

YUMMY NORTHWEST

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 SERVING IDAHO, MONTANA, OREGON, AND WASHINGTON

A growing business

There are more than 4,300 farmers markets throughout the United States and, especially in urban areas, the number is increasing rapidly. Farmers markets allow easy access to fresh, locally grown produce at a reasonable price. In 2000, 19,000 US farmers reported selling their produce only at farmers markets.

Getting produce to a farmers market takes time and effort, but it also means farmers can charge retail prices and thus get a higher profit. Cutting out the grocery store middle man also means that you, the farmers market shopper, reap savings on fresher produce.

In the US, 94 percent of farms earn less than \$250,000 annually. These are the small farms that struggle with every change of weather and government regulation. As you will read in this issue, some of those selling at markets raise produce in backyard gardens. Growing food is a tough job, but we are grateful someone is willing to do it.

She works hard for the money

Sixteen-year-old Abby Lair's typical summer day begins when she wakes up at 5:30 a.m. and goes out to her garden to work for about an hour. She'll also put in a couple of hours in the evening.

To prepare for the Big Timber (Mont.) Farmers Market on Saturday morning (9 a.m. to noon), Abby spends about three hours in the garden harvesting vegetables and flowers. If she makes her popular zucchini bread the night before, that can



Farmers market information

Find a market

Idaho Farmers Markets 2008

agri.state.id.us/Categories/Marketing/Documents/Farmers%20Market%202008%20Brochure.pdf

Montana Farmers Markets Directory 2008

agr.mt.gov/farmersmarkets/farmersMkts08.pdf

Oregon Farmers Markets Association

oregonfarmersmarkets.org

Washington State Farmers Markets Association

wafarmersmarkets.com

Find a complete list of Pacific Northwest farmers markets

yummynorthwest.com/farmersmarkets.htm

Start your own market

How to Create a Market

oregonfarmersmarkets.org/create.html

Establishing and Operating a Community Farmers Market

ams.usda.gov/AMSV1.0/getfile?dDocName=STELPRDC5062524&acct=wdmgeninfo

mean she's working on a short night's sleep.

At the market a crowd of eager customers and fellow vendors gathers to help Abby unload her truck.

Abby says her favorite thing about being at the farmers market is the people there.

"It's fun to have customers who like your zucchini bread – just to make people happy because they like it so much."



EAGER CUSTOMERS LINE UP FOR ABBY'S (RIGHT) FRESH PRODUCE

Her first day at the Big Timber Farmers Market three years ago was a little intimidating. She remembers selling zucchini and potatoes and also how helpful the other vendors were.

"Big Timber is a friendly market. Everyone is encouraging. It was scary when I first started, but they were really an encouraging bunch," Abby says.

"Her sunflowers are spectacular," says satisfied customer Kathy Agnew. "It's her high quality. She's so professional, and it's a pleasure to do business with her."

Abby's 20-by-250-foot garden is located on her family's ranch just outside Big Timber. Her family helps her prepare it in spring, picking up rocks that seem to multiply during winter and watching over it when Abby is unable to care for it herself. Her dad's irrigation system usually takes care of the watering.

But most of the time it is Abby who plants, hoes, and harvests.



NEWLY DUG POTATOES WILL BE SOLD AT THE MARKET THIS MORNING

Originally, the idea for Abby to sell at the farmers market came from her mom, Mary Lair, who also loves to garden and use the fresh produce in her cooking. It seemed a great way to save for college, and so Abby's farming career began.

Abby's garden is filled with plants that after three years' experience she knows grow well there. She'll also take recommendations from other local gardeners. Mainly, she aims to please her customers.



ABBY'S LARGE ORGANIC GARDEN SUPPLIES FRESH PRODUCE FOR HER FAMILY AND MARKET SHOPPERS



Zucchini with Parmesan

A Lair family favorite

8 medium zucchini
2 tablespoons olive oil
2 large onions cut in half and sliced 1/2-inch thick
1 teaspoon salt
1 1/4 teaspoon freshly ground black pepper
1/2 cup freshly grated Parmesan cheese

Remove the ends of the zucchini, cut in half lengthwise, and then slice diagonally in 1/2-inch slices.

Heat oil in a 12-inch skillet and add the onions. Cook for 10 minutes on medium-low heat until they start to brown. Add half the zucchini, 1 teaspoon salt, and 1/4 teaspoon pepper to the pan and cook tossing, occasionally, for 10 to 15 minutes, until just cooked through.

Add some cherry or sliced heirloom tomatoes and cook 2 to 3 minutes longer. Sprinkle with Parmesan cheese and cook for 30 seconds more.

Remove to a serving platter and then cook the rest of zucchini. Serve immediately.

Note: If you cook too much zucchini in one pan, the zucchini steams rather than sautés, so two batches are better than one here.

Picking enough of the right vegetables each Saturday is a matter of experience and luck. Frequently, Abby sells out of whatever she brings, but if there is anything left over she takes it home for a family meal. Leftover zucchini – which always seems to be large and abundant – goes into bread. One customer buys enough zucchini bread to freeze for winter use, so Abby makes plenty.

Pricing items takes a bit of skill. The local store's prices are a starting point, but Abby also has to take into account what other market vendors are charging or lower a price if an item isn't selling well.

When the market closes at noon, Abby's work isn't finished. She loads her truck and unpacks at home. Ice packs must go into the freezer and boxes neatly repacked with her equipment to be ready for the following week.

Abby's advice for folks who want to sell at the farmers market: "Stick with it. 'Cause it might not seem as great at first, but you definitely develop great customers who help out."



About Yummy Northwest

Each monthly issue highlights an edible delight available in the Pacific Northwest and Montana.

Contact the editor

Comments, corrections, topic ideas, and submissions are all most welcome at Yummy_Northwest@hotmail.com. View archives at yummynorthwest.com.