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Malinda Bermudez gets vegetable plants ready for the Independence Riverview Farmers Market, which kicks off in April.

# LET'S GET GROWING

## Bermudez Family Farm gearing up for farmers market season

By Emily Mentzer  
The Itemizer-Observer

**D**ALLAS — Malinda Bermudez has always loved growing things. Growing up in Monmouth, her family always had a vegetable garden in the backyard. It wasn't until she got to Central High School, however, that she really began exploring agriculture. "It's just really a passion," Bermudez, 35, said of gardening. "We always had a garden. I love that connection to nature and watching things grow."

While at Central, she met her husband, Carlos, in horticulture class.

Now she, Carlos and the whole family work two farms — one in Dallas and one in Independence — to supply three farmers markets in Polk County from April through October.

To be ready for the first market in April, the work starts now.

With the unseasonably warm, dry weather, Bermudez said they have been able to do a lot of early field preparation. In the greenhouse, little seedlings raise their leaves to the warmth, getting ready to sell at market and then to be transplanted into a garden.

Bermudez earned her bachelor's degree in horticulture from Oregon State University, learning about nursery management, but always enjoyed farmers markets.

"I have receipts from the (Independence) original farmers market that go back to 1997," she said, laughing. "It seems like I have always gravitated in that di-



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Chickens at Bermudez Family Farms are used for both eggs and meat at three Polk County markets throughout the summer.

rection."

She was one of the founders of the Independence Riverview Market, seeing a need to expand and increase products offered.

Bermudez said when Monmouth started a market last year, it meant three markets throughout the season.

"One of our goals as a family farm is keeping our product really local," she said. "There's some financial perks getting into the big markets, but we really like dealing with local folks, taking them from start to finish."

The smaller markets in Dallas, Independence and Monmouth — compared to Corvallis, Eugene and Portland — also allow her to be a full-time mom as well as a farmer. Carlos' and Malinda's 3-year-old son, Dylan, often ac-

companies his mom to markets, and has since he was an infant.

Having the family farms so close to the location of the markets means it's not unusual to have produce literally right out of the field.

"You can't beat that," Bermudez said. "I make many calls to my mother-in-law saying, 'we just sold out of whatever it happens to be,' and she'll bring me another box. Sometimes customers will sit around and wait for it."

Bermudez started farming full time about five years ago. Each year, more infrastructure is added to the two farms to increase production and make things a little easier.

Flower and vegetable growing beds at the Dallas farm are worked over with layers of news-



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Malinda Bermudez inspects old nopal cacti. These have run their course, but others have already been planted to take their place.

paper and compost, keeping weeds under control and the soil from getting compacted.

She brings a variety of products to the farmers markets: broiler chickens, turkeys, eggs, vegetables, berries, dried beans, fruits and nopal — a flat part of the prickly pear cactus that is delicious, Bermudez said.

Bermudez is a Master Food Preserver and offers canned goods to customers, as well as tips and advice.

"I always get asked questions about canning," she said. "The Extension Service is a wonderful outlet to make sure you're doing everything right. There's a lot of help out there to help people do it, have fun at it and be safe while they're doing it."

Nothing gets wasted at

Bermudez Family Farms. Leftovers from the market are either canned for the family, canned to sell at the next market, donated to the food bank, composted or fed to the chickens.

"We do donate a significant amount of our leftover produce to our local food banks," Bermudez said. "It's nice to be able to give back that way and not have the waste."

The best part about running a small, farmers market farm is connecting people to the food they eat.

"We always encourage people at markets to talk to your farmer," she said. "The ones who are doing it themselves are going to talk to you because they're proud of what they're doing. They're knowledgeable."



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Jesus Bermudez readies fields at Bermudez Family Farm's Independence location earlier than normal, thanks to the unseasonably warm weather this spring.