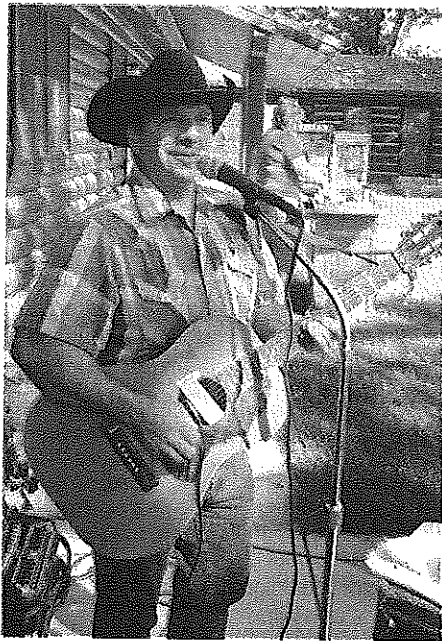


Following...

Farmers



Big Timber Farmers Market, Tom Tochihara, vendor.



Darby Farmers Market, Bachelor Bob.

With more than 70 farmers markets located throughout Montana, you'll find plenty of great-tasting, home-produced food wherever you go. Farmers markets are also important community centers, providing a place where neighbors get together, visitors meet the townsfolk and farmers and artists share their abundance.

Linger at a farmers market and you might discover a new vegetable, learn an easy way to prepare it and even hear the story of how it was grown. Don't hurry. The market vendors are glad to have you there.

Big Timber Farmers Market

The Saturday farmers market in Big Timber is so popular that you need to be there at opening or you'll miss out on the best produce and baked goods. Some customers help vendors set up so they will be first in line.

On an average market day, vendors sell items such as homegrown vegetables, slices of delicious lemon pound cake (see recipe) and hand-crafted furniture.

Tom Tochihara, 90, makes a weekly appearance with his spinach, lettuce, beets and flowers. Tom is well known locally for gardening wherever he can find space. He spreads his cultivated patch into every empty corner of the community garden, and you can see healthy greens in neat rows in several back yards where he has been invited to garden. Tom grows so many lovely vegetables

that, during the summer, the local food bank is often the grateful recipient of large bags filled with fresh produce he hasn't sold at market.

Jackie Emter, another regular, enjoys creating the things she sells. At her table, you might find crocheted rugs, hats knit from wool she has spun, fragrant soap or home-made vanilla and lemon extracts, all of which she has crafted on her ranch near Reed Point. "I like the whole feel of the open market," she said, "of people bringing their goods, the whole outsideness of it."

Darby Farmers Market

Farmers markets are all about food: ripe tomatoes fresh off the vine, crisp lettuces and still-warm homemade bread. But many markets also provide live entertainment to brighten up the atmosphere and showcase local talent.

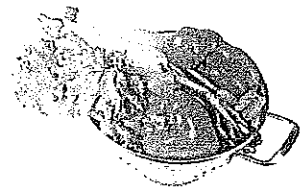
Country-Western singer Bachelor Bob makes the rounds of several markets in the Bitterroot Valley, such as Stevensville and Darby. His foot-tapping music brings smiles to faces.

"He's a lot of fun," said one vendor at the Darby farmers market who has heard him many times.

"I'm a great supporter of farmers markets," Bachelor Bob said. Among many reasons, "they keep the money in town locally, and people have something to talk about when they go back home."

Bachelor Bob said he is self-taught and can play more than 30 instruments. Some of

Markets



Story and market photos by
Mary Rosewood,
Big Timber

... across Montana

the 200 songs he has written are on two CDs he has already recorded: "Don't Get Married" and "Best Friends."

Thompson Falls Market

Any vendor will tell you that a well-run market is a joy to sell at. Manager Katrina Campbell is highly praised in Thompson Falls.

"Katrina is recently new to the town," one vendor said. "She and her husband bought the Falls Motel, and they were interested in doing something to help the community. Because they had this wide-open space, she thought maybe a farmers market would work here. We're blessed to have her."

This market is in a shady lot just south of Highway 200, next to the motel.

Katrina has created special events that include a class in growing and using herbs, a Critter Carnival, a Tomato Festival and the Cinnamon Roll Challenge.

Many markets have a free table set aside for local non-profit organizations to share. At Thompson Falls, when this table is occupied by the Friends of the Library, you might find a Saturday afternoon storyteller twisting balloons into animal shapes, a large selection of cookbooks for sale and friendly volunteers eager to help you apply for a library card.

Wilboux Farmers Market

There are four regular vendors at this tiny market, most likely the smallest in Montana, and you really can't avoid becoming

acquainted. Stay longer than a few minutes and you'll learn their names and how many grandchildren they have, too.

Don't be shy about asking a grower how to prepare the produce: an innocent question about how to cook corn will get you answers.

Corn grower Jerry Pesha says, "What you do with corn is clean it all off (removing the silk but not the husks) and put it in bags and put it in the deep freeze. Don't blanch it or nothin. Then when you want to eat it, you take it out and get your water boiling, and then you drop it into the boiling water for eight minutes. You will have a delicacy, just like fresh out of the garden."

Customer Sharon Feldman agreed with freezing it in the husk. But she said she prefers to grill hers: Wrap the frozen corn, still in the husk, in tinfoil. Put it on the grill and cook for about eight minutes.

Vendor Verna Sokoloski prefers to blanch and then freeze. "You get the water boiling, and then you husk the corn and put it in the hot water for four to five minutes. Take it out and let it cool off. Some put it in cold water, but I think that takes the flavor out. I just lay it out and let it cool. Then I cut it off the cob, and then I put it in containers and freeze it.

"When you take it out of the freezer, you just put it in a pan and put a little cream or milk or something on it, because it's almost cooked anyway, and steam it a little.

What's up with following farmers markets?

Writer Mary Rosewood: When I moved to Montana, I got the crazy idea to visit as many markets as I could to learn more about my new home.

In the summer of 2009, I planned carefully and drove more than 5,000 miles to visit about 60 markets around the state.



Rosewood

I learned firsthand that Montana is very big indeed. But I also found that the people of Montana are what make this state truly great.

I was suspicious of kohlrabi when I saw it at the Lewistown market, but two Hutterite girls told me how simple it was to prepare. They also gave me a taste of their Juneberry pie, now a favorite berry of mine.

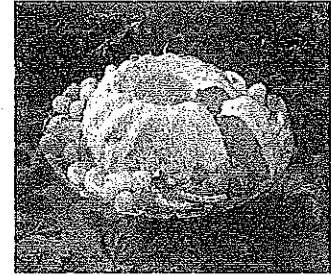
In Miles City, I learned about the moss agate, a state gem, from a craftsman who explained it is his passion to collect and polish the beautiful stones.

In Bozeman, I met a 17-year-old boy who makes what might possibly be the state's tastiest peanut butter cookies.

When you visit a farmers market, you are getting the best of local produce. You'll find unique crafts, sold by folks who will gladly answer any questions.

In fact, you're likely meeting the best cooks and the most talented craftspeople in the area.

It was a long drive that summer, but I've decided it wasn't such a crazy idea after all.



Lemon Pound Cake

Created by Jackie Emter,
Big Timber Farmers Market

3/4 cup butter
3 cups sugar
6 eggs
2 teaspoons lemon extract
1 cup light sour cream
3 cups flour
1 teaspoon baking powder
2 tablespoons poppy seeds

Preheat oven to 350°. In a large bowl cream butter and sugar. Beat in eggs and extract, and then carefully stir in sour cream. Slowly add flour and baking powder, then stir in poppy seeds. Turn into a well-greased bundt pan. Bake for 1 to 1½ hours. (Be sure to check center of cake for doneness.) Cool cake completely before removing carefully from pan.

Pour glaze on warm cake.

Lemon Glaze

Heat 1 cup lemon juice and 1 cup sugar, stirring until sugar dissolves. Pour or brush over warm cake.

Rum Pound Cake

Follow the recipe for Lemon Pound Cake, but use 2 teaspoons vanilla extract instead of lemon. For glaze, heat one container hot buttered rum mix, stirring in enough rum to create a pourable glaze. Pour over warm cake.