

GOING STRONG

Born of a disaster, Cannon Beach Farmers Market is blooming a decade later



By Nancy McCarthy
For Cannon Beach Gazette

Every Tuesday for the past 10 summers, the City Hall parking lot in Cannon Beach turns into a farmers market.

Instead of cars parked in the spaces, there are at least 25 booths filled with produce from local farms, berries, mushrooms, honey, organic meats, wine, peaches and lots of other homegrown goodies.

Musicians fill the air with songs as chefs prepare fish tacos, sausages, Ramen bowls or Kobe beef burgers.

Cannon Beach locals and tourists visit regularly — one day the counters at the market's entrances clicked off 2,331 visitors. They come from all over the U.S. and foreign countries; some from Australia and Scotland stopped by the market's information booth recently.

"It's a great market," said Jackie Johnson, of Maple Valley, Washington. Johnson, who visited the market for the first time last year, called this year to make sure it was still going.

"You've got some good vendors with good-quality products; that's what I like about it," Johnson said. "You've got some interesting things, some different things. We have a lot of (farmers) markets, but I haven't seen the variety and the quality of the products."

Blowing into town

You might say that a hurricane launched the market.

Kristin Frost Albrecht, the market's first manager, recalled how the Great Coastal Gale in December 2007 devastated the North Coast but alerted residents to the area's weaknesses, including the lack of locally produced food.

"That event brought to light our susceptibility to natural disasters and our region's limited food security, should we be cut off from major distribution routes," recalled

Frost Albrecht in an email. She now manages a food bank in Hawaii. "In particular, Cannon Beach residents had limited access to fresh produce."

A big deal

But several challenges arose, including finding local farmers.

"We discovered that, out of Oregon's 36 counties, Clatsop County was the 35th in terms of agricultural production," Frost Albrecht wrote. "Of the farmers who were in the North Coast region, nearly all were age 65 or older, with many considering retirement and leaving farming."

However, Bob Neroni and his wife, Lenore Emery, had a solution for that. As operators of the EVOO Cooking School, they also had difficulty obtaining local produce. They asked then-City Manager Rich Mays — who had never been to a farmers market before — if a market could be started. They talked to other chefs about collaborating on purchases, too.

"Because we were so small, it was really difficult for farms to come and deliver, say, a case of tomatoes," Neroni recalled. "But with the idea of the market, and at the same time the chef's collaborative ... one case turned into 20 cases. That was worth their while coming."

There were other challenges, too: finding a location; working around city ordinances prohibiting outdoor merchandising; dealing with local merchants' concerns about competition; and securing financial support.

After the Cannon Beach City Council agreed to sponsor the market and to allow it on the City Hall parking lot, a farmers market committee got to work.

"There was a lot of effort by the committee to try to structure what kind of farmers market we wanted and what the rules were," said Rainmar Bartl, who, as city planning director, guided the group through the web of city ordinances affecting the market. "That was a big deal."

The city's 'living room'

The committee had high expectations.

"We wanted this to be a serious food market with a 'gold standard,' with the vendors as 'growers/sellers,'" Frost Albrecht said. "In vetting our vendors, we visited every farm, as well as artisan producers to make sure they were the ones growing, harvesting and/or foraging their products."

Vendor Anne Berlinger, of Gales Meadow Farms in Forest Grove, appreciates the policy.

"I like it that Cannon Beach is what you see is what is grown at the vendor's farm; that's really important," said Berlinger, who has been with the market since it started.

The committee decided early on not to allow crafts to avoid competing with local merchants who might carry similar items.

The "no competition" rule was so strict that cut flowers were banned the first year because some local businesses carried cut flowers. The "cut flower" controversy heated up until Daryl "Hank" Johnson resigned from his membership on the city's design review board in protest of the ban. He later rejoined the board, however.

The "food only" policy sets Cannon Beach apart, said market manager Philomena Lloyd, who works 19 hours a week organizing the market.

"It's one of the things that makes our market unique in the whole North Coast area. It's kind of an identifying thing, and I think our food vendors appreciate it," Lloyd said.

Ten years later, the market is thriving with 29 vendors from Oregon and southern Washington.

"The market became Cannon Beach's 'living room' — a place where you were going to be sure to see your friends, neighbors, family every week — and buy fresh, local, seasonal food," Frost Albrecht said. "While the food was the reason, what became apparent was that the market was all about community."

If you go

CANNON BEACH FARMERS MARKET, 10TH ANNIVERSARY

WHEN: 1 to 5 p.m. Tuesdays through Sept. 27

WHERE: City Hall parking lot, midtown

NUMBER OF VENDORS: 29, plus community booths

NUMBER OF VOLUNTEERS ASSISTING THE MARKET: 24

ITEMS FOR SALE: They include produce, honey, wine, cheese, salad dressings, baked goods, organic meats, cured meats, candy, flavored nuts, hummus, mushrooms, peaches, cranberry goods, coffee, tea, olive oils, cut flowers

CITY-SPONSORED MARKET: The city of Cannon Beach budgeted \$40,853 for the market this year. When it started, Lake Oswego was the only other Oregon city to sponsor a farmers market.



NANCY MCCARTHY PHOTO

New to the Cannon Beach Farmers Market, Blackberry Bog Farms brings produce, eggs and free-range chickens to the market.



NANCY MCCARTHY

Once banned from the Cannon Beach Farmers Market due to concerns about competition with local businesses, cut flowers are among the most popular items purchased at the market.

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<p>164 ELLIOT WAY</p> <p>Cannon Beach • \$434,500</p>	<p>191 E MONROE</p> <p>NEW PRICE</p> <p>Cannon Beach • \$429,000</p>	<p>4039 S PACIFIC</p> <p>Cannon Beach • \$424,500</p>	<p>1320 CASCARA</p> <p>NEW PRICE</p> <p>Cannon Beach • \$349,900</p>	<p>655 BREAKERS POINT CONDO</p> <p>SALE PENDING</p> <p>Cannon Beach • \$325,000</p>					

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