

Fair Market Value

'SITE-SHOPPING' AND OTHER LOWDOWN ON THE FARMERS' MARKET. BY BEN FOGELSON



"Noa, you're fired," says Kate Penhallegon, chair of the Lane County Farmers' Market board, on Aug. 14, to the Farmers' Market Director Noa O'Hare.

When such words are spoken it sends shivers up your spine, and I never fathomed encountering such distress as I sat in a green plastic chair for my interview with O'Hare on the future of the Farmers' Market. There we were, cooling in a minute piece of gold-spotted shade behind vegetable, fruit and flower laden booths along 8th Avenue, and the bomb was dropped.

I turned to Penhallegon who had stuck her head from a shelf of stiff, planted shrubs, sending honey-bees helter-skelter and infusing the afternoon with the sweet scent of lavender.

"You're firing me a lot earlier this week," laughs O'Hare with a smile, decoding the joke. So far, none of the faux firings have stuck.

I sighed, looked to the sky and wondered for the hundredth time that afternoon ... what's really going on with the Farmers' Market these days? Maybe, if I were lucky, I could dig up something juicy and squash some rumors.

First of all ...

The market wants to expand. That's the official position of the Farmers' Market board, chaired by Penhallegon.

Second of all, if you want to read on and learn where you might get your fresh chard in the future, your flats of juicy, red raspberries, be warned in advance: I'm gonna do it *my* way.

We got interviews, we got the occasional (and rare) poignant insights from yours truly and we got quotes from one dusty old history book called *Market Days*, by Stan Bettis, to inform you how the past of the Farmers' Market may shed light upon its future. Quotes in italics are from that agricultural tome.

The story begins long ago, when a bearded man named Eugene Skinner strode his skinny ass up a hill and looked out over a peaceful valley ...

No, it doesn't, it starts with a home, or the lack thereof.

There's no place like home

"The board's expressed," says O'Hare, "the ideal situation of having a central, permanent structure that can sell around the week and from which we can establish satellite markets; north, south, etc., to distribute agricultural products well and make sure that there are adequate markets for local farmers. I'm trying to create as large a capacity as possible."

"The perfect plan," says Penhallegon, "would be to have accessible parking for growers and customers, to have bath-

rooms, to have electricity to do more than just wash the vegetables, and to have an area where people could come to learn about agriculture in the county. We just need a home."

I do not believe that there is a merchant in the city who does not realize that the prosperity of the city is wrapped up in the prosperity of the surrounding county. This plan has worked very successfully in other cities and I think it would be well for Eugene to give it a trial. It would establish a sort of bond between the city and the country.

— **DIKE COOPER**, member of the Eugene Commercial Club (forerunner of the Chamber of Commerce) speaking to the club in 1915, just before the establishment of the first Eugene Producers' Market.

So what now? Rather than quote market statistics about how booming a business the market is doing or that how in one single year the farmers' market in Olympia, Wash., went from \$100,000 in sales to \$2.3 million by building a permanent structure for their market, I'd like you to Google *that* stuff yourself. There have been *EW* (see June 15, 2000 and May 15, 2003) and *R-G* articles on shortening the link between producer and consumer, and how that's good for the community.

But, because Penhallegon told me that "site shopping" is under way, and because in my verbosity I suddenly fear that surpassing my 2,000 words is nearer to reality than coming in under, I'd rather jump to a series of short interviews with Lane County citizens, farmers and politicians.

Setting the table

When something expands, it often expands directly from where it's situated. When you eat a caramel-dipped, fried African jungle grub, it's usually *your* belly that extends, not your neighbor's. It's the same way with Farmers' Markets.

No really, when the Farmers' Market wanted to grow in 2002, it grew in its immediate vicinity. It looked up the street, spoke with the city and added booths along Oak Street, forming a horseshoe around what's commonly known as the butterfly parking lot (a former location for the Saturday Market that now provides parking for Saturday growers, patrons of the markets and many county employees who work across the street.)

The butterfly lot has long been the subject for possible Farmers' Market expansion, and to continue the analogy, if the market's the belly, the butterfly lot would certainly be the belly stretching its belt. So I decided to dig in that direction.

But how does one investigate demolishing a county park-