

Meet Me At The Irvine Farmers Market (Jazz Music)

Marshall: Your listening to Mister Radio, and I'm your host Marshall. The Orange County Farm Bureau opened the first ever certified California farmers' market in the history of Orange County nearly 40 years ago. This past winter I had the opportunity to visit the Irvine, California farmers market, where one can cut the middle man and buy fresh fruits, vegetables, plants and other produce directly from the farmer. In turn supporting family farms that are part of the community rather than large grocery chains. Not only can you find produce that is rarely found at a grocery store but you also reduce your carbon footprint since produce at the farmers' markets travels shorter distances from the field to the plate thus having a smaller carbon footprint.

It was a beautiful February day in Southern California, "SoCal" to the locals, and the music playing in the air lured me in.

Doug Earley had been invited to play saxophone at this market and I asked him if he considered himself a smooth jazz artist.

(Background Farmers Market Shopper Sounds)

Doug: Oh, definitely. I would say more on the smooth side, but I like to say instrumental R and B.

Marshall: How long have you been playing?

Doug: On and off, about 30 years on and off ? I just retired. So now I have more time to play.

Marshall: And you don't have any CDs or anything like

that?

Doug: I don't have any copies in anymore. I have one that's online. You can just look me up. Doug Earley, E A R L E Y. And you'll find it it's on Spotify and all of the platforms.

(Music)

Marshall: As Earley's smooth jazz played on in the background I took in all of the vegetable stands that surrounded me and eventually met Heidi, a knowledgeable shopper who was giving some potato growing tips at the potato stand. Excuse me. I couldn't help but overhear that you're an expert on potatoes.

Heidi: Well, I'm not an expert. I've just done a little homework.

Marshall: Are you a vendor here or are you a customer here?

Heidi: I'm an avid customer here.

Marshall: What brings you to this particular farmer's market?

Heidi: Well, it's local to me. What brings me here is the, the, all the different stands and the produce that's offered. I am a gardener at heart and my interest is, is growing. And, and also I'm here to obviously buy food and fresh food. But I saw a gentleman asking about growing potatoes. So I joined the conversation.

Marshall: What is your specialty for cooking potatoes?

Heidi: I do a simple boil and then I toss with butter and parsley and parmesan.

Marshall: Besides potatoes. What else do you get at the farmer's market?

Heidi: I come here religiously for green juices for farm, fresh eggs, occasionally flowers, and lots of healthy leafy greens, like Swiss chard, spinach, a lot of Asian greens they offer here, which is they have an amazing collection of Asian greens here.

Marshall: Timothy from Don Antonios Kitchen explained the benefits of the Keto bread he had for sale.

I understand you're the expert on keto bread. Do you want to tell me who you are and what you do?

Timothy: Oh, my name is Timothy and, uh, I work with my buddy who makes the keto bread, uh, is basically a low carb bread alternative, you know, for anybody who's trying to stick to a low carb diet and, uh, you know, bread is actually, my friend went through a trial and error with it and I've kinda been helping them out, getting it out there, you know, telling people about it. You know, the keto diet itself is kind of complicated, but you know, when you're trying, when you're people are eating in and out burgers and when they're trying to go on like a, okay, can I not get no bread on? Can I get no bun? Uh, this bread is like a very good, best sub substitute you can get.

Marshall: How is it made?

Timothy: It's made with a couple ingredients of main ingredient is the vital wheat gluten, and it's also got oat fiber and it does contain eggs and butter. Other than that, it's just like the Xanthan gum and you know, a little bit of sugar to activate the rest of the ingredients and, you know, it's all made locally, actually we're working on the shipping people, get it where it's still a nice and cold. Keep it in the fridge. Like I said, last two weeks, three weeks. So yeah. You know, Don Antonio's kitchen, definitely.

Marshall: Alex Rodriguez a vendor for Back Home Barbecue explained the variety of produce that he had on display.

Alex: We are selling Philippine and Hawaii, Hawaiian food. So pan set, which is like a stir fry noodle, spam musubis, vegan musubis, barbecue, empanadas and vegan options on everything. So we try to do vegan options for the vegans. Yeah.

Marshall: What's the favorite choice?

Alex: I definitely would say the spam musubis are probably the most popular item. And if not, that's the barbecue, the barbecue pork, or the barbecue chicken.

Marshall: For those interested in some tasty baked goods, Irene explained her job and what the Picket Lane Bakery had to offer.

Irene: I manage the booth at Picket Lane Bakery at the Irvine farmer's market.

Marshall: What kinds of goods do you sell here?

Irene: Fresh baked goods croissants, slice loaves, baguettes, cookies, lots of nice treats. The owner of the bakery is a French chef, his name is Robert. He has been in the industry for over 40 years. He has worked all over the world. He came out to California and was working for a big resort hotel place. And then he decided to go out on his own.

Marshall: How many customers do you get each time you open up here?

Irene: It's hard to tell. My booth is pretty much empty at the end of the day. So we do pretty well at the farmer's markets every Saturday.

Marshall: Is this the only farmer's market you work at?

Irene: We do the Laguna Hills farmer's markets on Saturdays as well.

Marshall: Laticia from Gourmet Tamales was eager to share her wide varieties of tamales.

Laticia: My name is Laticia Manuel, I'm working for Gourmet Tamales.

Marshall: What kinds of tamales do you have here?

Laticia: I have 24 different kinds. I have a lot of kinds, vegetarian, vegan meat and dessert tamales.

Marshall: What's the favorite one?

Laticia: My favorite is beef.

Marshall: Who makes these?

Laticia: Three ladies in the kitchen.

Marshall: What's involved in making the tamales?

Laticia: I put, um, corn, I say gluten free, and put vegetable oil. And I have a lotta, of different kinds.

Marshall: Maricela Bautista has worked on her families date farm since 1999 and I asked her how her farm followed the organic growing guidelines.

Maricela: We don't use any fertilizers that need chemicals, everything that we use. It's organic with our, that we have in our farm. Like we have cows, which we use are the cows manuers. A lot of water. So it's mainly, uh, stuff that it's not with chemicals or anything.

Marshall: Can you just explain the products that you're selling here?

Maricela: We only sell dates and we carry seven different types of dates from Medjool to Deglet Noor which is from sweetest to less sweet and dryer. So we have a lot of varieties to choose from.

Marshall: Wer-Mor honey was started over 35 years ago by Steve Wernett and Melinda Moore in Orange County, California. Since 2014, they have been joined by their son Spencer Wernett and their nephew Jarad Moore. Wer-Mor honey currently has over 500 hives and I had the opportunity to speak with Spencer.

Spencer: Yeah. So my name is Spencer Wernett. I sell honey, I'm one of the beekeepers it's me and my parents. So it's a small family business. We just sell our honey that we harvest all out of Southern Cal.

Marshall: What do you have to go through in order to participate in this farmer's market?

Spencer: Our family's been doing it for a long time. It's basically you have to kind of get in nowadays. It's a little harder, cause there's a lot more vendors. Basically. You had to talk to the manager and kind of go on a list, a waiting list, and eventually it opens up and you can get in.

Marshall: Now I've heard that if you have local honey, it helps with allergies. Is that correct?

Spencer: Yeah, that's what they say. So you get little bits of the pollen from around the plants from that area. So it's supposed to kind of build up your immunity to the pollen from the tree. It helps a little bit, but you gotta be consistent with it. Yeah.

Marshall: And if somebody wanted to order any of your honey do you do anything online and how could we get in touch with you?

Spencer: Yeah, so I do have some, I have a few little sizes online, one pound and two pounds, and it's at wermorhoney.com. So I got a little website going for that. Otherwise people mostly pick it up or get it here at the farmersmarket.

Marshall: And how many hives do you have?

Spencer: Uh, so we currently have about 540 hives at the moment. Yeah. And that's just for three of us. So it keeps us busy.

Marshall: Have you had to worry about any of the diseases that have been attacking bees lately?

Spencer: We've been pretty good about managing our numbers. I know some beekeepers have a lot of bees and they can't get around to keeping on top of them as far as like treating them. Cause there's a mite that can ruin your hive. We've been pretty good about keeping on top and keeping our bees alive. So we, we keep our numbers about consistent year round.

Marshall: Located in Linden California, Smit Farms supplies the Bay Area and Southern California Certified Farmers' Markets with tree fruit that has been sustainably grown since 1969. Cory explained some of the pressures involved in growing organic fruits. This is Smit Farms. Can you explain what you grow and how you do it?

Cory: We grow mostly apples, blueberries and cherries. We have 150 acres. We've got almond trees. We have cider and honey and, um, we got a nice size operation.

Marshall: Is this organic?

Cory: It's mostly organic. Yes. Pesticide-free herbicide free. Yeah.

Marshall: In order for it to be completely organic, what would you have to do?

Cory: You have variable times in the year where you have certain pressures to make it organic? You can't use a certain pesticide for, I think it's like 18 months or something like that. I forget how long it is and then you can call it organic, but if you use it and use it once and you're having a trouble area. You lose your whole organic certification and then you can't sell it as organic. So sometimes there's just that tough time of year where something's a pest pressure comes and just nothing's working.

Marshall: What is involved in setting up your stand here? Do you have to get approval? How do you do this?

Cory: And you need certain certificates from the state and the county. You need, um, health inspection. You need commercial kitchen.

Marshall: If anyone listening wants to order something online, do you do anything like that? Or how can they contact you?

Cory: You can go to our Instagram or our website, Smit Farms and find out what local farmer's markets we have all throughout California. So we've got some in Northern California and Southern California.

Marshall: Jose Samore was selling sugar snap peas as a hobby and was eager to explain how to grow and prepare his sugar snap peas.

Jose: My name is Jose Samore.

Marshall: Is this, your farm that you're, you're selling

things from?

Jose: Oh, right now its is like a hobby now that I have, that I'm doing just to keep myself busy.

Marshall: How often do you come to the farmer's market?

Jose: Oh, only once a week.

Marshall: Can you explain to the people listening what exactly you're selling here?

Jose: Right now I'm selling sugar snap peas.

Marshall: How does one prepare sugar snap peas if you want to eat them?

Jose: You can get them raw, if you like raw, raw vegetables, and, or you can stir fry 'em and put them in rice also or in salads.

Marshall: What's involved in growing them?

Jose: Oh, well it's alot of work, uh, first you have to prepare the ground and then after that you put your seed in the ground, you irrigate and then you, uh, maintain, uh, uh, pulling weeds out, and then put in a stake support for the vine to go up. And after that it takes about, uh, 70 days to harvest. And then you have to harvest and you harvest by hand.

Marshall: have you started this on your own or did your family have the farm?

Jose: Well, my father was a farmer, was a farmer all his life and I learned all this from him.

Marshall: I notice you have a phone number here. If somebody wanted to order something by phone or online, would they be able to do that?

Jose: No, not right now. I normally just come to the farmer's market if they want some of my product they need to come into the farmers market.

Marshall: I spoke with Chris a citrus vendor who explained what he was selling.

Chris: Right now we just have citrus, but we do certified organic fruit, so depending on the season.

Marshall: How does it become certified organic?

Chris: We have to go down through the process of a USDA to get certified.

Marshall: And how big is your farm?

Chris: About 500 acres, right now.

Marshall: According to the California Department of Food and Agriculture Farms 95 percent of California's 77,400 farms are family-owned. Non-family corporations make up just 1.3 percent of farms in California and the remaining, 3.6 percent, are operated as cooperatives, estates, trusts or institutions.. I spoke with several family farmers including Vang Vue who spoke about his stand and gave some tips on how to prepare his produce.

Vang: We sell primarily, uh, Asian type vegetables, Asian vegetables, like bok choy and, uh, mustard, greens, and cauliflower and stuff like that.

Marshall: Is this a family farm?

Vang: Yes.

Marshall: How old is the farm?

Vang: The farm, we've been doing this for, uh, I've been a farmer for probably about 20 plus years, but we haven't done farmer. We've been doing a farmer markets for maybe fifteen.

Marshall: What are some of the most popular vegetables here?

Vang: Uh, it varies from season to season, but for us like the bok choy is always sell real well. The, uh, water spinach, uh, which is primarily a Chinese type vegetable that sells real well. Uh, you know, your bitter mellon, your fruits, summer fruits sell real well you're a bitter melons, your eggplants your cucumbers and stuff like that. They sell real well.

Marshall: You mentioned bok choy.

Vang: Yes.

Marshall: How does one prepare that to eat?

Vang: Bok choy? Best way to do it quick stir fry, uh, little olive oil, little garlic little bit or whatever meat, if you want. Otherwise, if you're a vegetarian vegan style, just,

just the vegetable by itself. Just like that, the simplest way to do it.

Marshall: Andrew from Springhill Farms explained the popularity of his cheeses. I'm from New Jersey. And I see you're the Spring Hill Jersey Cheeses.

Andrew: Jersey cows.

Marshall: Can you tell us a little bit about your farm?

Andrew: Yeah. So our farm is located in upstate, California, Petaluma. That's a all dairy farm, all Jersey cows, a breed of cow brown cows.

Marshall: What's your most popular cheese that you sell?

Andrew: Popular cheese? We have a two year aged white cheddar. Which has actually won the second best white cheddar in the country. That's our best seller for sure.

(Sitar Music)

Marshall: Besides jazz the market offers a variety of other musical entertainment including the sitar of Farhan Khan (AKA) Flash Sitar a musician from Newport Beach. How long have you been working farmer's markets?

Farhan : All along about 20 years.

Marshall: Where did you learn to play the sitar?

Farhan: At home?

Marshall: On your, on your own?

Farhan: Uh, no I took some lessons.

Marshall: Did you start out with guitar first?

Farhan: Yes, I did.

Marshall: What kind of gigs do you do?

Farhan: I do a lot of weddings.

Marshall: What's involved in trying to get booked here?

Farhan: Uh, you need to have to be really good.

Marshall: What's the process, who do you contact?

Farhan: Oh you, they call it, they call you, you give them a tape and then if they like it, they invite you. So that's the way it works.

Marshall: Were you influenced by Ravi Shankar?

Farhan: Little bit.

Marshall: Who was your biggest influence?

Farhan: Oh, Vilayat Khan, Ravi Shankar Vilayat Khan yes your right all of these?

Marshall: You're always playing solo.

Farhan: No, I have a band.

Marshall: What is the name of the band?

Farhan: "Flash Sitar" I have with the violin violin player and the singer. And then this one is a small market. So I just play here by myself. I play mostly here in Canada, a lot of weddings.

Marshall: How old were you when you first started playing?

Farhan: About eight years?

Marshall: Were your parents involved?

Farhan: None of the, none of nobody in my family play music. I'm the only one.

Marshall: What are you going to play now? And what's it called?

Farhan: I have no idea. Let's see. What I got on the shuffle.

Marshall: Okay.

Farhan: I have no idea. No idea, uh. Gonna play this.

(Sitar Music)

Marshall: Spencer goes to the farmers market not only for the fresh food but to have a breakfast burrito.

Spencer: I've been to only two farmer's markets over the past couple of months, but I used to go a lot when I was younger, uh, to the farmer's market and in Laguna

Beach.

Marshall: What's your favorite part about the farmer's market besides, uh, looking at the grinds here?

Spencer: Probably just all the fresh food. Yeah, it's just the fresh food. It tastes a lot better than the stuff you get at the grocery store. So I like to get bread. I like hummus, like the dips. Sometimes I'm going to get a breakfast burrito after this. So, um, yeah.

Marshall: Where are you getting the breakfast burrito and why a breakfast burrito?

Spencer: It's called Martha's Kitchen. Why am I going to get it? I don't know, I just don't feel, I didn't wake up feeling that great. And I feel like a breakfast burrito, uh, maybe feel a little bit better. So. (Laughs)

(Sound of Wind Chimes)

Marshall: In addition to food and music the farmers market enables craft artisans to exhibit their wares which is how I met Patty who explained her attraction to the Wind Chimes while Cheryl pointed out the most popular chime in her Garden Party booth. We're located in a lot of chimes. Can you explain what attracted you to this chime place?

Patty: Well, I love chimes. I have them all over my balcony and I just love the way they look and how pretty they are. She's got a really nice assortment.

Marshall: Are you a farmer 's market roadie, do you go to all the farmer's markets in the county?

Patty: No, but I used to go to the Venice farmer's market when I lived out there for 14 years. And then I worked when I was off work for some people from Carpinteria in their flowers. And this is like 25 years ago and they pay me \$10 an hour. And then when it's time to close up I got all the flowers I wanted and I loved that.

Cheryl: My name is Cheryl Kepler, and this company is called Garden Party.

Marshall: What's the favorite chime that you sell?

Cheryl: The favorite chime, the most popular one is behind you. The multicolored hearts in a, in a strip over there.

Patty: Is that what I just got?

Cheryl: No, you (laughs) you got a different multi-colored hearts, that one costs \$10 more, but it's just slightly different style right there.

Marshall: And the hearts because it's Valentine's day?

Cheryl: No, it's popular all year long. I sell a ton of them at Christmas. I sell mother's day you name it.

Patty: How much are those?

Cheryl: 39.

Patty: Oh 39, here you go.

Marshall: How many farmer's markets do you go to?

Cheryl: Two, I go to the one on El Toro, um, on Fridays from nine to one. And, and I go to the one here every other Saturday, 'cause I'm old and I can't do them one after another.

Marshall: The farmers market is not only for adults, pre-covid this market also had a train ride for the kids. Even though today's market did not have a train ride two of the youngest patrons, Cameron and Luna explained what they liked best about the farmers market. Cameron, what brings you to the farmer's market?

Cameron: The cellery and...

Father: (laughing) For juicing in the morning no?

Marshall: You like celery?

Cameron: Yes.

Marshall: What else do you like besides celery?

Cameron: Um, like carrots and beets and vegetables.

Marshall: Do they sell carrots and beets and vegetables here?

Cameron: Yes.

Marshall: And your favorite one is?

Cameron: Uhm, the beets.

Father: (laughing)

Marshall: Because of the color or the taste?

Cameron: Because of the taste.

Marshall: Did you go to the farmer's market today?

Luna: Yes.

Marshall: What did you see at the farmer's market?

Luna: I got some fruit.

Marshall: What kind of fruit?

Luna: Strawberries and blackberries.

Marshall: Strawberries and blackberries, what is your favorite thing at the farmer's market?

Luna: Fruit, and I got a chocolate muffin.

Marshall: What did you get?

Luna: A chocolate muffin.

Marshall: A chocolate muffin, how did that taste?

Luna: Good.

Marshall: Did they make chocolate muffins there?

Luna: Yes.

Marshall: Was it a big chocolate muffin?

Luna: A big chocolate muffin.

Marshall: How big was it was a bigger than a ping pong ball?

Luna: No, it was like this big!

(Sitar Music)

Marshall: The Irvine Farmers Market is open on Saturdays and is located at Mariners Church Parking Lot, 5001 Newport Coast Drive, Irvine, California from 8 am to noon, rain or shine. Look for the white tents near the corner of Bonita Canyon and Turtle Ridge to find this market on Saturday mornings.

Thanks to the following vendors and musicians for helping put this podcast together:

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Farhan: That was a cover song by Post Malone called rockstar.

(Jazz Music)

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(Jazz Music)