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Perry: Go buy the farm

By **Dave Perry**
The Aurora Sentinel



Americans have exported a host of cultural nightmares all over the globe, but without a doubt, one of the worst inventions we've inflicted on the planet is the supermarket. The antidote to that miserable infection is brewing in a hot parking lot in west Aurora.

There, each Tuesday, from 11 a.m. to 3 p.m., a handful of farmers and foodies meet for a few hours to exchange dollars for fresh corn, peaches, lettuce and whatever else attracts neighbors and entices them to open their wallets.

Despite our best efforts to push Wal-Mart on the Mexicans, the Europeans and now, even the poor Chinese, market days still prevail in just about every country on the globe, and even right here in Aurora.

In my travels around the globe, my favorite experiences almost always have come from market day. Few things rival getting up early to sample the best that local farmers and craftsmen are proud enough to stand behind a table and sell. If you haven't had fresh fried sardines in Barcelona squirted with fresh local lemons, you haven't had fresh fried sardines. Same goes for dark honey or white asparagus sold at the Friday market in Freiburg, an ancient burg in the German Black Forest. I've had pickled lemons and date rolls in Marrakesh. Fresh octopus salad in Greece. Outrageous cherries and tapenades in Provence. Meat pies in Windsor. Stroopwafels in Harlem. Slicing tomatoes the size of melons in Aurora. Yes, Aurora.

Each market has the same things: people proud of what they've made and grown. And people who believe that what they eat and who they buy it from is important. Everything else is just Wal-Mart.

In the old Fan Fare parking lot, undoubtedly one of the most dubious landmarks in Aurora, farmers from Weld County, bread makers from Frederick, jerky chefs from Castle Rock and even some local green chili and burrito experts offer the best of the best along Havana Street, just a bit south of East Sixth Avenue.

This week, the first peaches from Palisades arrived. Still too small, but much better than those sorry imitations from California at the grocery store. If you don't know about the magic of Western Slope peaches, you aren't from around here. If you are and still don't know how the hot dry sun and chalky soils on the state's desert side produce the perfect blend of sweet and tart, you needn't read any further. You'll like your peaches out of can by Del Monte just as well.

But for those who are frustrated by grocery-store peaches tasting about the same as the pears and not much different than the apples, meet your soulmates at the Aurora farmer's market next Tuesday.

Elaine Moorhead said she makes the trek because fresh counts.

"Everything here is fresh," she said. "That's important."

Vegetables and fruits coming from Mazzotti and Domenico farms were still attached to roots and stems just a few hours ago. The flavorless counterparts stacked neatly on fuzzy green plastic carpet at the grocery store have probably spent more time in refrigeration than they did at the end of a tree or top of a stalk.

Especially tomatoes. Most people here in the city don't know that tomatoes don't have to be pinkish-gray slices of chewy foam. When they're allowed to bake in the heat, under bright sun until they're fully ripened, tomatoes are deep red, full of juice and have a strong, earthy flavor that tastes a little bit like wine and a lot like beef. The local reds aren't in yet. The pretty California tomatoes filling baskets this week were tempting but disappointing.

You can have that discussion with the farmers who bring their bounty to the



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market each week.

Agnes Domenico has been preening over dark, purplish broccoli bouquets and fragrant, black zucchini for years. She and her husband, Ray, took over their family operation back in the '60s. Their business is mostly wholesale. But the fun part of being a farmer who's proud of what they grow is having others appreciate it. Agnes' job these days is to supervise younger family members and employees answering questions about the farm's organic beans and lettuces. The farm has been certified by the USDA as organic for several years, but the company just recently began marketing the distinction.

With all the news about toxic and contaminated foods. Knowing where your dinner comes from means more than every, several shoppers agreed.

Agnes can tell you honestly about which variety of corn is the sweetest. Which tomato is the sassiest. Which cukes are the crispest when they're scooped out of the pickle crock. You can't get that from a clerk stacking cellophane boxes at the grocery store.

You can't get apricots that ripened on the tree until they got soft, and then grew warm in the parking lot sun to taste like creamy apricot pie instead of fuzzy golf balls.

You have to go to the farmer's market to get piping hot egg-and-potato burritos, fresh-baked focaccia with asiago or icy, fresh-squeezed lemonade.

My complaint about the Aurora operation is that the prices seemed on the high side, and it's small, with only about a dozen vendors last week. The selection is good, but the growing crowd of a few hundred people seemed eager to spend more. A loaf of artisan bread will set you back \$6; a giant tomato cost me \$1.25. But you get what you pay for. Packaged bread that's been sitting for days in the grocery store costs \$4, and tastes about as much like the packaging as anything.

One of the events organizers. Gayle Jetchick from the Havana Business Improvement District said she plans to bring in entertainers. Next week, look for a Lakota Indian performer with his flute and drums. Later, local singers will entertain at the market. It'll be a great addition.

There are more sellers at other markets organized by the Mazzottis. all of which are listed at www.denverfarmermarket.com. Hopefully, the others will see what an enthusiastic crowd there is growing at the Fan Fare location and join the rest.

You should come, too. Help bring a little old-world culture to old Aurora and find out for yourself why okra baked for weeks in the Front Range sun and then fried in peanut oil on a hot summer night will keep you happily driving past the grocery store every Tuesday.

Dave Perry is editor of the Aurora Sentinel. Reach him at 303-750-7555 or dperry@aurorasentinel.com.

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