



Taste of the Valley and Foothills

Guide to Farmers Markets

by Kimberly Horg

Where can valley residents go for the freshest produce? During this time of year (and in some areas all year long), consumers can find the freshest and often tastiest produce from the growers themselves. Farmers markets offer produce sold by local farmers and, because it is fresh off the farm, it is packed with rich nutrients.

MERCED In Merced, from 7 am to noon on Saturdays in a parking lot located at N and 19th streets, a farmers market has taken place all year round, for the past 25 years. There are no crafts sold but there are 14 certified growers who sell a variety of vegetables, dried and fresh fruit, honey and nuts during the busy months and, during the winter, there are a couple of persistent growers still selling produce. "We sell just about any fruit or vegetable there is," Original Merced Certified Farmers Market Manager Kathleen Schaefer said. "We try to make sure that we don't have an abundance of one product."

TURLOCK The second annual Turlock Downtown Gourmet Farmers Market opened May 14th. This year's market will be running



Turlock Farmers Market in 2004.

every Saturday morning from 8:00am - 1:00pm, May 14th - Sept 24th, 2005 at Central Park (Downtown corner of Main & Golden State Blvd.) The event will be larger and more exciting than 2004. Programs and various demonstrations will fill the venue. Cooking demonstrations,

youth presentations, and many other activities are planned.

MODESTO In Modesto, a market has been held two times a week since 1979, on Saturday and Thursday from 7 am to noon. It starts on May 7 and runs until the weekend before Thanksgiving. It is on 16th Street, between H and I streets. There are 65 local certified growers who take turns selling an assortment of fruit and vegetables. Various local bands perform while baked goods, flavored almonds, coffee and arts and crafts are sold. On Saturdays one may find BBQ food and a chef giving out samples of food. "Saturdays are busier than Thursdays; it is shoulder to shoulder on the weekends with 6,000 to 8,000 people here," Steve Christy, Modesto market manager, said.

RIVERBANK In the neighboring town of Riverbank, a market is held every Wednesday from 5 to 8 pm, starting June 1 and ending toward the end of August. It is the third Riverbank Farmers Market and the second time the market has been held at the community center, located at 3600 Sante Fe. "We decided to bring it back for a variety of reasons, the main one being community involvement," Riverbank Farmers Market Manager Linda Abid-Cummings said. "It is a fun night to get involved with the community." She says it offers not only a variety of produce from certified local farmers but also has food booths, baked goods, crafts, jewelry and homemade soaps and candles.

MANTECA In Manteca, it is the fifth year the farmers market has been part of the Convention and Visitors Bureau. It will begin on June 7, and will be held on Tuesdays, at Library Park on Manteca Avenue and Popular Street, from 4:30 to 7:30 pm and will end on Sept. 20. "It has been very successful," executive director of the Convention and Visitors' Bureau, Linda Abeldt, said. "This year it is scheduled to end in the evening, right before movies in the park begin." It offers California certified fruit and vegetables along with honey, nuts and baked goods.

STOCKTON/TRACY There are five markets in Stockton and one in Tracy, all offering certified fresh produce. Tracy's market started in April and runs until Oct. 27 on Wednesdays from 3 to 7 pm at 10th and Central streets.

There are Stockton markets on Thursdays and Sundays at the Weberstown Mall, located at Pacific and March Lane, from 8:30 am to 1 pm and on Fridays at Main and San Joaquin from 9 am to 2 pm, from May until November. The largest market in Stockton, (running year round) is on Saturdays from 6 to 10 am, under the Crest Stone Freeway, on El Dorado and San Joaquin.

Stockton and Tracy Market Manager of 13 years and local grower, Carlos Dutra, says each market offers something different but the one on Saturday is the largest of all the markets he runs and it is one of the largest Southeast Asian markets in the state, with 95 vendors and 7,000 to 11,000 people.

A new Stockton location this year brought on by the popularity of markets in the area is on Tuesdays from 10 am to 3 pm in the Kaiser Permanente parking lot on West and Hammer Lane. It runs from May 3 to Oct. 26.

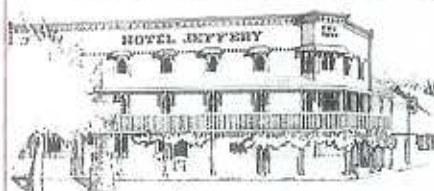
LODI In Lodi, on Thursdays, fruit and vegetable lovers can head downtown, on School Street between Walnut and Elm streets. Starting June 2 through Sept. 29 from 5 to 8:30 pm, the area will be adorned with fresh fruit and vegetable stands, crafts and food booths. A local grower who has run the market for the past 12 years, John Tecklenburg, says it is the most diversified market in the area, drawing such a large swarm of residents to the fruit and vegetables that the bugs can't even get close.

AMADOR COUNTY In the Mother lode region of California, in Amador County, there are two farmers markets. The Sutter Creek Market, (held next to the Sutter Creek Coffee Roasting Co.) on Eureka St. in Sutter Creek, starts June 11 and runs through October 15, every Saturday. The Sutter Creek Market is open from 8 to 11 am. The Pine Grove Market is held in the park on Hwy. 88 in central Pine Grove. It starts on June 15 and runs through Oct. 19, on Wednesdays from 3:30 to 6 pm.

"We are very excited about the market this year and are looking forward to the new season," Amador County Market Manager, Michelle Grondin, said. "We are continually growing and welcome new vendors. Our farmers market is California certified and features wonderful locally-grown produce, local crafts, musicians and artists." Certified farmers markets require growers to grow the produce themselves in order to sell it.

SONORA Another certified market nestled a short distance southward in the foothills, is the Sonora Farmers Market. It starts on May 14 and runs until Oct. 22. Every Saturday, between 8 am and noon, produce is sold in the downtown parking lot on Theall and Stewart streets. "The Sonora market has been city operated since 1996 and I have been involved since the beginning," Grants and Redevelopment Manager for the city of Sonora Rachelle Kellogg said. "It is a huge success and it is very community-oriented," she added. The farmers provide fresh produce and flowers while locals bring baked goods, olive oils and meat to sell. Kellogg says there are only a couple of vendors

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Taste of the Valley and Foothills



Mariposa Farms Market, in the foothills above Merced, always has fresh produce, friendly folks, and clean mountain air.

that are not from the valley and it tries to make room for any local certified grower.

MARIPOSA South on Hwy 49, in Mariposa, are two fresh food destinations that originated in 1982; one on Wednesdays from 5 to 6:30 pm at Mariposa Park, (starting in the middle of May and ending

in October) and the other starting in June at Darrah School, (located at Darrah and Triangle streets) on Sundays from 9:30 to 11 am. Early and late in the season, consumers may see up to six local growers and in the peak of the season, there are up to a dozen growers in a single day. It is a non-profit

group with certified growers.

"We have tomatoes, carrots, beets, onions, garlic, potatoes, and squash. We also have a lady who grows herbs, (known as the herb lady). Another local couple sells figs and almonds and a man brings fresh blueberries every year," enthuses Dave Harris, market manager and local grower. It is a small market, averaging anywhere from 50 to 100 people in a day.

TUOLUMNE COUNTY

A hop, skip and a jump away is the Tuolumne County Farmers Market, commencing in June at the Memorial Park (between Pine and Main streets) in Tuolumne City. It is held on Wednesdays between 4 pm and dusk. The market runs until October.

Tuolumne Farmers Market manager and Certified Grower, Melitta Varosy, said, "It is a nice little market and a great community and family event." She says there are 14 local certified farmers that bring a variety of produce. Live music is performed in the gazebo area of the park.

In just about every corner of the Central Valley, farmers markets are giving communities access to the very best foods available in a fun and easy way. Each market has a charm of its own, making customers want to come back over and over, year after year. Discover the fun of 'going to market' for yourself. If you've never been, you're in for a great time *and* some great produce!

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