The Purposes of Farmers’ Markets

With the resurgence of farmers’ markets in our country comes hope of a healthier future and a more sustainable lifestyle for our families. Many of us are embracing elements of the past.

Over the last few years, farmers’ markets have reclaimed their social and economic roles in our communities. There are now more than 7,000 farmers’ markets operating throughout the U.S. This is a 18 percent increase from 2009. For most farmers’ market shoppers and supporters, the growth of farmers’ markets offers us a hope for a healthier future as well a return back to the time when we knew our neighbors and children played outside and rode their bicycles to neighborhood schools.

Farmers’ markets are important for many reasons but mostly, they serve as an important element in rebuilding our local food economy. Farmers’ markets offer a cost-effective, retail sales opportunity for local food producers who work to make small acreage farming and ranching profitable again. By making farming and ranching profitable, land is preserved and a new generation is taking-up farming and ranching. We have families of farmers at our markets where the husband and/or wives were once corporate professionals. They wanted out of the corporate rat race and to work doing something worthwhile and with their families.

Farmers’ markets are cost-effective for producers because they provide short periods of concentrated retail sales/demand with low fixed costs. Different from grocery stores, farmers’ markets ask shoppers to come at the same time for short periods of time once a week which reduces the retail labor cost for producers.

Minimizing the retail hours of operation has multiple benefits:

1) Farmers have time to farm rather than work as retailers.

2) The short time periods of heavy demand allows producers to bring more to market.

3) By having customers come at the same time, farmers’ markets have the potential to become frequent and important social and civic events and destination habits for their communities.

Farmers and shoppers recognize the purpose discussed above. It is the contention of some that farmers’ markets are culturally significant for two other reasons –social and civic. These two features aren’t always fully established at farmers’ markets but all three purposes are equally important.

Farmers’ markets should serve as an important social event in the community. They should serve as a meeting place encouraging friendly interactions between producers, neighbors, friends, family and co-workers. Food shopping is usually a weekly event which offers opportunities for these on-going social connections. For many shoppers, the social side of a farmers’ market may be as important as the shopping itself.

Farmers’ markets should build community. They provide opportunities for citizen involvement in food policy issues; promote volunteerism; and serve as a civic forum about important matters in the community. Farmers’ markets also help urbanites understand the work and life of farmers and ranchers and those living in smaller communities.

Our farmers’ markets strive to build all three of these purposes and because of this you have embraced us as your local shopping, meeting and learning place. We thank you for your participation.