

# Grower-Only Farmers' Markets: Public Spaces and Third Places

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**I**N 1970, THE PIKE PLACE MARKET IN SEATTLE WAS A COLLECTION OF run-down buildings in a worn-out corner of downtown. There were always farmers selling produce they had grown and a shopper could find a parking space on the street near the market, unless it was a particularly nice Saturday morning. The market regularly brought together small farmers from the Seattle area and loyal urban customers. There were also fish vendors and green grocers who sold produce they had purchased wholesale, but the heart of the market was the tables where farmers sold the fruit, vegetables, and flowers they had grown. As the sign said (and still says) "Meet the producer."

Developers who saw the potential of a six-acre site on the bluff overlooking Elliot Bay and the waterfront threatened the future of the market. A grassroots organization, "Friends of the Market," went to work to save the livelihoods of the farmers and the market with its laid back atmosphere (Figure 1). In September 1971, Seattle citizens voted to make the market an historic district, and the market was saved. Today, Pike Place Market is probably more successful financially than ever, but something has been lost. The market has become a tourist destination and the experience is staged for the tourists. Parking is more difficult, and the crowds have become thick. Though there are still tables for farmers, only on Wednesday and Sunday are the local farmers out in force. The market is less a place for the old, regular, Seattle shoppers looking for regional, seasonal food, and easy interaction with growers and other shoppers. It is more a place for out-of-towners to take pictures, buy souvenirs, or have seafood packed as

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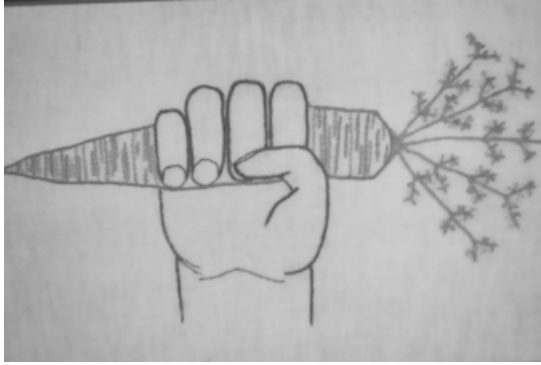


FIGURE 1. "Save the Market." Embroidery of the symbol of Seattle's Friends of the Market movement. 1970. From the author's collection.

carry-on luggage for the flight home. Some come just to see fishmongers playing catch with whole salmon. To use Ray Oldenberg's term, Pike Place Market has lost the status as a "third place" it had thirty-five years ago when I often rode the #3 bus over Queen Anne Hill to meet my



FIGURE 2. Shopping between facing rows of farmers at the Carrboro Farmers' Market. Photo by the author.



FIGURE 3. Diversity. Just a few of the tomato varieties available at the Carrboro Farmers' Market. Photo by author.

friends, make new friends interested in the market, talk with Asian American farmers and learn about new and seasonal foods.

Although the Pike Place Market has become less of a farmers' market and a third place, in the last ten years the number of farmers' markets in the United States has nearly doubled, and in 2003, the USDA listed 3,100 on its Web site (USDA). Some of these markets also function as places of informal association, as public spaces and third places. If a market is dominated by growers selling their own produce, and is physically arranged so that shoppers must walk into the market space, informal association usually takes place, even at a market with only a half-dozen sellers open for only four or five hours one day a week only during the local growing season. Some farmers' markets become third places; other farmers' markets do not. What is it about some markets that allows them to partially replace the coffee shops, public plazas, and corner bars that have disappeared?

### What good comes from informal association?

Ray Oldenberg argued through three editions of *The Great Good Place* (1989, 1997, 1999) that Americans are experiencing a decline in the number of places like coffee shops, Main Street benches, and corner taverns where we can engage in informal association. At the same time, others have been arguing that the quantity and quality of city parks and downtown plazas are declining, again reducing the chance for Americans to engage in informal association (Banerjee). Americans



FIGURE 4. Announcing the annual Melon Tasting. Carrboro Farmers' Market. Photo by author.

seem to be growing farther apart, yet the labeling of suburban subdivisions of large lots, no shops and no sidewalks as “communities” and the growth of a national chain of restaurants anxious to be known as your “neighborhood bar and grill” indicate our desire to capture some of the informal association that was available in the past, even if it is created commercially.

Informal association occurs when people engage in conversation, discuss local concerns, sports, current events, and civic affairs, and learn a little about each other without committing to becoming close enough to trade dinner invitations or share holidays. According to Oldenberg, such informal association is critical for a good life for

both individuals and society. David M. Hummon's review of the first edition of *The Great Good Place* (Hummon) gives an excellent summary of this contention:

[Third places] provide the individual with stimulation and the joy of shared fellowship, while enriching a person's perspective on life through conversation with diverse others. They serve society by offering settings for ritualized revelry, teaching skills necessary for association beyond private life, developing political consciousness, and nourishing a broader appreciation for public life and space.

(Hummon 931)

Banerjee writes that parks and public spaces have similar functions, being a source of "civic pride; social contact, especially between people from diverse backgrounds; a sense of freedom; and finally common sense (as in aesthetic standards and public taste)" (Banerjee 10). Even a summer softball league throws together diverse teams for a few hours a week in ritualized revelry, and zoos, museums, and fishing ponds are places where city residents have to practice skills of association and observe the positive functions of public life, space, and services.

Informal association adds more dimensions to our lives and makes our communities richer. A decline in third places and public spaces may lead to a decline in society as we find ourselves spending time only with those we know well. Do any farmers' markets provide a place and a space where we can informally associate with others? Do some become, like Pike Place Market, a place of staged experiences rather than informal gathering? What are the characteristics of those markets that have become third places and effective public spaces, becoming places for both trade and informal association?

## Farmers' Markets

The 3,100 farmers' markets listed by the USDA vary widely in size, scope, organization, and rules. A few are open six or seven days a week all year, though the norm is one or two days a week during the local growing season. After visiting sixty markets in six states during the 2003 season, it was easy to see that markets in the United States varied as much as Tunbridge found they varied in Canada.

A small number are essentially wholesale markets. Though there are some retailers, brokers buying truckloads of produce from local and

distant producers and distributing it to small grocers, farm stand operators and restaurant suppliers do the main business of these markets. These wholesale markets are usually open six or seven days a week most of the year. Examples of essentially wholesale markets are the State Farmers' Markets in Charlotte, Greensboro, Asheville and Raleigh, North Carolina.

Some markets allow vendors to resell produce bought wholesale and some allow a farmer to sell goods produced by a few neighbors and friends alongside their own. These markets tend to be open most days of the week, but are often closed in the winter. They are really more a series of greengrocers than a farmers' market, though there are a few stands where a farmer with a truckload of sweet corn, peaches, or melons can sell his or her own goods for a few days. Examples of these greengrocer markets are the Soulard Market in St. Louis, the markets in Carthage and Goldsboro, North Carolina and Boston's Haymarket.

The vast majority of the 3,100 farmers' markets are grower-only markets where sellers are allowed to sell only what they have produced themselves. Grower-only markets fall into two broad categories, labeled "indigenous" and "experience" (Tiemann). Indigenous markets have a narrow range of traditional produce for sale; what some farmers refer to as "corn, 'maters and 'taters." Many of the sellers at these markets are retired or have another source of income. Prices are low and the customers seem to be older. The sellers are people who still have a big garden, selling what locals have always grown to people who no longer have a big garden. These tend to be in small towns and are often supported by the local extension office. There are many examples of these indigenous markets. Those in Tarboro, Louisburg, and Albemarle, North Carolina; Washington and Fulton, Missouri; and Danville, Virginia are all of this type.

Experience markets offer a much wider range of goods. More types and varieties of produce are available, and there may be meat, cheese, jams, handmade soap, and crafts. These markets tend to be in larger towns, and many are in college towns. The farmers themselves often organize these markets. The farmers see that their success depends on the market's success, as many of the farmers depend on sales at the market as their main source of income. The Matthews and Carrboro Farmers' Markets in North Carolina; the Clayton, Ferguson, and Cole County markets in Missouri; the Dane County and Brookfield markets in Wisconsin; and most of the markets in Maine fall into this category. These markets provide shoppers with an experience as well as with

groceries. Because sellers can sell only what they have produced, the experience evolves over the season as lettuces, then strawberries, then tomatoes, and sweet corn, followed by winter squashes and broccoli appear and disappear. Finally, at the end of the season, the lettuces reappear. At experience markets goods are more attractively displayed, the variety is greater and the season longer than at indigenous markets. The farmers and the managers of experience markets actively promote the idea that locally grown produce is better than produce that comes through the formal food distribution system. Local chefs often shop at these markets and can be seen in their white coats and checked pants. Customers are offered the latest food ideas, foods that are not available elsewhere and a chance to talk with the grower.

Farmers' markets also come in a number of physical arrangements. The large wholesale and greengrocer markets are under cover and often enclosed. Sellers have permanent tables or stalls and walk-in coolers. Both types of grower-only markets are generally in the open, though sellers have some sort of temporary tent-like roof to protect them and their goods from the sun or rain. Some grower-only markets, especially indigenous markets, are arranged facing a parking lot, so that a shopper can walk directly from their car to their favorite farmer's table. Other grower-only markets, especially experience markets, require shoppers to walk among the vendors, either by arranging the tables in facing rows with the rear of the stalls to the parking lot, or by arranging the stalls around an open central area, like an old-fashioned town square (Figure 2).

Markets that evolve with the season and require shoppers to walk among the sellers provide shoppers more opportunity for informal association and are more effective as third places. A well-arranged grower-only farmers' market is usually a third place, especially if the season is long and the variety of goods offered is wide. Because experience markets are more likely to have long seasons, a wide variety of goods, and be arranged in a way that promotes informal association, experience markets are the most likely to become effective public spaces and third places.

## Farmers' Markets and Public Spaces

Sometimes a farmers' market will bring people downtown in the evening or on the weekend, helping revive a lagging central business district, or

adding foot traffic to an already healthy downtown. The shoppers drawn to downtown Ferguson (MO) for the market on Saturday mornings are helping small businesses compete with the malls that surround this old St. Louis suburb. Nearby Clayton is an edge city with its own collection of high rise office buildings, yet the farmers' market that takes place on one block of a downtown street generates Saturday morning business for coffee shops, newsstands, and drugstores that would otherwise do little business on the weekend when the office workers are not there. Like most third places, markets develop a personality that mirrors the community. Even within one city, "Each market reflects its neighborhood. Our French Quarter Market is more heavily tattooed than our Tuesday version, where uptown ladies come in straight off the tennis court," says Richard McCarthy IV, executive director of the Crescent City Farmers Market, which operates four separate markets around New Orleans. (Johnson).

The Town of Carrboro (NC) built an open pavilion it rents to the very successful farmers' market on Saturday mornings and Wednesday afternoons. The market introduces people to this pavilion, called the "Town Commons" by the town, which is used for many other events like town-sponsored Fourth of July celebrations and holiday programs in December. In similar ways, other markets introduce people to public spaces and increase awareness and appreciation for public spaces in towns and cities.

### Farmers' Markets: Third Places for Farmers

Most of the sellers at experience, grower-only markets are small full-time farmers, actively cultivating less than fifteen acres in any season. Though these farmers work side by side with family members, hired help and an occasional intern, raising produce and flowers for direct retail sale is lonely work. Oldenberg gives "third places" that name because they are neither home nor work—the first and second places. Though the weekly market is a place of work for farmers, it gives them a chance for informal association with each other like a third place does for workers in a city or town. Each farmer tends his or her own stall or table, but even a casual observer will notice that the sellers have an easy relationship with each other, much like the regulars at a coffee shop or corner tavern. Some will be close friends and meet each other socially, but most of the relationships are informal. Jokes are traded, change for

a large bill is offered, admiration is expressed for a nice display or unusual crop, and the weather is discussed. It is not unusual for an experience market have an older vendor who still comes, though he or she no longer brings much to sell. These "old timers" are like those in a coffee shop who nurse one cup through the morning, but add much to the conversation.

Experience markets are organized to benefit regular vendors who come most weeks of the season. In order to keep a certain spot at the market, these markets require a seller be at the market at least half or two-thirds of the days it is open. Those who come less often will have to take what space is left, or may be denied entry during the height of the season when all of the regulars are selling. This results in a sense of order for the buyers, but it also creates groups of regulars who are near each other week after week and soon find themselves engaged in the same kinds of conversations as regulars at any third place.

New farmers at grower-only markets are usually brought into the informal association. Like a newcomer at a tavern, a new farmer must demonstrate a willingness to engage in the banter in order to be included. The farmers will probably initially reach out by offering merchandising suggestions or helping make change, but the newcomer must reciprocate to become part of the unofficial association among the sellers. New farmers also benefit from association with other farmers, for interviews with the sellers reveal that the other farmers are the best source of advice on growing and merchandising.

Markets that are open six or seven days a week, like wholesale markets, are work places, not third places. Seeing other sellers is no longer a special event but part of the daily grind. Coming to the market is not a pleasant change from working in the fields, but is what you do every day. The sellers are more shopkeepers than farmers. Similarly, at greengrocer markets that allow sellers to offer goods purchased wholesale or raised by others, the sellers have less to talk about. Though they may all be small business owners, the weather and farming topics are less important as conversation openers and uncontroversial discussion topics. The grower-only market, and especially the experience market, is more likely to be a third place for farmers than either the wholesale or greengrocer market. Andy Griffin, who sells at the Ferry Plaza Farmers' Market in San Francisco, put it very well. "This market is an uncomfortably large part of my income. It is also a big part of my social life, such as I have one" (Weil).

## Shopping or Seeing Friends? Farmers' Markets as Third Places for Customers

Many grower-only farmers' markets provide all of the functions of third places that Hummon lists. Below, examples of shared fellowship, conversations with diverse others, ritualized revelry, learning skills necessary for association beyond private life, and consciousness about the effects of political and personal decisions on the way we live that often happen at grower-only farmers' markets will be shared.

Even though grower-only markets are open for only a few hours a week for part of the year, the stimulation and joy of shared fellowship is apparent to anyone who spends more than a few minutes at one. If the physical arrangement forces shoppers to walk among the sellers, the shoppers become a good-natured group. If buyers can park their cars facing the farmers' stands, they will get out of their cars, walk directly to one or two stands, buy what they want, then walk right back to their cars and drive home, seldom interacting with each other. When buyers walk between facing rows of sellers, they dwell at the market. The Cary (NC) Farmers' Market meets in a pleasant, central space at the edge of the downtown of an affluent, food conscious suburb. You can buy heirloom tomatoes and fancy lettuces in season. It continues to operate, but has never drawn large crowds, nor become a third place. While a farmer at the nearby Carrboro Farmers' Market might sell three hundred pounds of tomatoes on an August Saturday, a farmer at Cary is happy to sell one hundred pounds. The Cary market is arranged like a strip mall and shoppers do not spend much time there wandering among the vendors and buying more than then planned to buy when they left home. Carrboro is arranged as two facing, concentric circles, and shoppers have to walk among the vendors, an arrangement that promotes success both financially and as a third place.

Even on a rainy day at a well-arranged market, the crowd is good-natured, everyone is happy to see local lettuces the first weeks of the season, an abundance of strawberries a few weeks later, and the first tomatoes when summer arrives. Different people proceed at different paces and every buyer's irregular pace through the market results in a rich experience as each is forced to slow down in front of an unfamiliar stand, notice that there are new varieties available, and chat with both acquaintances and strangers. Each week is different at a grower-only market because what is available evolves with the season. Every week

there are new foods discovered and shared among the shoppers. At experience markets, the change from week to week is greater than at indigenous markets. The greater variety of goods means that more items are coming in or going out of season each week. If heirloom varieties of tomatoes are offered, then buyers become aware that there are early-season and late-season varieties. Fennel and arugula do not grow in hot weather, and asparagus needs to have warm, but not hot, weather. Changing topics for informal conversations are readily available at an experience market.

Markets that allow the sale of goods bought from distant growers may have a dependable selection of produce, but the shared joy of the rhythm of the seasons is lost. A survey of shoppers at the Carrboro (NC) Farmers' Market in 2002 found that fifty-seven of the 153 respondents answered an open-ended question of what they liked best about the market with responses about meeting friends, a spirit of community, or the friendliness of the people. Farmers' markets also develop their own community and they have "regulars" like any third place. The Carrboro survey found that over seventy percent had come at least ten of the twenty-nine Saturdays the market had been open since March, with forty-five percent of shoppers coming twenty times or more.

### Conversation with Diverse Others

The other functions of a third place take longer to notice. Conversations between diverse others occur as old and young question each other about which farmer has fennel or as urban or suburban customers ask rural farmers how many more weeks asparagus will be available. At experience markets, where there is a great variety of goods, it is common for two customers at one farmer's stand ask each other where some item in their shopping basket was found. The farmers at these markets compete by introducing new goods or finding ways to extend the season of a particular fruit or vegetable. Customers faced with a choice of six or seven different tomato varieties will be drawn to ask a farmer, like I did one morning, the difference between "Nebraska Wedding" and "Kellogg's Breakfast," two medium-sized, yellow tomatoes. If the seller has grown those tomatoes, he or she will be more knowledgeable about the advantages of different varieties and more motivated to find out what kinds of tomatoes customers like.

The mission of the Matthews (NC) Community Farmers' market includes "... to be a blend of fresh marketplace and gathering place for all members of the community ..." (Matthews), and other markets encourage interactions among diverse groups. The shoppers at a grower-only market are brought together by the desire for fresh, local food, and other differences are blurred over. Even though fresh, local food brings the shoppers together, the motivations to buy at a farmers' market are diverse, too. At experience markets where organic or "no sprays" produce is often sold, some buyers come for food that is not chemically treated to protect their own health, others want to protect the environment. At any grower-only market, some want to buy locally produced goods because they are fresher tasting, others want to support local businesses. At experience markets, some want to be in on the latest food trends, others are just curious about new foods.

Diversity of products is an important feature of an experience market, and it seems that the diversity of foods brings out a diverse crowd of shoppers: old and young; well dressed and unshaven; chefs from top restaurants and old hippies; graduate students and professionals. The variety of food can be dazzling. Not only is there arugula and fennel in season, but in mid-summer at the Carrboro Farmers' Market you can buy three or four varieties of red slicing tomatoes, two or three of yellow slicing tomatoes, a few different pink tomatoes, heirloom slicing tomatoes of many colors and sizes, green striped Italian salad tomatoes, red and yellow plum tomatoes and red, gold, yellow, and purple cherry tomatoes (Figure 3). A similar wide variety of goods is available in Madison, Wisconsin; Jefferson City, Missouri; Camden, Maine; Union Square in Manhattan and Borough Hall in Brooklyn.

### Places for Ritualized Revelry

Successful farmers' markets mix some theater in with the sale of produce. There is the simple beauty of the displays at any market, but at experience markets there are also cooking demonstrations and tasting contests. At a third place there are rituals, but the rituals cannot become too repetitive or too predictable, or they become more tourist attractions than genuine experiences. How do grower-only markets provide shoppers an experience without having the same experience week after week? Is getting to the Fearington (NC) Farmers' Market

before the opening whistle to be first in line for asparagus different from seeing the daily show of fishmongers playing catch with whole salmon at Pike Place Market?

Constructed experiences, like those at Disney World or even Colonial Williamsburg, are meant to be consistent so that visitors coming at any time can have the same experience. A tour of Europe of the “if it’s Tuesday, it must be Belgium” variety is constructed so that everyone returns home knowing that they have seen all of the same highlights that others have seen. Pine and Gilmore (1999) note that one of the problems with constructed experiences is keeping them fresh. How often will a customer come and pay for the same experience, no matter how well conceived and executed? How do experience farmers’ markets avoid making their rituals stale and annoying to the regulars?

The revelry at a third place is different. It may be ritualized, but it is not always the same. If it involves sporting events on television, each game is different, and the crowd watching will vary some from game to game. Similarly, the revelry at a grower-only market will vary from week to week. Even if the ritual is a cooking demonstration at an experience market, the recipes will change as the season changes. If it is a tasting, the weather that makes one variety of strawberry grown by one farmer the best tasting will be different the next year and a new winner will be named (Figure 4). Much of the revelry simply involves being at the market, meeting people and seeing what is for sale—events that are not predictable and certainly not consistent from week to week at grower-only markets. A report on Maine farmers’ markets says it best, “when vendors are pleased to be at a market and working well together it creates a wonderful atmosphere . . .” (Eat Local Foods Coalition 7).

Grower-only farmers’ markets do not attempt to create the same experience every week. Many of the rituals are seasonal, and the experiences are not all created by the market manager. The market manager may arrange the cooking demonstrations and tastings, but at an experience market what is cooked or tasted is what is available, and what is available follows the seasons. Much of the revelry at grower-only markets is between individual farmers and customers: hiding a pound of scarce asparagus below the counter for a late-shopping regular or having a standing joke with another. The farmers create many of the rituals: peppers roasted in August or bites of melon handed to passing customers in July. The revelry is partially decentralized, and even the centralized part varies with the season.

## Teaching Skills Necessary for Association Beyond Private Life

One of the habits that people lose as public spaces and third places become scarce is caring for common space. When such spaces are shared, boisterousness in those places is lower and vandalism decreases as more people define an area as “theirs” (Oldenburg 1989: 80–84). People learn to interact in large groups and to practice habits of patience and consideration for others when they are in public spaces they will visit again. Since many grower-only markets are held one or two days a week in places that have other uses on other days, the shoppers become only one of a number of groups that adopt that place as theirs. Realizing that others also use their space will increase shoppers’ awareness of the complexity of their community. Realizing that the space is important to the livelihood of the farmers who sell at the market will increase patrons’ appreciation for the importance of public spaces generally.

Both the farmers and the shoppers at a crowded farmers’ market must practice patience and common courtesy. The Dane County Farmers’ Market is held on Saturday mornings on the sidewalk that edges the central square surrounding the Wisconsin State Capitol building in Madison. The farmers are in the street, their displays facing inward toward the sidewalk. The other side of the sidewalk is bordered a curb or a low fence, so all the shoppers must stay on the sidewalk. In mid-summer, there will be twenty thousand shoppers and three hundred sellers at the market. It all works much better if everyone walks around the Capitol in the same direction, and almost everyone co-operates by walking counter-clockwise. New shoppers quickly learn the wisdom of this common courtesy, even if it means a long detour to go back to one farmer’s stall.

Farmers at grower-only markets usually stand behind their displays where they can weigh bags of produce, collect money and make change. There is seldom an obvious line at the cash drawer and someone making a purchase will often stand in front of the goods another customer wants to inspect. Space is limited, but customers learn to be patient, to be careful to make room for others and not to take up too much room with their shopping basket or stroller. The awareness of others is inescapable, and shoppers learn to co-exist in the crowded space.

Customers also learn to bring a shopping basket or cloth bag and to try and use exact change and small bills. It is not unusual to see

shoppers offering a \$10 bill and a quarter for a purchase costing \$5.25. It is easier on the farmer to simply give a five in change and it saves his or her quarters for other customers.

Grower-only markets are usually kept clean and neat. At many, the farmers are responsible for picking up their areas; both during open hours and at the end of the market day. When vendors and shoppers come to an attractive, clean space to shop for produce, the experience of a clean, neat public space should help form attitudes toward keeping other public spaces neat and clean.

## Developing Political Consciousness

Grower-only markets only allow sellers from a certain geographic area. While the Dane County Farmers' Market allows growers from anywhere in the state of Wisconsin (Dane County), the Carrboro Farmers' Market is open only to growers within a fifty-mile radius (Carrboro), and the Cole County (MO) Market is limited to growers from that county and contiguous counties (Cole County). Both indigenous and experience markets usually have such rules.

The farmers who sell at experience markets often make their living growing and selling produce locally. Many were drawn to farming to live healthier lives or to work for themselves. There are a few who wanted to "get back to the land" in a Sixties-survivor sort of way. As a result, many of these markets have a political subtext not far below the surface. It can be as simple as "Support the farming lifestyle" on the Moore County (NC) Farmers [sic] Market Web site. It can be a little more elegant and focused like the broadside distributed at the Greensboro (NC) Curb Market that states that shopping at the market "Ensures farmers' fair share by avoiding the middleman" (10 Good Reasons). A vision of a more sustainable local economy is common, something that recalls the original Friends of the Market movement at Pike Place Market in 1970.

Almost every farmers' market brochure urges customers to think of the way they spend their money as a political, as well as economic, act. The Fairfield (ME) Farmers' market brochure urges:

Buy Locally. Buy Fresh!

The money you spend at the farmers' market directly provides a livelihood for small family farms in our area, rather than going to

the middlemen or large corporations in distant place. This strengthens the local economy because money spent with a local business circulates locally. (Fairfield)

The *2003 Farm Fresh Atlas*, a directory of farmers' markets in southern Wisconsin, also links shopping at farmers' markets with political preferences when it states, "Your food choices can influence farmland preservation, water quality, and jobs in Dane County, as well as global biodiversity." There are many more examples. Farmers' market shoppers can see the results of their spending patterns every week and over the years as they meet successful, local farmers and watch the farmers' children grow and see new, young farmers replace those who retire. The 2002 survey of Carrboro Farmers' Market customers asked shoppers to answer an open-ended question "What is your favorite aspect of the market?" Responses like "helping local farmers," "supporting local farmers," "The connection with the Earth's seasons," and "buying from community," show that awareness that shopping decisions are also political decisions has been raised.

It is not that surprising to find that political consciousness is high in university towns like Madison, WI, where the Dane County Farmers' Market meets, or Chapel Hill, NC, only a few blocks from the Carrboro Farmers' Market. Farmers' markets also raise political consciousness in small towns in Maine and Missouri. A booklet published by the Kingdom of Callaway Food Circle in Fulton, Missouri, introduces the group by explaining "[it] . . . is an educational network of producers and consumers working together to support family farmers, preserve rural communities and keep a sustainable food system in Mid-Missouri" (Kingdom inside front cover). Each Maine farmers' market has a brochure and a slogan. Slogans like "Put a face to your food" (Brunswick), "29 years of local freshness" (Camden), or "Quality products from people you know" (Belfast) promote the connection between shopping and community.

Once the idea that buying from local producers helps support the local economy takes hold, farmers' market shoppers often become involved in efforts to support local merchants competing against national chains and big box stores. Carrboro has tried hard to become a walkable, bikable town with a viable downtown of diverse retailers, ideas largely supported by farmers' market shoppers who see how local businesses and public spaces are beneficial. Many of the markets in

small Maine towns are downtown, drawing attention to the benefits of shopping locally. Many farmers' market shoppers have come to realize that how they spend their money is a political decision.

### Developing an Appreciation for Public Life and Space

While wholesale farmers' markets are usually on the edge of major cities, grower-only markets are often in "Main Street" settings, like the Brunswick (ME) Farmers' Market's location "on the mall," a village green at the edge of downtown. In Fulton, Missouri, the market meets in a parking lot behind the town's main business street. The Tacoma (WA) Farmers' market meets "Downtown Between 9th and 11th on Broadway" (Tacoma Farmers Market). Surveys of shoppers at Oregon farmers' markets in 1998 found that twenty-four percent of the shoppers at the Portland Wednesday market and forty-five percent of the shoppers at the Eugene Tuesday market chose "for the market" as their answer to "Why are you downtown?" (Lev 4). Though a few grower-only markets are in mall parking lots, most farmers' markets bring people into public spaces, often bringing them into a streetscape instead of into a mall.

Effective grower-only markets are physically arranged so that shoppers must walk among the farmers, and most experience markets are arranged this way. Those that are arranged like a strip mall, where the customer pulls his or her car up to the stall they plan to patronize, are usually less successful both financially because shoppers do not dwell and buy things they had not really thought about purchasing. They are also less successful as third places because there is less interaction among the shoppers and between the shoppers and farmers. When markets bring people out of their cars and into streetscape, they function well as places to appreciate public life and space. Coming to a farmers' market is easy, even if parking is a problem; customers do not need to get on the freeway or six-lane feeder road and drive from shop to shop. As Oldenberg says of third places, "... the membership requirements are exceeding modest" (Oldenburg 1999: 63). Like coffee shops and corner taverns, grower-only farmers' markets are places where unanticipated meetings with friends and neighbors occur, and almost forty percent of those surveyed at the Carrboro Farmers' Market gave answers about friendship and social relationship when asked what they liked best about the market.

Grower-only markets bring people into streetscapes, parks and plazas. When city and town dwellers come to these places, they develop an appreciation for public spaces. Grower-only markets connect city and town residents with local growers selling locally grown goods. When city and town dwellers know about the variety of people, the variety of life-styles of their neighbors and the variety of goods produced locally, they develop an appreciation for the public life available in their hometown.

## Conclusion

During visits to sixty farmers' markets in six states during the summer of 2003, it became apparent that there was a great variety among the markets. Some of the markets acted as third places and effective public spaces while others did not. Ideas about the connections between what was being sold, by whom it was sold, the physical arrangement of the market and the market's effectiveness as a third place emerged and were confirmed as more markets were visited. Grower-only markets, especially those I have called "experience markets," were likely to promote informal association. This seems to be because the experience evolves with the season, the sellers are closely connected with their wares, and the once or twice a week schedule makes the market a special event. Markets that make shoppers walk among the vendors are also more successful because this causes shoppers to dwell longer, meet farmers and neighbors and notice sellers they have not patronized recently.

In 2004, the Carrboro Farmers' Market meets on Saturday mornings and Wednesday afternoons from March into December. It is in an open pavilion next to the old school that serves as town hall, a pleasant setting. There are always farmers from a fifty-mile radius selling fruits, vegetables, and other foods to loyal regulars and to customers who only come occasionally. There are a few crafters, but the heart of the market is the stands where local farmers sell what they have raised. As the market's caps, t-shirts and Web site proclaim "Locally grown, nationally known!"

Business is slower on Wednesday and the farmers can be seen chatting with each other and wandering from stall to stall to see what others have to sell. Even on a busy mid-summer Saturday morning, shoppers meet neighbors, coworkers, friends and acquaintances, and stop for a brief chat. When the market re-opens for the season in

March, there are new vendors to meet as well as beautiful lettuces, hoop-house tomatoes, and other early season crops. In May everyone hopes for warm, dry weather so that the cut flowers will appear and the strawberry season will last an extra week or two. In mid-June shoppers are looking for tomatoes and sweet corn, but lamenting the disappearance of lettuce and fennel. Peaches, green beans, roses, and summer squash appear in early July, and peppers late in the month. August and September are hot and dry, and we all hope for enough rain to keep things growing. October and November see some farmers end their season while others bring lettuce along with broccoli and cabbages. For the last few weeks of the market in December, pine and grape vine wreaths appear and we buy sweet potatoes, hoping to have some local food for Christmas dinner.

Almost every Saturday morning, and many Wednesday evenings, my wife and I walk the mile to the market, buy fresh, local food from the people who produced it. We meet friends and neighbors. We find that there are many others interested in food, in the market and in supporting a sustainable local economy. It is not 1970, and Seattle is at least three thousand miles away, but this farmers' market, like many other experience farmers' markets, has become a third place.

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