

Farmers Market Builds on Community Strengths

Shawn Matthewson is a past Building Community Solutions Coordinator and current member of the Building Community Solutions Steering Committee. Shawn has visited many markets all over the world and regularly smiles at shop keepers and neighbours.

Building Community Solutions would like to invite everyone to attend the Haney Farmers Market throughout the summer in the Memorial Peace Park on 224th in Maple Ridge. The Market runs every Saturday from 9 AM to 2 PM between May and October.

Come out and support our local farming and artistic communities by purchasing fresh local produce, plants, crafts, baked goods, soaps and prepared foods. While you are there, enjoy the live music, a life size game of chess, or allow the artist inside you to pick up sidewalk chalk and create a masterpiece.

You may be asking yourself what a Farmers' Market has to do with building community and that is a valid question. The most obvious answer is that all events that bring a diverse group of people together from a single community help build and strengthen it. When we are given the opportunity to come together we can build lasting connections.

For thousands of years markets have done just that. They have provided people with the opportunity to interact socially on a regular basis. Farmers, bakers and small business people sold their wares to their neighbours and friends while catching up on the local gossip.

Weekly or daily markets are still very much a part of many cultures. Most European cities have a weekly Saturday market while many African or Asian villages and towns have a daily central outdoor market. Traditionally, the Market was the heart and soul of many communities.

Human beings are social creatures we seek out contact with others. Every time you nod at a neighbour or smile at the owner of the corner store in your neighbourhood you are making contact and fulfilling a very important need that we all have. Farmers' Markets take you a step further by allowing you contact with those who fulfill another of man's basic needs - sustenance.

Farmers' Markets allow communities to become directly involved with the people who grow their food. They afford each of us the opportunity to meet the farmer that grows the produce that we are about to purchase. These relationships build stronger ties to farmers and to the land that the food is grown on.

British Columbia is bucking the national trend by increasing the number of small farms being created. Farmers' Markets help support these small farmers by allowing them to sell directly to the consumer. Consumers are also acknowledging that they want to know where their food comes from and how it is produced. More importantly, if we did not have local farmers and farm products our ability to feed ourselves would be greatly impaired.

Farmers' Markets also support small business and local economic development. Bakers, crafters and prepared food vendors are able to sell their products at the Market. This allows them to avoid start up costs associated with advertising and marketing. Someone that starts off as a baker for the Farmers' Market may become so successful that they expand by opening their own shop and employing ten people.

Consumers visiting the downtown core to shop at the Market will also venture to surrounding stores. This increased traffic helps keep the commercial area vital and strong. Dollars spent locally build a stronger community.

The Haney Farmers Market Society, the organization that runs the Haney Farmers Market, is committed to supporting our community by offering non-profit organizations the opportunity to have a booth at the Market. Each week a different group will be given the chance to share what it is they do in and for our community.

The Haney Farmers' Market is also working with the Food Bank and the Recycling Society to promote and support the vital work that they do in Maple Ridge and Pitt Meadows.

If these are not enough reasons to come and visit the Haney Farmers Market... I will give you one more- it is going to be fun! What more can you ask for besides fresh fruit, fresh vegetables, wicked garlic, herbs, cheese scones, delectable honey, oatmeal pecan cookies, blackberries, apples, pears, live music, beautiful photographs, organic salves and ointments, fragrant soaps, bread, pottery, flowers, unique jewellery, yummy jams...need I say more... but of course there is more! You will just have to come out and see for yourself!

The Haney Farmers Market Society is still accepting applications from Farmers, Prepared Food Vendors, Crafters and Buskers. Please call 604-467-7433 or visit our web site at www.rmkestudycircles.ca or pick up an application at Maple Ridge or Pitt Meadows Leisure Centres.