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Farm to table: A roundup of local farmers' markets

By Lily Dayton
 Adventures Monterey Bay
 Posted: 09/15/2010 02:02:34 PM PDT
 Updated: 09/15/2010 04:02:38 PM PDT

AUTUMN IN MONTEREY COUNTY: The fog evaporates to expose clear, blue skies. It's harvest time for a wide variety of fruits, nuts and vegetables. And the local farmers' markets are in full swing.

"A lot of people assume there is less produce in the fall, but September and October is harvest season," said Iris Peppard, co-founder of Everyone's Harvest, which manages several farmers' markets in Monterey County, including the Pacific Grove Farmers' Market. "We'll have tomatoes, squash, corn, watermelon, beets, carrots, and even berries until it starts raining."

"In the fall we'll start picking pears, prunes and late-season peaches," said Tony Inzana of Inzana Ranch and Produce, a certified grower out of Hughson. "We'll have more apple



(Photo by Orville Myers)



(Photo by Orville Myers)

and fig varieties, Asian pears, pomegranates, almonds, pistachios, filberts, walnuts, chestnuts and pecans. At the end of November you'll start seeing the citrus — mandarins, lemons and navel oranges."

With 17 certified farmers' markets to choose from in Monterey County, there is a market for most communities. If you're willing to travel to experience the bounty at a different locality, there is also a market for each day of week.

This was not always the case. Though farmers selling their produce from open-air markets and roadside stands was the norm through the 1930s, the growing dominance of supermarkets in the 1940s and 1950s began to eliminate the niche for farmers' markets. As recently as the late 1970s, it was illegal

in California for farmers to sell their crops directly to consumers. In 1978, then-Gov. Jerry Brown signed the Direct Marketing Act, allowing California farmers to sell produce directly to consumers, opening the door for farmers' markets in California.

Today, according to Richard Ordenez, chief deputy agricultural commissioner, the industry is booming in Monterey County.

"The concept 'buy local' has really caught on recently," he said. Farmers' markets "provide an opportunity for the public

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to meet the people who grow their produce and producers to meet the consumers."

"The prices are close to what you find in the supermarket, but the quality is the difference," said Joe Aliotti, owner of Community Help Around the Monterey Peninsula, another managing organization of several farmers' markets in the county. Walking around the Old Town Salinas Farmers' Market, he swept his hand towards stalls ripe with fresh produce. "These cantaloupes are picked in Salinas — not green and sitting in grocery stores. The farmers come with stuff that's fresh-picked. The

cantaloupe is sweet as candy and beautiful. It's the same with organic strawberries and corn, grapes and heirloom tomatoes."

Besides produce that comes fresh from the tree, soil or vine — rather than a packing warehouse — the produce offered at farmers' markets often comes in a wider variety than is typically seen in a grocery store. One can find purple carrots, lemon cucumbers, fresh peas and East Asian varieties of bitter melon.

"Some people come to the farmers' market just so they can sample the different varieties — and learn which varieties are available when," said Inzana.

But farmers' markets are more than just about buying weekly produce, or even fresh seafood or grass-fed beef. They are community events. The bustling Old Monterey Marketplace spans several city blocks and gets thousands of visitors each week.

"If you're a tourist and you want to meet the locals, this is where you'll find them every Tuesday," said Ray Headley, manager of Old Monterey Marketplace. "A lot of folks from Monterey spend every Tuesday at the market as a social event. It's three or four blocks of food, arts and entertainment."

Live musical entertainment is a feature of many local markets, and vendors from local restaurants sell fresh-prepared food ranging from gyros and falafels to kettle corn and cupcakes. Some markets, such as the Pacific Grove Farmers' Market, also feature a community information booth where people can find recipes using fresh fruits and vegetables, information about local gardening, and posts about local events, classes and eco-groovy businesses.

Another feature of the Pacific Grove Market is a kids'



(Photo by Orville Myers)

activity booth with art supplies. This market also hosts educational events, such as composting workshops, cooking demonstrations, garden tours and lessons on pickling and canning (see www.everyonesharvest.org for details).

The larger markets are truly one-stop shopping spots, where shoppers can find a plethora of gifts, arts and crafts — including hand-crafted jewelry, embroidered clothes, knitted hats and scarves, handmade soap and even parakeets and love birds.

"People come here for the social interaction, arts and crafts, and the whole feeling of the Monterey area," said Headley. "Getting produce directly from the local people who live here really supports the local economy. And after a period of time, you are also supporting people you know. Come out and chat with some of the farmers, vendors and folks in the crowd. The market will speak for itself."

CARMEL

The Barnyard: 9 a.m.-1 p.m., Tuesdays (May to September), Barnyard Shopping Village Parking Lot

MARINA

Marina Farmers' Market: 10 a.m.-2 p.m., Sundays (year-round), 215 Reservation Road

MONTEREY

Del Monte Center: 8 a.m.-Noon, Sundays (May 2 to October), Whole Foods Parking Lot

Monterey Fairgrounds Farmers' Market: 3-8 p.m., Fridays (April to September), 2004 Fairgrounds Road

Monterey Peninsula College: 10 a.m.-2 p.m., Fridays (year-round), Lower Level Parking Lot

Old Monterey Market Place: 4-8 p.m., Tuesdays (year-round), Alvarado Street

PACIFIC GROVE

Pacific Grove Farmers' Market: 4-7 p.m., Mondays (year-round), Central & Grand Avenues, in front of Jewell Park

SALINAS

Alisal Community Farmers' Market: 9-5 p.m., Thursdays (July to October), 632 East Alisal Street, "Gabby Plaza"

Boronda Square Farmers' Market: 9 a.m.-2 p.m., Fridays & Sundays (year-round), North Sanborn & Boronda Roads

Lincoln Elementary Farmers' Market: 4-8 p.m., Thursdays (May to October), 705 California Street

Natividad Hospital Farmers' Market: 11 a.m.-4 p.m., Wednesdays (June to November), 1441 Constitution Boulevard

Old Town Salinas Farmers' Market: 8 a.m.-2 p.m., Saturdays (year-round), Main Street & Central Avenue

Toro Elementary Farmers' Market: 4-8 p.m., Wednesdays (year-round), Toro Park Elementary School

SEASIDE

University Plaza Farmers' Market: 3-8 p.m., Mondays (year-round), Fremont Boulevard & Echo Street

SOUTH COUNTY

Greenfield Farmers' Market: 9 a.m. -1 p.m., Saturdays (June to October), Palm Street, between 9th and El Camino Real

King City Farmers' Market: 4-7 p.m., Wednesdays (April to October), 200 Broadway Street

Soledad Farmers' Market: 5-8 p.m., Thursdays (May to September), Soledad Street



(Photo by Orville Myers)