

The Great Tide Pool

TALES OF PACIFIC GROVE, CALIFORNIA

by local award-winning author, Brad Herzog

BOUNTIFUL

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Spring has sprung on the Monterey Peninsula, which got me musing about nature's bounty... which then had me thinking about farmers' markets. Across the country, there are... gulp... nearly 9,000 such markets, an increase of some 400 percent over the past three decades. They have become economic and cultural connectors - rural to urban, farmers to consumers, neighbors to neighbors.



Pacific Grove's version - the Everyone's Harvest Farmers' Market, every Monday from 3-7 pm (3-6 pm in the winter) - has been bloomin' booming since 2008, when it was first held on Lighthouse Avenue. These days (and for many years) it pops up every Monday in the perfect spot - at the intersection of Grand and Central avenues, bounded by the PG library, the Museum of Natural History and Jewell Park. It's where knowledge and nature coexist.



The more I've learned about farmers' markets, the more I've appreciated that it's about far more than simply grabbing some pizza and peaches. The knowledge comes in understanding the myriad benefits of these community centerpieces. Here's the good stuff:



***IT'S GOOD FOOD:** Duh. Fresh, locally grown, organic produce. Seasonal deliciousness - maybe it's cucumbers in spring, peaches in summer, sweet potatoes in autumn, grapefruit in winter. No long-distance shipping. No sitting in storage. It's fresh from the farm, minimally processed. In PG over the years, that has meant everything from eggs from Clara's Egg Farm in Watsonville to mushrooms and microgreens from Lake Family Forest in Carmel Valley to strawberries from La Milpa Organic Farm in Salinas. Not to mention the vendors that have offered made-on-the-spot meals and snacks, whether that's kettle corn from Carnival Catering, cheesesteaks from Oli's, or falafel from... well, Mr. Falafel.



***IT'S GOOD FOR THE REGIONAL AND LOCAL COMMUNITY:** Amid the domination of large agribusiness, family farmers need all the support they can get. When they have direct access to consumers, they realize a better return and can more easily compete in the food marketplace without the added costs of shipping and storage. And, obviously, when food is produced and sold in the same region, the circulation of money stays in the local economy. Much the same can be said, on an even more local scale, about the local artisans who display their crafts alongside the artichokes and almonds and hummus and honey.



***IT'S GOOD FOR THE ENVIRONMENT:** It has been calculated that food in the U.S. travels an average of 1,500 miles to get to your plate, which contributes to the use of fossil fuels and creates trash with extra packaging. Meanwhile, sustainably-grown farmers' market food comes from just around the corner, minimizing the impact on the earth.

***IT'S PART OF A GOOD CAUSE:** Everyone's Harvest, the organization behind PG's market was started by a former CSUMB student named Iris Peppard a couple dozen years ago and is dedicated to providing healthy and affordable foods to the community. It's Market Match program, for instance, matches the spending of low-income individuals through tokens or vouchers, turning \$10 into \$20 worth of fresh produce.



***And finally... IT'S A GOOD TIME:** You might amble around to the live soundtrack of a local musician like PG's "Guitar Man" Chris Bohrman and what he calls his "handcrafted, kid-shakin', street-dancin' acoustic music." You might observe an occasional cooking workshop from a local chef. You might sit in the park and savor some fresh sushi. And, as everyone strolls amid the outdoor stalls of fresh sustenance, you'll definitely appreciate random encounters with your neighbors in a place brimming with smiles.

Yes, PG's farmers' market is every Monday - and that particular day of the week has its critics. Just ask Garfield the cat. But I prefer to cite the great author Gabriel García Márquez, who once declared, "This should be the spirit every Monday: Know that something good will always happen." Like when afternoon turns to evening at the corner of Grand and Central.

