Leon Panetta. County supervisors will also attend, and Mrs. Scherer added that while the market itself is in Supervisor Phil Baldwin's district, most of the produce is grown in the districts of supervisors Marilyn Liddicoat and Cecil Smith.

Later this month, the Live Oak Senior Center will participate in the weekly market. The center opened its doors for the first time last month, and is now preparing to sell baked goods and provide music with the "Senior Rhythm and Blues Band." The Farmer's Market also operates a refreshment stand with apple juice, coffee, orange juice bars, ice cream and yogurt.

The market will be open at Live Oak School from 9 a.m. to 2 p.m. Saturdays. The gates are closed from 8:30 a.m. to 9 a.m. while the farmers set up their produce for sale. Consumers are encouraged to bring their own bags and containers, Mrs. Scherer said, although these items are also provided by the farmers.



Darryl Dawson sells produce at the Farmers' Market.