Sean Ellis/Capital Press

People sample produce at the Capital City Public Market in downtown Boise Sept. 10. CCPM farm vendors say they are doing well four years after a few dozen other farmers split from Idaho's largest farmers' market and formed their own market.

Ag vendors at Idaho's largest market doing fine after split

By SEAN ELLIS
Capital Press

BOISE — When a few dozen farmers left Capital City Public Market four seasons ago to form their own market, Kurtis Williams wasn't about to join them.

Williams, who owns Waterwheel Gardens, said there was no way he was going to give up the 12,000 to 15,000 people Idaho's largest farmers' market draws on a typical Saturday.

Not only did Williams remain at the CCPM, but demand for the farm's wide variety of fresh produce has been so good he now operates in two locations at that market.

"We're really happy here," he said. "The market is as big and good as ever."

The farmers who left CCPM and formed the Boise Farmers Market to create a more agriculture-centric market say they are doing well and have no regrets.

CCPM farm vendors say the same thing.

"The city has grown so much that it can support both markets," Williams said. "I think it's all worked out well for everyone."

Like Williams, Timber Butte Elk Ranch owner Diana Molenaar said she can't pass up the potential 12,000-15,000 customers that flock to the CCPM each week. She tried once and it didn't work.

Molenaar joined the Boise Farmers Market its first year but didn't do that well and returned to the Capital City Public Market.

She said people who go to the food-centric BFM are looking for fresh meat, which constitutes only about 15 percent of her business, which includes salami, pepperoni and huckleberry elk sausage.

"You can't walk away from that kind of volume," she said about the CCPM crowds. "When you have (several) hours to make an impact, you want to touch as many people as you can."

The net result of having two markets operating blocks away from each other is that more produce and farm products are being sold in Boise, which is a benefit to farmers and consumers, said CCPM Manager Melissa Nodzu.

"That's what we are all striving for, to get more local foods into the hands of local people," she said.

About 95 percent of sales at the BFM are of farm products, while the CCPM has a good balance between farm vendors and non-farm vendors.

"Both markets serve separate needs," Molenaar said. "It's been good for everybody."

The split did force the CCPM to actively recruit new farmers for the first time and the market has also adapted in other ways.

It recently began shuttling people from a low-income part of the city to the market and matching their first $10 of fresh produce purchases.

Agriculture fuels Southern Idaho economy

By CAROL RYAN DUMAS
Capital Press

Carol Ryan Dumas/Capital Press

Ethan Mansfield, regional economist with the Idaho Department of Labor, gives a presentation on the economic strengths and shortfalls in southern Idaho during the Southern Idaho Economic Development Organization's 15th annual summit in Twin Falls on Sept. 8.

TWIN FALLS, Idaho — Southern Idaho has had impressive success in drawing business, investments and jobs to the Magic Valley in recent years, and much of it has been in the ag production/manufacturing cluster. But the area also faces a future shortage of labor needed to keep the momentum going.

Community leaders met last week at the Southern Idaho Economic Development Organizations 15th annual summit to get the low down on the area's strengths and needs, and to come up with a strategy for attracting talented workers.

Over the last 15 years, SIEDO's efforts have wrought $1.8 billion in capital investments, 37 new companies, 21 company expansions and 5,000 jobs to the region, said Jeff Hough, SIEDO executive director.

Those achievements have been accomplished through the collective efforts of the cities and counties in the region, with the College of Southern Idaho as the crowning jewel through its collaboration on workforce training programs, he said.

The question is "where do we go from here" to recruit talent from outside the area to continue to fuel that economic growth, he said.

To help in that answer, the Idaho Department of Labor crunched the numbers on what the region looks like now and what it's projected to look like in the future.

What it found is that the region has been able to capitalize on agricultural production and create a food cluster of processors and manufacturers, blurring the lines into other industries — such as warehousing and transportation, said Ethan Mansfield, a regional economist with the state Department of Labor.

"The Magic Valley is very dependent on crop and animal production, and manufacturers are strongly linked to ag production," he said.

On a labor basis, the Magic Valley's crop and animal production sector is 13.31 times larger than the national average, he said.

Agriculture is the basis for Magic Valley's edge in economic development and drives everything, he said.

Manufacturing is 1.38 times larger than the national average, transportation and warehousing is 1.56 times higher and wholesale trading is 1.02 times larger, according to labor statistics.

Agriculture and manufacturing are in decline nationally but on the rise in Southern Idaho because of the region's competitive advantage. Transportation/warehousing and wholesale trade are also strong sectors, he said.

Agriculture is dependent on external factors, primarily market prices. If it contracts, the region will lose its competitive advantage — such as lower production and freight costs, he said.

But the area also faces a labor shortage, with job needs projected to reach 13,687 by 2025 and the labor force projected to reach just 8,586 — a gap of more than 5,000, he said.

With 1-in-4 workers in the region older than 55, that presents a challenge to economic development and demonstrates the need to bring in young blood, he said.

"We need to attract people — and not just people, talented people — to this region," he said.

Young, talented people like diversity and are looking for "the experience" more than in the past, considering cultural and natural amenities more and more, he said.

They want diversity in housing, transportation, public and private spaces, restaurants and bars, outdoor access and population.

"Creating beautiful places is key to attracting talent," he said.