

Home of Its Own?

A building for Farmers' Market needs to accommodate the seasons.

The Lane County Farmers' Market is burgeoning. It is the height of the season for local produce, and once again the idea has come up that the Farmers' Market should have its own permanent building [see cover story last week].

A Farmers' Market building has been tried once before in Eugene. In the early part of the 20th century there was a market just where the present one is located. It was run by the local Grange. Around 1930 the growers built a building at Broadway and Charnelton. They found however that they could not sustain this building every day all year. They had to take in commercial businesses and by the late '50s they failed. The building still stands and now houses medical supplies. This information comes from a book *Market Days* by Stan Bettis, published in 1969.



For some years there was no Farmer's Market in Eugene; if you wanted local strawberries, for instance, you had to drive out to the farm to get them. Then, in 1970 the Saturday Market began and the Produce Market was its adjunct.

Rebuilding a customer base for local produce was very slow work, and the Farmers' Market still benefits from its proximity to the Saturday Market. Here is a quote from Beth Little, the Saturday Market manager, in a recent (8/7) Saturday Market newsletter:

"Having the Farmers' Market as a neighbor is a gift to us. Their dedication to the quality of produce mixed with the artistry they show in the stacks of carrots, onions, corn and beets contributes so very deeply to the ideals we hold in keeping money in the community."

One of the pleasures of the produce market is its seasonality. This week it is melons and peaches but soon it will be apples and pears and grapes. We do not have a year-round growing season here in Oregon. The Farmers' Market starts small in spring. It expands through the harvest season, when there is also a Tuesday and now a Thursday market. In fall it shrinks down again – the first frost kills the tomatoes – and by the end of October it is gone for the winter.

Those who want to see a Farmers' Market building sometimes cite the Seattle Pike Place Market. Eugene is not Seattle, however, and a friend who lives there tells me that it is now mostly for tourists and sells predominantly bunched flowers.

A better model is the Portland Farmers' Market on Portland's park blocks. Its board has decided that the market is big enough. They accept no more new vendors unless they have something special to offer. (If there are 20 vendors selling blueberries, why have 10 more? The Eugene Saturday Market also has a waiting list.) In Portland, too, there is a weekday market, an evening market and satellites in the outlying districts.

It has been suggested that Lane County's "butterfly" parking lot might be reconstructed to house a new arts organization (DIVA, Downtown Initiative for the Visual Arts) and also an enlarged space for the Farmers' Market. This is an interesting idea; it would keep the Farmers' Market downtown, where customers expect to find it and still in the vicinity of the Saturday Market.

Any structures for the Farmers' Market would need to be carefully designed to accommodate its seasonality – perhaps with awnings, and maybe some sculptures and benches to give the place a less abandoned look off-season.

Lotte Streisinger is the founder of Saturday Market and Farmers' Market, and she provided a lot of the background information for last week's cover story on Farmers' Market.

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