

Farmer's market flourishes in downtown State College

BY SALLY DUNMIRE
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STATE COLLEGE — Every Friday afternoon, rain or shine, market gardeners from across Centre County congregate on McAllister Street in State College, to sell their homegrown products, fruits, flowers, herbs, plants, and baked goods.

But it wasn't always such an attraction.

Nine years ago, several area growers ran an ad in the local paper. Anyone interested in starting a farmer's market was invited to attend an organizational meeting. And that's how the Centre County Farmer's Market was born. It's still going strong with 26 active members today.

"The first market site was out on Benner Pike, behind the Nittany Mall. It wasn't worth it—\$10 was a good day," according to Tucker Paterson, who, with his wife, Joy, was in on the ground floor. "Since moving the site into State College, we're doing real well, especially football weekends; lots of traffic walking by here," he said with a big smile.

"On a good day, a stand can average \$300 to \$600 a day," said Joy.

"We open the market, for all Centre County growers the week after Arts Festival, and are open 12 weeks thereafter. Three weeks before and 3 weeks after the Arts Festival, a limited number of organization gardeners, can come in and set up. State College doesn't want to block off another whole street during Arts Festival. We pay \$10.00 a year to belong to the farmer's market, plus pay a

percentage of our day's gross, anywhere from \$1.50-\$15.00 each market day. That money goes to pay State College Borough for the use of the street. The rest goes to advertising and there is a banquet at the end of the year for everyone," said Tucker.

"What I really like about this market is that it opens at noon until 5:30. This is an afternoon town. We can pick almost everything fresh that morning, so it's really fresh when people buy it. At markets that open early in the morning, growers have to pick the night before, so their produce can't be as fresh as ours," he explained.

Tucker must be doing all right. This year he became a full time farmer and market gardener, his 9th year in the business. Previously, he worked part-time for the state.

His wife, Joy, works two days a week as a registered nurse at a local psychiatric hospital. The rest of her time is devoted to their two small children and the gardens. The flowers are her primary responsibility. Tucker helps out with the vegetable garden.

They have one-and-a-half acres in vegetables and flowers. Six acres are devoted to sweet corn, an excellent seller at the market. Alfalfa, mostly sold at the Belleville auction, is raised on 70 acres.

Tucker does advertise, in the Lancaster Farming newspaper, in an effort to sell his hay himself. He prefers to move his alfalfa by the tractor trailer load, if able. "The hay business is tricky. We have good years and bad years, like a lot of farmers," Tucker said.



Shoppers browse through the stands at the sidewalk Farmer's Market in State College.

"For the most part, everything is grown organically. We use a lot of manure on our fields and gardens. I like to rotate my fields, so they go fallow on the year nothing is planted," he stated.

"In the vegetable garden, we use locally available organic fertilizer, Earthrite, on the produce. What has worked out well for us, is to plant in widely spaced rows. We till between the rows often to keep weeds down. We use a tiller/furrower tiller attachment so we can 'dirt mulch.' This attachment piles up soil around the plants to keep the roots moist and the weeds back," explained Joy.

"For market, we grow what we grow for ourselves - tomatoes, beets, sweet corn, sweet peppers, broccoli, and green beans. Some oddities like yellow pear tomatoes sell well here. I guess I'm just an old fashioned farmer, so we stick to the basics. Joy makes a few jellies, jams, and loaves of homemade bread, which we also offer at market," Tucker said.

Fresh cut flowers of zinnias, statice, cockscomb, snapdragons, bells of Ireland, strawflowers, globe amaranth, stellar scabocia, scabocia, baby's breath, mums, and marigolds are all good sellers - mixed bunches in particular. "We use Miracle-Gro on the flowers. We seed our short blooming annuals, at intervals, until midsummer - so as the old plants play out, the new ones will start to flower. Another important thing to do, to keep the blooms coming, is deadheading - removing the spent flower heads so the plants won't go to seed," stated Joy. Once the plants have formed seed pods, they will stop producing blooms.

Some of these varieties are strictly for fresh table flowers. Many, however, can be dried and made into arrangements for

winter months. These include the statice, baby's breath, cockscomb, strawflowers, globe amaranth, and stellar scabocia.

"At market, it's important to know the names of the flowers, & how to care for them to keep them fresh - they can last at least a week with proper treatment. Most important of all, to successfully sell at a farmer's market, you have to like people. We have customers who seek us out no matter where we are, because they like us and our produce," Tucker said.

"At first, when we moved into State College, my stand was farther up the street. When one of the other members dropped out, I took her area on the street corner - a prime location. People came looking for me when I moved. That is one of the bylaws, of the organization, by the way, spots are awarded on a first-come, first-served basis. If someone drops out, you can ask for their area. A grower can retain their location for a year of absence. We have a lot of teachers who go on a year's sabbatical, and come back the following market year to sell. They can get their old location back then. After a year, that spot belongs to someone else," he explained.

Another bylaw is that all the organization members have to live in Centre County. There is only one exception, a Mifflin County grower, McNitt's Fruit Farm. This is because he was one of the original founding members with Harner's Fruit Farm, of State College. Any new members must also grow their produce in Centre County. To sell it here, you have to grow it yourself. That's nice because it keeps out the large wholesalers who import produce and flowers from California and Florida. You know if you buy it

here at this market, it is really fresh, not passed off as fresh," said Jackie Greenfield, of Burr Oak Farm, Howard, Pa., another market gardener. "It gives the small grower a chance to compete successfully."

Jackie has been market gardening fulltime for two years. She, her husband, and two year old daughter, - with a lot of help from their friends, work two acres of vegetables, flowers, herbs, and small fruits. Her husband works full time at Landscape II, as a wood safety specialist.

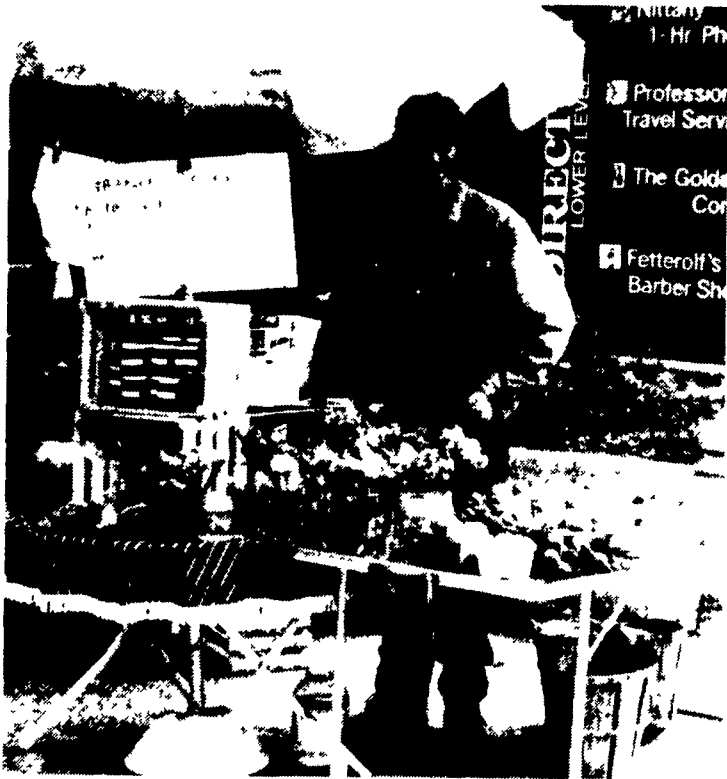
At market she sells vegetables, flowers, cut fresh herbs, herb plants, and small fruits as ripe. She also provides wholesale herbs and produce to local restaurants. Vegetables that sell well for her are onions, shallots, broccoli, lettuce, spinach, and tomatoes.

"Our specialties are Chinese leeks, due to the large Oriental population in the State College area, and, of course, our fresh herbs. I sell fresh cut thyme, parsley, Italian parsley, rosemary, lemon thyme, tarragon, sage, and the mints.

Everything is organically grown, we have people who seek us out because we grow and sell organically grown foods, and I really insist on quality or I won't sell it. I divide my herb perennials, pot, and sell at market for \$1.25 to \$2.00 for a four inch pot. I grow annual herbs, in the spring, in our makeshift greenhouse. These all sell well here in this town," explained Jackie.

Jackie's tip for successful market selling - educate people.

We do a lot of teaching at our stand - how to use the herbs, how to prepare the vegetables, & how to put them up," said Jackie. "You will sell more if you know what you are selling and how to use them."



Tucker Paterson, one of the founders of the Farmer's Market in State College, tends his stand.



Jackie Greenfield, right, of Bur Oak Farm of Howard, with her friend and helper, Nancy Scott, left Jackie sells herbs, flowers and vegetables at her stand.

Forage Conference to include hay preservative panel

DOYLESTOWN — Selecting forage species, planting and establishing forage crops and preserving hay will be among the topics covered at the Annual Forage Conference at Delaware Valley College, Doylestown.

Scheduled for Nov. 26, from 9 a.m. to 3:30 p.m., the conference is sponsored by the Pennsylvania Forage and Grassland Council in cooperation with Delaware Valley

College and Penn State University.

The morning session will focus on establishment of forage crops and address the use of marginal soils, weed control, no-till planting and fluid seeding.

In the afternoon, presentations on selection of forage species and hay preservation will be followed by a panel discussion in which four farmers describe their experience with hay preservative materials.

Speakers at the conference will

include industry representatives and agronomists from The Pennsylvania State University, the Delaware Valley College and Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University.

For more information, or to register for the conference, contact Larry Hepner, Agronomy Department, Delaware Valley College, Doylestown, PA 18901, phone (215)345-1500.