

CORVALLIS-ALBANY FARMERS' MARKETS

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Opening Day for outdoor farmers' markets in Corvallis and Albany is April 14. Wednesday markets in Corvallis begin April 18. Hours for all Corvallis and Albany outdoor farmers' markets are 9 am to 1 pm.

This is the 40th birthday for Albany Farmers' Market, entering its 41st season. Albany has Oregon's longest continuously operating outdoor farmers' market. The relatively younger farmers' market events in Corvallis are in their 28th (Saturday) and 38th (Wednesday) seasons.

In Albany, we'll be serving free birthday cupcakes from Natural Sprinkles Bakery starting at 9:30 am. Music is Sakumuna, a fusion of pan-African sounds from the Caribbean and beyond.

Music for opening day in Corvallis will be Blues and Sunshine. Event booths will include the College of Earth, Ocean and Atmospheric Science. OSU vet medicine students will be promoting Pet Day.

In recent years the Procession of the Species parade coincided with opening day in Corvallis. This year both Albany and Corvallis parades will fall on April 21.

Market locations

In Albany, the farmers' market is in the City Hall parking lot at 4th and Ellsworth and an adjacent piece of 4th Avenue. Albany market customers can use restrooms and access water fountains in City Hall from 8:30 to 1:30 on market days.

The farmers' market in Corvallis occupies a street closing on a 1.5 block of 1st Street and rounds the corner onto Monroe Ave. For much of the season, the market will extend on Monroe almost to 2nd Street.

Markets are like accordions

Since all the farm products must be local and farm direct, the size of the farmers' markets expand and contract over the outdoor market season. Some local farmers grow inside large greenhouses called high tunnels, which helps keep the soil a little drier and warmer. Not all market vendors have access to this equipment, so there may be differences in what is available.

The Saturday incarnation of the Corvallis Farmers' market has a changing lineup of 50-70 vendors per week. The Albany season begins with fewer than 20 vendors. As hot weather crops develop, the Albany vendor count builds to about 30. Corvallis' Wednesday farmers' market is similar in size to the Albany Farmers' market and includes vendors from both Saturday events.

Corvallis and Albany both have a 32-week long season with a lot of change along the way. Early market weeks feature spring raab and many other greens, potatoes and other storage vegetables, radishes, fresh turnips, carrots, rhubarb, preserved foods, honey, eggs, meat, poultry, and cheese plus nursery plants and cut flowers. On the other extreme, the last market on Wednesday Nov. 21 will feature much of what will be on Thanksgiving tables the next day.

Power of Produce kids' club in Albany

The Albany Farmers' Market are supporting a 12-week Power of Produce Club running June 16-Sept. 1. Kids 5-12 get \$4 in tokens to spend at each market they attend during the program, plus activities with support from community partners like the YMCA and Linn County Master Gardeners.

Two significant new grants, along with local small business sponsorships, will fund the PoP Club this season. Albany Elks Lodge #359 obtained a grant from its national organization. Local Elks members will assist with cooking and planting activities. CAFM also received significant PoP funding from the Siletz Tribal Charitable Contribution Fund, which has supported anti-hunger efforts in our counties for many years.

AFM's Power of Produce is modeled after the Oregon City Farmers Market PoP Club. This program began in 2011 and has spread to farmers' markets across the country.

Information about sponsoring Power of Produce is found at locallygrown.org/albany-pop-club/. Or contact event coordinator Vonda Peters at volunteercaf@gmail.com or 541-990-5474.

SNAP Match succeeds Double Up Food Bucks

Corvallis-Albany Farmers' Markets and most of the smaller area farmers' markets were funded in 2016 and 2017 to offer Double Up Food Bucks to customers using SNAP benefits (commonly called food stamps) on their Oregon Trail cards. The program helps families stretch their food dollars further and improve the nutritional quality of meals by potentially doubling the amount they can spend on fresh, local foods.

Now that the Double Up grant is over, CAFM is attempting to continue a smaller SNAP Match program as funds can be secured. "We're redeeming SNAP every day we are open, but matching funds are likely to be off and on this season," said Market Director Rebecca Landis.

Corvallis markets will be able to begin with carryover from the City of Corvallis' Basic Needs allocation. In Albany, organizers hope for a small grant plus market bag revenue to start a few weeks into the season. CAFM and its community partners will be applying for grants and planning events to benefit SNAP Match.

The matching program will return to \$2 tokens printed in purple ink. These tokens are good for all SNAP eligible foods. Even dollar amounts are matched.

Other nutrition programs

Samaritan's Cancer Resource Center operates That's My Farmer nutrition program in cooperation with the markets. Current and recent cancer patients get help from Samaritan dietitians and other staff plus vouchers to purchase fruits and vegetables, grains and dried beans.

Another program that increases access to high quality foods among low-income households is the Farm Direct Nutrition program, which includes both young families (WIC or Women, Infants and Children) and seniors. Gleaning groups also collect perishable produce from vendors and distribute to others in need.

Community Table and community involvement

Most market vendors are members of the nonprofit association and sell using their own tents and other equipment. The market also has a Community Table consignment option that is often the best option for backyard growers.

Community groups that would like to do outreach at the market can sign up at locallygrown.org/community-involvement/ or contact Vonda Peters at volunteercaf@gmail.com or 541-990-5474. Community groups provide cooking demonstrations and other education, plus family fun, such as children's art projects. Individual volunteers are also welcome.

Shop like a pro

Experienced market shoppers walk around the market before making purchases. They get to know individual farmers, try samples of unfamiliar foods and get recipes and other cooking advice. When it's time to preserve the harvest by drying, freezing or canning, savvy shoppers know farmers they can ask for quantity discounts.

Those interested in keeping their dollars circulating locally and knowing who grew their dinner can rely on farmers' market guidelines that prohibit any resale. Most vendors are selling agricultural products they grew in a six-county area: Benton, Linn, Lincoln, Lane, Marion and Polk counties. A modest amount of baked goods and restaurant food is added so customers can overcome the hunger pangs that beautiful food displays can cause.

All markets include a market booth, marked with brightly colored pennants, where customers with Oregon Trail cards and debit cards buy wooden tokens. The market also sells cloth market bags, which help to fund SNAP Match.

Some information is available at the market booth, but more information is available online. Market shoppers can use features on www.locallygrown.org to search for particular vendors and view interactive maps showing the location of vendors on each market day. Music and other events are listed as well.