

## **Winter Market Unlikely**

By Dana Anderson

Every Wednesday and Saturday in the summer and fall, people craving organic goodies flock to the Boulder Farmers' Market to buy local produce. The market has been a part of Boulder life since 1986 and was recently named by Livability magazine as one of the top 10 best farmers' markets in the nation.

With approximately 150 vendors and a central location along Boulder Creek, the market serves as an outlet for local farmers and small businesses to attract customers.

According to the Boulder Economic Council, the market is the largest outdoor market in Colorado. As such, the market has always been held in the warmer months. But at the start of this year's season, market organizers told the Boulder Daily Camera they were considering extending sales through the winter.

Eric Skokan, chef and farmer at Boulder's Black Cat bistro, said a winter market would be an asset to the Boulder community because it would mitigate the current lack of fresh local produce available in the colder months. Despite this, extending sales through the winter would currently not be a profitable option for vendors, Skokan said.

"It's really this kind of catch-22 or this chicken-and-egg issue of there's no place to buy [produce in winter] and so the customers don't come, and if the customers aren't coming, it doesn't make financial sense for the farmers to put themselves out there and grow a lot for the winter," Skokan said. "The city has identified the main part of the issue: there's no place to sell local produce year-round."

The City of Boulder is now working to find a possible location for a winter-time farmers' market, Skokan said.

“I’m incredibly excited about it; I think it’s a slam dunk,” Skokan said. “Once a winter-time market happens, I think it’s going to take on a life of its own and become a really big deal for the community.”

Boulder residents eager for access to local produce in the winter should not expect to see a yearlong market in the near future, according to Wyatt Barnes, treasurer for the Boulder County Farmers’ Markets.

Barnes said finding a practical and affordable location for the market may be an impossible task.

While market participants currently pay a membership and space fee, the costs of maintaining a yearlong facility could be prohibitive for small farms and businesses, he said.

“If you get into a structure that has to be there like year-round and paid for, suddenly your rent goes really high,” he said.

In addition to space considerations, Barnes said many farmers who work all summer look forward to the winter-time break and also lack the setup for selling over the winter.

“In some ways it’s nice to have year-round work for your employees and stuff, but you would have to store everything,” he said. “A lot of farmers don’t have a place to store like 10,000 pounds of onions to go bring onions every week.”

Some vendors, such as the Black Cat bistro, already grow produce for the winter. Eric Skokan said other farmers would need to adjust if they want to do the same. “We back-load our planting and harvesting towards the end of the season; two-thirds of what we grow is actually for the winter,” Skokan said. “But for a lot of the farmers it will be a big, new challenge to open up the market for the winter; they’ll need to evolve their business and production plans to look a lot more like our farm does right now.”

The market features goods such as strawberries, peaches and cherries in the summer, and apples, pears and grapes in the fall. According to the Colorado Department of Agriculture, Colorado's winter produce includes squash, carrots, onions and potatoes. While many fruits and vegetables can be grown in greenhouses, Agricultural Business Week states the cost of greenhouse technology can still be too expensive for smaller farms.

Wyatt Barnes said the reduced variety of produce farmers could sell in the winter would attract fewer customers. "The draw would be so much less that you wouldn't be able to pay your rent in the winter."

Livability magazine described the market as a helpful outlet for local farmers and a "community staple;" even if the market does not become a permanent, yearlong fixture, it is likely to remain an important part of Boulder life.

Chet Anderson Jr., whose father is one of the market's founders, said the market has helped Boulder become a unique place to live. "Boulder has become, and continues to reinvent itself, as this natural, organic food hub," Anderson said. "A lot of the investment that has gone into [the market] over the years has really blossomed and allowed for this creativity from the growers and people around Boulder to realize their visions as they relate to natural food and local food."

Long-time Boulder resident and market customer Bill Hayes said he likes the existing warm-weather market because it provides an opportunity to buy quality produce in a community setting. "I think they're doing a very good job with what they have currently," he said.

Hayes said he is willing to pay higher prices for local organic food. "It ought to be against the law to call what they sell in grocery stores tomatoes," he said.

Hayes said he believes local farmers don't have the advantage of major agribusinesses in terms of using machinery and petroleum products. "I don't think the prices are unreasonably high for most of the items there, and obviously they are competing against each other as well," he said. "These are people who are doing it by hand and organically and it's very labor-intensive."

Those who are disappointed to read that their market may not be around to brighten upcoming winter months will have to console themselves with Boulder's Holiday Farmers' Market and Gift Show on Dec. 4 and 5. The show, held at the Boulder County Fairgrounds, has been extended this year from one to two days to provide locals with seasonal produce.

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**Sidebar:** Facts about the market; times and dates, history

**Multimedia:** video of a day at the market

**Web Links:** Boulder Farmers' Market: <http://www.boulderfarmers.org/home.html> Livability Magazine article: <http://www.livability.com/top-10/best-local-farmers-markets>