

Chef Mollie of Trattoria Mollie is a regular customer of both the Montecito Farmers Market and Tri-County Produce.



TO MARKET WE GO

Three local venues that give the chef in all of us a place to start

Santa Barbara locals love to cook almost as much as they love being cooked for. The local dining scene, as it continues to grow and evolve, is home to more restaurants per capita than any other town in the nation. And that doesn't even count the catering and confection industries whose private chefs and planners are largely responsible for putting our town on the culinary destination map for weddings, wine tasting and food festivals; not to mention a first class culinary school at City College. All told, it creates the perfect environment to produce a growing population of knowledgeable foodies eager to create and consume.

Part of the reason the area attracts and supports such talent and overall food interest is the wide assortment of

fresh, organic foods sustained year after year by some of the most knowledgeable and noble farmers and fishermen in the world. That combined with an array of very competitive specialty markets bending over backwards to conveniently provide, stock, display and replenish the area's finest foods, it's only natural that the best chef in all of us begins to shine when cooking for family and friends. "It all starts with what you buy and where you buy it," says Lynette La Mere, Chef-owner of Pure Joy Catering. "We truly are blessed with our markets and local resources here in Santa Barbara." So where do those in the know go when it comes to creating healthy, good tasting food? The following three market profiles give some of the history, variety and philosophy behind what's available when Santa Barbara goes to market.



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Santa Barbara Certified Farmers Markets

Outdoor family fun

BY LAURENCE HAUBEN

Photo by Mehosh Dziadzio

The words “fun family outing” don’t typically spring to mind when one thinks of grocery shopping, unless of course one is talking of the Farmers Market. It is the only food market where your kids won’t be begging for sugary cereals and candy bars, but for organic strawberries, snappy carrots, and of course honey sticks while they dance to the tunes of street musicians and sport fanciful hats made by the balloon man.

Started in the mid nineteen seventies by a group of just six farmers, at least one of whom, Randy Wade, still attends the market weekly, the Santa Barbara Certified Farmers Market Association (SBCFMA) has grown into a cherished institution with over a hundred and fifty farmer members. It is the pride of locals and the envy of visitors. It is the place to run into old friends and make new ones. It is a must-stop for political candidates and a forum for community groups. It is increasingly where the top chefs shop not only for produce, but for specialty oils, honey, even for meat from local ranches.

What I love most about the market is that its face is ever changing, reflecting the seasons and our community. I asked General Manager Sam Edelman what is most exciting at the market these days.

“All of the exceptional products that we have available at our fingertips each week. Farmers have truly been pushing the envelope over the past few years when it some comes to quality and overall selection. A couple relatively recent additions to our markets include Fat Uncle Farm with their exceptional blistered almonds and almond butter, Rancho San Julian’s amazing Beef, as well as a few young family farmers just getting into the farming venture. Customers are always looking for something new to work with in the kitchen to keep them excited about cooking, and area farmers are meeting the demands. It seems that people are reverting back to more home cooking, which is much more economical, healthy, and not to mention a great way to spend time with the family. Truly taking the time to enjoy the local ingredients sourced directly from our area is becoming much more appreciated.”

Let’s talk about the new Wednesday market at Harding School. What are its unique features?

“The Harding Farmers Market was established to serve the greater Westside and Mesa area residents, although we do get customers attending from all parts of town. This market is the first to be held directly within a residential neighborhood, so many of our customers walk just a few blocks to patronize the market each week. The challenge is getting customers to initially try the market for a first expe-



Chef Jerry Wilson from Pure Joy Catering shops for his kitchen at the Tuesday downtown Farmers Market.

Photo by Michosh Dzandzio

rience, but once they get an opportunity to meet the farmers and taste the amazing produce, they often return on a weekly basis. The Harding School Farmers Market has a great selection of local growers, and more will be coming this summer. A full selection of fresh fruits and vegetables, Ojai Valley Sprouts, Lily's eggs and Chicken, Ojai Valley Bee Farm honey, Mill Road Orchard's Apple cider vinegar and juices, as well as flowers and plants. Tom Shepherd's Farm just joined us this past month, bringing in his renowned spring mix, spinach, dried beans, herbs de Provence and his great strawberries. It is also a great educational experience for all of the curious children that visit this market, instilling good eating habits at a young age."

What is the role of local chefs at the Farmers Market?

Local Chefs play a vital role at our markets, and we seem to be getting more and more every year. Not only do they help promote local agricultural producers through their menus, I think that they give great inspiration to our customers to experiment with items they may not have worked with before. Restaurant patrons are very in tuned with the overall economic, social and environmental importance of eating locally and supporting area farmers. Trattoria Mollie, Bouchon, Hungry Cat, Cannery Hotel, Pierre LaFond, Hollister Brewing Co., Wine Cask, Elements, Roy, Arts & Letters Café, just to name a few.

What role does the market play in the life of our community?

Community support is vital for keeping local farming alive and well in our area. Our mission is to provide small local family farmers, many of who rely solely on this income for the financial and physical sustainability of their farms, with an outlet to market their goods directly to the public. The SBCFMA additionally provides for the consumers of the communities it serves an access to fresh, healthful food, wholesome community gathering places, as well as food and agricultural information and education to the public. Without the support of our community, many of the farms that attend our 8 weekly farmers market would not be able to sustain financially. We have some of the most loyal farmers market patrons imaginable and the SBCFMA greatly appreciates, and heavily relies on their years of support.

For more information on market locations and growers go to www.sbfarmersmarket.org

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