

EVANSTON



FARMERS MARKET

grows into dynamic community event drawing from Wyoming and Utah, opening markets for local goods

Kimberly Chapman

Interest in a farmers market had been brewing for quite some time in Evanston.

Those attending a 2012 meeting of interested parties were in unanimous agreement a farmers market would be a positive addition to the community; however, no one was in a position to take on the project.

Around the same time, good friends Barb Martinez and Leanne Hutchinson were discussing the possibility of starting a farm as a way to attract their grown children back to Evanston.

"Our kids quit coming home, and we wanted to get into farming, but we needed an outlet for the produce," said Martinez. "We decided, 'Let's just start a farmers market.'"

Martinez and Hutchinson attended food safety training conducted by the Wyoming Department of Agriculture and the Wyoming Farmers Marketing Association, where they



learned about starting and operating a farmers market.

They were also introduced to the concept of community-supported agriculture (CSA) ventures. Local people invest in a farm by purchasing shares at the beginning of the season. They then receive a share of what the farm produces, usually in the form of a weekly delivery of produce, eggs, or honey. The two women decided a CSA was the best fit for them and founded Good to Grow, LLC.

Evanston Assist, Utah Big Boost

While their own company was taking off, Martinez and Hutchinson were still interested in starting

a farmers market. To move forward, they reached out to the city of Evanston and Evanston Urban Renewal Agency (EURA) coordinator Jane Law. The city of Evanston, and more specifically the EURA, partnered with the market managers to provide support, advice, and assistance with advertising.

"EURA members felt strongly a farmers market was needed in Evanston, particularly in downtown," says Law. "Barb and Leanne were ready to hit the ground running, and we wanted to support them in any way we could so they could be successful."

Finding good vendors with quality produce was one of the first tasks. The two market managers visited other farmers markets in the region to recruit vendors. In addition to owning and operating Volker's Bakery, Volker Riezinger runs the Park City, Utah, Farmers Market. Not only did he readily agree to come to Evanston's new market, he also allowed Martinez



Farmers market vendors come from a 300-mile radius of Evanston.

“There’s no doubt the farmers market has been a great addition to downtown Evanston. It’s a great venue for local artisans and producers, but really, it’s a great social activity in our downtown.”

*Jane Law
Evanston Urban Renewal
Agency coordinator*

and Hutchinson to reach out to the other vendors at the Park City market. They were able to connect with Tyson Roberts of Roberts’ Farm and Weeks Berries, both northeast Utah producers. With a little convincing, they agreed to give Evanston a try. After just one market, they became full-time vendors.

That same spirit still guides Martinez and Hutchinson today.

“Anytime we hear about someone who has a unique (product or idea) ... we’re like sharks going after blood in the water. We go (to that person) to convince them to give the market a chance,” says Martinez.

Running the Market

Evanston Farmers Market continues to thrive entering its fifth season. Drawing from Uinta County and the Wasatch Front in Utah, the market has a good mix of vendors of all sizes. Due to Evanston’s high altitude and challenging climate, anyone within a 300-mile radius of Evanston

is able to apply to become a vendor. As long as applicants comply with the Wyoming Food Freedom Act and the Evanston Farmers Market rules, they are allowed to participate. The market also allows craft vendors to sell their handmade goods.

To sell at the Evanston Farmers Market, and because of its partnership with the city of Evanston, each vendor must purchase a business license from the city in addition to paying the market’s vendor fee. The business license costs \$50 annually, and the vendor fees range from \$10-20 per market, depending on the products sold.

Due to the hard work of Martinez and Hutchinson, there are a wide variety of products available at the market: fresh produce, berries, artisan breads, cheese, honey, pies, and other baked goods, tamales, oven-fired pizza, soaps, jewelry, pottery, woodworking and much more.

“We love our vendors. I just can’t say enough, how fabulous our vendors are,” says Martinez.

A Community Benefit: Success Stories and Connections

The farmers market has had several positive impacts on the community.

“There’s no doubt the farmers market has been a great addition to downtown Evanston,” says Law. “It’s a great venue for local artisans and producers, but really, it’s a great social activity in our downtown.”

Each week, a member of the Evanston Farmers Market Board of Directors organizes some sort of entertainment to take place during the market (quilting demonstrations, singing, skits). Continuing its partnership with the market, EURA sponsors a free concert series that starts in Depot Square as the market is winding down. Music in the Air at Depot Square brings in bluegrass and folk performers to entertain shoppers and community members in a relaxed, outdoor setting.



Support and advice from the Evanston Urban Renewal Agency was instrumental in establishing the market.

Ana Escalante is one of the stories Martinez and Hutchinson are most proud of. After receiving a tip from Law, Martinez approached Ana about selling her homemade tamales at the farmers market. At the time, Ana was making tamales to order and customers were picking them up from her daughter's downtown clothing boutique.

It took three visits, but Martinez finally convinced Ana to sell her tamales at the market. They were a big success; so much so that Ana and her daughter, Maria, eventually opened Ana's On Main, a restaurant and coffee shop on Main Street.

Now anyone can get their fill of Ana's delicious cooking year-round, as well as at her stall at the farmers market.

Another direct community benefit is an additional opportunity for local nonprofits to hold fundraisers. Nonprofit organizations are allowed to operate stalls at the market, usually selling food or baked goods. The organization is allowed to fundraise at one market for free and then fundraise at as many markets as they like as long as they pay the \$20 vendor fee. Parent Teacher Associations raising money to send children to Teton Science School, the Evanston Youth Club for Boys and Girls, and several other community groups have benefited from having a presence at the farmers market.

Lessons Learned

Martinez and Hutchinson have learned several lessons from starting

the Evanston Farmers Market. They share these with other Wyoming communities looking to start their own markets.

First, they stress the importance of attending training. In addition to the Wyoming Farmers Marketing Association training, they have also utilized educational resources from the Wyoming Department of Agriculture, USDA Rural Development, and University of Wyoming Extension.

According to Martinez, "One thing that we've found by going to classes is that we learn a lot from the lecturers but also from interacting with producers from other parts of the state."

Second, interested parties need to create partnerships and find people willing to help.

"Get a good board," says Hutchinson. "You need a lot of help to run a good market."

The Evanston Farmers Market board of directors assists with planning and running the market.

Third, both women suggest that anyone interested in starting a market, "Do a little research before you jump with both feet." They encourage visiting nearby markets, talking to producers and growers to ensure you have enough locally grown produce to sustain a market, and create a solid set of rules to guide the market.

The Evanston Farmers Market operates 3-7 p.m. every Thursday at Historic Depot Square, 920 Front Street. The market starts the first week of July and runs through the first week of October.

*We're willing to bet a couple of Ana Escalante's tamales that **Kimberly Chapman** frequents the Evanston Farmers Market. Chapman is the University of Wyoming Extension community development educator based in Uinta County and serving western Wyoming. She can be reached at (307) 783-0570 or kichapman@uintacounty.com.*