

*Saturday*

**FARMERS'**

*Gillette*



*Wyoming*

**MARKET**

*Live, Eat, Grow Local*

From humble beginnings to an award-winning market that seeks to reconnect the community to the local food system, the Gillette Saturday Farmers' Market has grown into community hot spot

*Hannah Johnson*

Little did the Campbell County Master Gardeners know when they opened the Saturday Gillette Farmers' Market in a parking lot in 2010 the adventure would soon become a community event everyone looks forward to each summer.

The venture has not only grown as a market for local vendors but has networked with local agencies to provide ways low-income families and individuals can obtain local, nutritious food and even recipes and cooking demonstrations.

### **Meager Beginnings**

Originally in the Gillette College parking lot, the market now operates in the Gillette College Tech Center Parking Lot every Saturday July to October from 8 a.m.- 1 p.m. About 500 customers stroll through the market. There were only about eight vendors in 2010. Now they average 23, coming from all over the county, state, and surrounding states. Last year they pumped over \$61,000 back into the local economy according to vendor sales data collected by market managers each week.

Market managers and Master Gardeners Erin Galloway and

Megan McManamen have strived hard to continue to grow the market and make it a community hot spot. The market started accepting Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program electronic benefit transfer (SNAP EBT) cards in 2016 as a way to bring new people to the market. Gillette has about 9 percent designated low-income wage earners, and Campbell County is 18 percent low income.

Customers can swipe or run their SNAP EBT card at the Master Gardener booth to purchase tokens they can use at any vendor who has the "We Welcome SNAP Customers"



*Vendors from the local area and surrounding states bring fresh produce.*



*Youth participate in the annual pumpkin painting contest held the last Saturday of the market.*

sign displayed at their booths. In turn, the market matches them dollar for dollar up to \$10 so customers are able to purchase even more.

### **Growing Philanthropy**

The market started the Share the Harvest Program in 2015. This program allows vendors to donate any unsold vegetables, baked goods, and other value-added products to the Council of Community Services (CCS). CCS is a non-profit organization in Gillette that provides a diverse, supportive network of services to people seeking to improve their lives, and provides a number of services to help those in poverty and homeless situations become self-sufficient.

Donations are collected at the Master Gardener booth on Saturdays and delivered to the council Monday mornings. Since the council rarely receives donations of locally grown produce at peak freshness, the Share the Harvest program is a great way to get fresh produce into the hands of those who need it most.

### **Have the Produce, How to Cook?**

Gillette Farmers' Market personnel soon realized increasing access to local and nutritious food was not enough. Many recipients of food donations were unsure how to cook and store fresh produce, and many lacked the utensils and equipment needed to cook and process raw vegetables. A new partnership was formed with Elizabeth Chapell, the Cent\$ible Nutrition Program (CNP) coordinator with University of Wyoming Extension.

CNP offered free cooking demonstrations using items purchased from market vendors throughout the summer market season. This helped show market shoppers those "scary" vegetables are easy to cook and delicious to eat! Market managers also worked with CNP to develop a series of budget-friendly, limited ingredient recipe cards using the CNP curriculum. Recipe cards were distributed to market customers during the cooking demos and delivered to the council along with produce donated through the Share the Harvest program.

Both programs have been so successful attendance at cooking demos continues to increase and more recipes are delivered to the council each month.

### **An award winner**

In 2017 the Gillette Farmers' Market was named one of the nation's Top Ten markets by the American Farmland Trust in the categories of People's Choice, Focus on the Farmer, Healthy Food for All, and Pillar of the Community.

Last August, the market launched its first annual cookware drive, with all cookware donated to the CCS. Fliers were distributed throughout Gillette, along with newspaper, radio, and Facebook ads, to advertise the event. Donated cookware was brought to the Master Gardener booth at the market. Over 12 totes of donated cookware were delivered to the council.

### Expand Market Base with 4-H'ers

The market managers collaborated with the local 4-H program to provide kids activities during the summer to diversify and bring even more people to the market. Market managers found many kids would accompany their parents to the market. Adults will stop and talk to vendors about their products or see other people they may know, so this was a chance to let the kids have something fun to do while their parents chatted.

4-H groups come to the market a couple Saturdays each month to provide one big activity. Activities range from face painting, a farmers market scavenger hunt, veggie races, and the annual pumpkin painting for the last Saturday of market. This is a great way for 4-H to reach out and get involved in the community.

This year, the market offered the first Farm to Table Dinner in Campbell County at the A Bar A Ranch. Dinner guests were invited to tour Erin Galloway's (local vendor and owner of Greens & Things) vegetable gardens, high tunnel, and apple orchard. Attendees were treated to a five-course dinner featuring vegetables, meat, cheese, and honey from the Gillette Farmers' Market and provided



*A request through the farmers market for cookware donations resulted in more than 12 full totes for the Council of Community Services, which provides a network of support services for Campbell County residents.*

by market vendors. All proceeds support the farmers market.

Next year, the market is looking forward to increasing the SNAP incentive from \$10 to \$20, and purchasing unsold fresh produce, meat, and value-added products from vendors at half price to increase the amount of homegrown and nutritious food donated to the council through the Share the Harvest Program.

The market is expanding in other ways. The Winter Market launched this November, once a month during winter. The market moved inside the Tech Center and is open 9 a.m. to noon. Vendors continue to have the opportunity to sell items during winter and the chance for the community to continue to buy fresh produce, baked goods, and more. The market managers have worked closely with vendors and because of this, many of those vendors who produce in high tunnels have already started planting for their winter harvest.



*Elizabeth Chappell, Cent\$ible Nutrition Program educator, prepares vegetables at the market.*

*Campbell County horticulture program coordinator **Hannah Johnson** has watched the growing success of the farmers market. She can be reached at (307) 682-7281 or [hjh10@ccgov.net](mailto:hjh10@ccgov.net).*