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2015



JUDGES' REPORT

COMMUNITY INNOVATION

MARLBOROUGH FARMERS' MARKET

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INTRODUCTION

The Marlborough Farmers' Market (MFM) was established in 2001 by local food producers keen to give consumers an opportunity to access really fresh food, reduce the environmental impacts of food production and maintain the diversity of horticulture in Marlborough.

Fourteen years on that aim has been fulfilled with stalls selling diverse and locally grown products, ranging from pine nuts and almonds to freshly harvested veges, wild game meats and handmade goats cheese.

Unlike selling to a supermarket, the MFM gives small growers and boutique producers the opportunity to control the quality of what they sell and sell at a fair price because they cut out the middle man.

The Market also enables customers to meet and chat with the producers and has become a community gathering place for friends to catch up over a cup of coffee each week.



GENERAL INFORMATION

In summer the market is held at the A&P Showgrounds in Blenheim every Sunday from 9am-noon, come rain or shine. During the winter the market is held under cover in the stock sheds, and the MFM Committee has worked with the A&P Association to upgrade these facilities.

The number of stalls and what is being sold each week varies depending on the season. There is also a community stall where people can sell excess produce from their gardens and in some cases this has led to their own market stall. The committee is keen to attract more “backyard gardeners” to the community stall.

MFM has a unique place in Blenheim's markets. It promotes local food production and has kept to the principles of the Farmers Market movement - food produced in the region and sold by someone involved in producing it. It has resisted pressure to move away from the environmental and sustainability commitments.

As well as becoming a regular event for local customers, the MFM is popular with tourists and visitors as a one-stop shop to sample and buy the best of Marlborough produce.



The MFM has a commitment to education in the community. Members have built a mobile kitchen available for schools and other groups to showcase local ingredients. Schools are encouraged to take part in the Sunday cooking demonstrations and MFM supports the Marlborough Community Gardens.

The market is run by a committee of volunteers with a part-time paid administrator. Funds are ploughed back into the ongoing running and improvement of the market.

PROBLEMS AND HOW THEY HAVE BEEN TACKLED

Since entering the 2012-13 Marlborough Environment Awards, the MFM has changed its management structure to involve the committee in a more hands-on way. The knowledge and experience of long-time stallholders has added depth and heart to the way the Market is now managed. As well as helping to consolidate funds, this new approach - which relies mainly on voluntary effort - has helped build relationships between stallholders and with the community.

The partnerships with the Marlborough District Council (which owns the land) and A&P Association (which owns the buildings) have also improved.

Recycling has yet to be introduced to the market and is a priority for implementation for next season. Providing paper plates and biodegradable coffee cups is a step in the right direction but the advantage is lost if those go to landfill. Sorting and disposing of rubbish is an extra job that comes at the end of a long day for volunteers.

A lot of work has gone into addressing the public perception that the Farmers' Market is expensive. Radio advertising, facebook and regular newsletters have all helped to dispel that perception as does the experience of regular shoppers. Aside from being able to buy fresh local produce at a fair price, there is the value of enjoying a vibrant and friendly market – a much more satisfying experience than a supermarket.

SUMMARY

There has been a lot of change and progress at the MFM in the past two years. The judges were impressed at the hard work and success of the committee-driven management and the growth in relationships within and outside the market while maintaining the principles of an authentic farmers' market.

The committee is constantly thinking, learning and improving what they do to keep stall-holders and customers engaged and interested and together they have created a distinct identity for the market.

The strength of this entry is that the market is still going, 14 years on. This is a robust organization thanks to the perseverance of the committee and stallholders. Each week, rain or shine, they are growing, harvesting, packaging, putting up the tent, setting out the stall, being nice to the customers, selling their wares, then packing up and heading back home to start all over again.

It requires a relentless effort behind the scenes and Marlborough is fortunate to have this group of dedicated people.

The MFM has proved it is sustainable and continues to deliver many environmental benefits – low transport costs to get food to market, encouraging diversity of crops grown in the region, and providing the ingredients and knowledge for customers to prepare good food.

The vision of the Marlborough Farmers' Market is to increase the network of local food producers, educate and promote local produce to customers. This vision has been realized thanks to the consistent and committed efforts of this hardworking group of volunteers.



SUGGESTIONS

- Recycling: It would be worth looking at a commercial service, preferably as a sponsorship deal. Approach Waste Management Services (Weka wheelie bins). Propose they drop off and pick up recycling bins in exchange for their sign/info being at the market and acknowledgement of their support on MFM website.
- Contact: Patrick North, Waste Management Services, patrick@wasteservices.co.nz 021 411 040
- Management structure: With the success of the past year, consider continuing with the committee-led management rather than employing an individual to take over.
- Schools: Build on the link with schools by offering cooking demonstrations from their edible gardens. Link with winner of Schools Environment Award, Bohally Intermediate. Contact: Annette Woods, Bohally teacher aide, 578 5219.
- Midweek Express story ideas:
 - Comparison shopping with supermarkets. Have a photo of a basket of produce from the Farmer's Market, with cost. Then compare to how much it would cost from a supermarket.
 - Bohally cooking demonstration, link with their award-winning gardens and art work.
 - Call for backyard gardeners to bring their produce, especially in citrus season.