

46 local simple fresh



Paul Budge

Capital City Public Market, founded in 1994, crowds 150 vendors into six blocks of Boise's downtown. Sixteen of the original vendors have since split off to a nearby farmers market exclusively focused on local food.

4 Market to MARKET

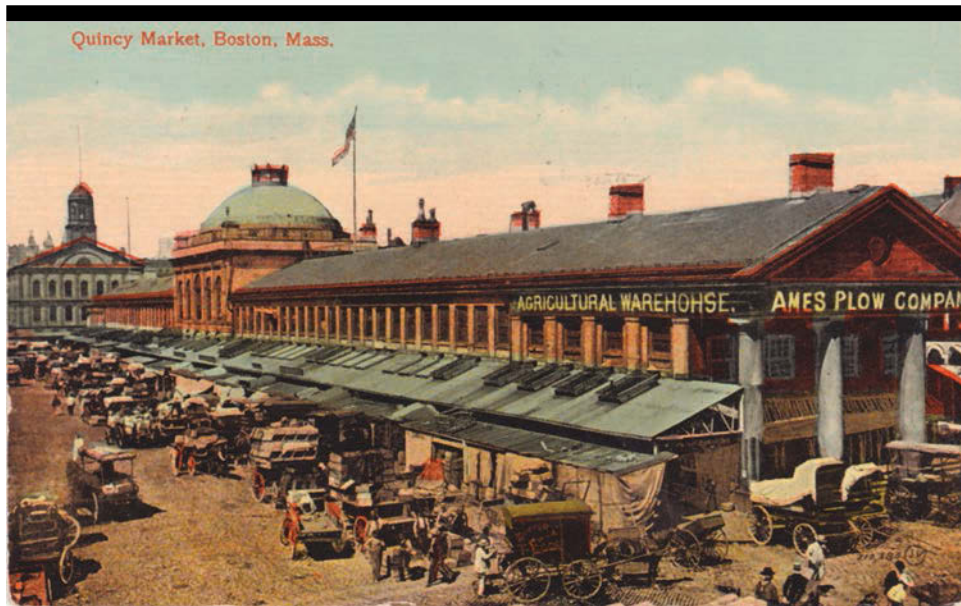
by Jennifer Shelby

Early on a Saturday morning, you'll likely find a whirl of activity in downtown Boise centered on clusters of produce, baked goods and handcrafted items. People lose themselves in the scent of a ripe and juicy heirloom tomato, the sun-kissed sweetness of fresh raspberries or the peppery crispness of kale. The lively music of a fiddler grows clearer as the sound of folk singers fades into the distance. Shoppers catch up with each other, plan their market strategy or receive a bit of culinary wisdom from those supplying their goods. Restaurants and shops on the periphery benefit from this surge of activity too. It all blends into a grand medley of music, conversation and urban buzz.

Amidst the vibrancy of Boise's Capital City Public Market, it's hard to imagine why farmers markets—one of humanities oldest, most fundamental institutions—nearly disappeared from the American landscape.

The first market of record in the English colonies was established in Boston in 1634 by an order of Gov. John Winthrop. In 1658, a wooden

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Quincy Market with its palatial indoor pavilion opened at harbor's edge in Boston in 1826.

building was erected on the designated site. All early American markets followed Old World precedent. They were established by political authorities with the goal of providing a means of trade. By the early 19th century, markets had been established in New York, Philadelphia, Lancaster, Cincinnati and Cleveland. Yet, by the end of that century, as the Industrial Revolution revved up and those markets began to decline, locals increasingly obtained their wants and necessities from specialized, full-time shops, groceries and centralized wholesalers. Farmers markets became less relevant. Jane Pyle, in an article published in the *Geographical Review* in 1971, quoted the Cincinnati mayor from this period as saying that "markets were decadent and that demolishing them would be no great loss." Despite the overall decline in markets during the 19th century, many remained strong in the South and Northeast. In the Midwest, markets flourished in young towns and declined in old ones. In the newly developing West, markets were never as well established as those in older parts of the country. As the 20th century dawned, markets continued to decline overall.



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Cincinnati's Findlay Market, opened in 1855, pioneered iron beam cage construction. The market once anchored a German brewery district.

During World War II, the U.S. Department of Agriculture saw an opportunity for farmers markets to fill a gap in the produce market and provide low prices for consumers. The USDA did not anticipate the dominance of larger-scale agricultural systems made possible by irrigation and expanding transportation networks. By the late 1960s, markets had transformed into more specialized businesses. Accelerating industrialization and consolidation of America's entire food system dramatically increased output and efficiency, further leading to a focus on foreign rather than local markets. Contact between consumer and farmer became increasingly rare. According to Allison Brown in a paper for the American Geographical Society titled "Counting Farmers Markets," by 1970 only approximately 340 markets remained, with even fewer dominated by local producers. Writer Jane Pyle surmised that with technological advances that allowed travel and expanded trade, one might have imagined a complete demise of local markets as the



Know Your Farmer, Know Your Food is a \$65 million USDA campaign to promote urban markets and local foods.

20th century progressed. Instead, the last decades of that century defied expectations as farmers markets rebounded in popularity.

But why? The reasons appear to be as diverse as the produce found at today's revitalized farmers markets. Rick Bayless, host of the PBS TV show *Mexico One Plate at a Time*, said, "to find a local market is to find local flavor. Food here is kind, flavorful and inexpensive." Others say markets serve essential social, economic and political functions in growing communities by attracting tourism and encouraging interaction between rural and urban areas while broadening the diversity of both. The increased traffic in an urban area also creates opportunities that reach beyond the sale of produce.

Farmers markets are also often said to be lifesavers for small-scale local farmers who have struggled to survive in the shadow of industrial agriculture. Many consumers now champion those local farmers and are willing to pay higher prices for their products, believing that market distortions have unfairly left conscientious farmers out of the agricultural equation while fos-



David R. Day/American Photography Source

McClaskey's Glads near Caldwell sells cut flowers, eggs and cherry tomatoes at public markets in Nampa, Eagle and Boise.

tering an industrial food system that they say overuses chemicals and antibiotics while diminishing diversity and flavor.

Frequent market shopper Misti Selman argues in favor of farmers markets, despite the perceived higher prices, stating that "many farmers markets are not government subsidized, so that is why they are priced a bit higher. If our government didn't subsidize those who grow for the supermarkets, we would see their prices jump as well. Many people do not understand that about the farmers markets, and judge them unfairly because of it. It's nice to see the support it brings to the farms that choose to grow at a higher standard than what our government requires."



Guy Hand

Market shoppers expect to pay more for certified organic. Pictured: valley-grown parsnips.

Market advocates like Selman say that shopping at a farmers market is one way consumers can cast their votes for local flavor, local production and sustainable practices. However, not all considered this affordable. One Boise market-goer, Sarah Radican, states that she “loves the idea of the farmers market,” but rarely buys anything when she goes because of the cost. “It all looks wonderful, and I might get something to try just to justify the trip downtown and the parking, but honestly, it doesn’t work with our grocery budget. It’s more like something we have to budget entertainment dollars for,” she said.

Still, Brian Halweil in his book *Eat Here* argues that the “cost of market meat and produce is comparable to or less than supermarkets, when making a fair comparison of goods.” Industrial farming has trapped many farmers with increasing costs and decreasing profits. The majority of the profits in the agricultural industry go to other parts of the production process and little goes to the farmers. Farmers markets are one way to put cash directly

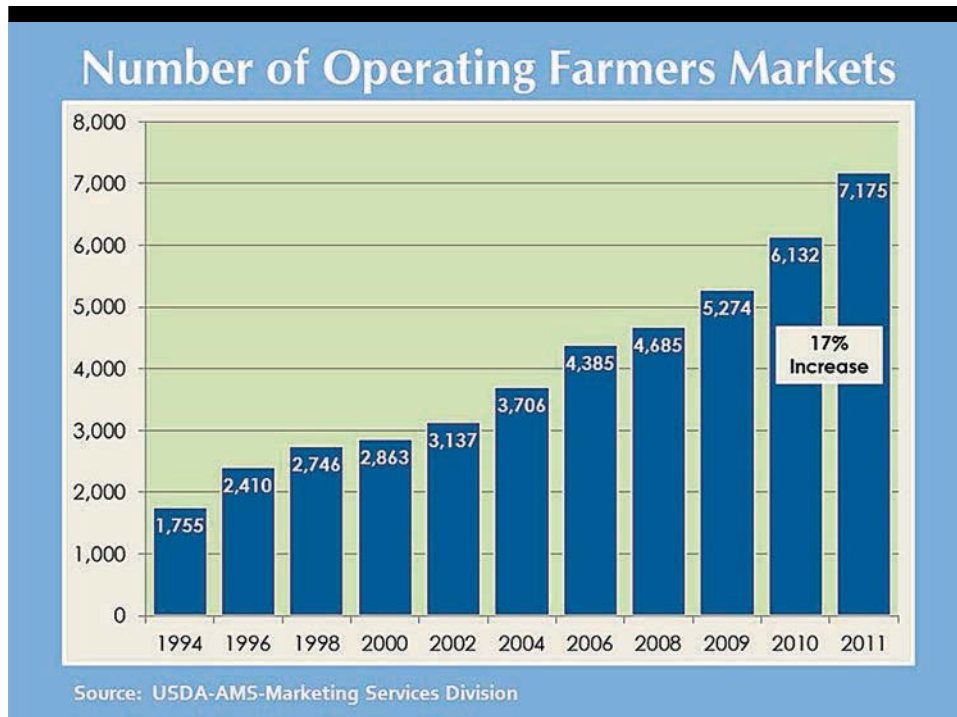
into the hands of the farmers. The success of the markets is intricately tied to the success of small farms and local food systems. According to Halweil, farmers markets offer an opportunity to support those committed to local farming and sustainable practices and provide the most visible form of support to local agribusiness.

As proof of the increased popularity of farmers markets since the 1970s, Halweil cites approximately 300 weekly markets being held across the nation in the 1970s compared to more than 1,700 in 1994 and nearly 3,100 in 2004. However, Allison Brown in *Counting Farmers Markets* cautions that data concerning market trends are often incomplete and do not always point upward. A 2006 study on market failures by Oregon State University titled “When Things Don’t Work: Some Insights into Why Farmers’ Markets Close” warns that figures estimating the growth in the number of markets are somewhat misleading because they do not represent net totals and therefore do not reveal the number of markets that fail, only how the totals change over time. Brown stresses that effort must be made by interested researchers to capture the data before they disappear in the midst of market flux and the waxing and waning of public interest.

Experts say that modern farmers markets fail for numerous reasons. The Idaho Department of Agriculture states that when a market is too small to attract customers, it is also likely too small to attract vendors. A critical mass of vendors is essential to a successful market and a loss of vendors may lead to its failure. A diversity of foods also is essential. The OSU study found that the failed markets needed more fruits and vegetables, signaling market demand for agricultural goods over other kinds of products. Researchers felt that if these markets added a more varied mix of products—more fruits, vegetables, fish, meat, cheese, bakery items or cut flowers—their chances for survival would improve.

How markets are administered is also key. Historically, market management varied, from control by royalty to the church to specially appointed boards. Today, larger markets usually have full-time staff, while volunteers typically manage the smaller ones. One hypothesis suggests that volunteers are only willing to exert a certain amount of energy for free. Creating a balance and satisfying both consumers and producers to the greatest degree possible is the job of a market manager. Also, managers and board members must be able to mediate and resolve internal issues because conflict on market day may deter businesses from participating or consumers from purchasing.

Manager turnover is also related to market demise. Younger markets often lack the prowess of an experienced manager to help them navigate



Demand for local food has steepened the rise of urban farmers markets. In 2012, the USDA reported a 9 percent annual increase.

the marketplace when they are most vulnerable. According to the OSU study, community support is key to the success of a market. In Idaho, the Department of Agriculture offers resources for new markets to assist them make community connections, establish bylaws, understand laws and taxes pertaining to the sale of goods and build connections with others in the farmers market community. The department reported that in Idaho the number of weekly farmers markets has grown from the first in the early 1990s to 24 in 2006 to 55 today.

Despite the perceived value to the local community; the success of a farmers market takes commitment at every level, from farm to table. Before a market ever sees opening day, someone with vision and commitment must make connections with local civic, agricultural and political organizations; media; local government; members of the community; and farmers. Behind



infohaves/Flickr

The Capital City Public Market with support from the City of Boise hires musicians, dancers, actors, magicians and puppeteers. Pictured: Saturday bluegrass on Idaho at Eighth.

the scenes, taxes, insurance, organization, marketing, ordinances, permissions and legalities must be dealt with. Tax issues involved with selling directly to consumers can make many growers back away from participation because of the paperwork and administration that goes along with it. Building relationships with farmers and community members is key. Convincing people to engage in something unconventional and uncommon takes patience and compassion.

Karen Ellis, the founder and former manager of the Capital City Public Market, was one of Idaho's first market managers to succeed at those skills. Ellis said that the beginning of the Market was really a "cosmic coming together of events." Inspiration struck her when she first visited Pike Place Market in Seattle. Upon returning home she shared the idea with her hus-



Guy Hand

Certified organic greens lead the nationwide locavore trend. Pictured: garden-fresh Boise broccoli.

band, who encouraged her to put in a proposal when the opportunity came up for the empty Eighth and Main street lot once known as "The Hole" in downtown Boise. Despite being selected as a finalist, she backed away from that property as she was up against major local corporations such as Simplot and Russell Corporation.

She continued making connections, eventually meeting Al Marsden, who shared her dream of a Pike Place-style market. At that time Marsden worked for the S16 Corporation, formed by the 16 grandchildren of Idaho potato mogul J.R. Simplot.

Their conversation started in late 1993; S16 hired her in January 1994 to promote the market. She knew they needed to start by connecting with agricultural producers. S16 purchased green and white tents for the farmers to set up their produce. They had, maybe, 15 vendors in an Eighth Street Marketplace parking lot on opening day. Eventually, Pug Ostling of Grape

Escape and Dave Krick of Bittercreek Alehouse jumped in to help. The two went to the Capital City Development Corporation, the Boise's redevelopment agency, and proposed that the stretch of Eighth Street between Bannock and Main directly in front of their two restaurants be closed on Saturday mornings for the market. When the market moved to its new location in 1998, it had grown to around 25 vendors. "The focus was to support, recruit and educate people on food and the point of the farmers market," said Ellis. "The desire was to make this an urban market that would help the downtown area flourish."

Oregon State included the Capital City Public Market in its analysis several years in a row. This data, along with a form from the Project for Public Spaces, made it possible to estimate the market's economic impact in the community, which in 2011 was approximately \$4.8 million. Considering the limited number of days and hours the market operates in downtown Boise, this is a considerable impact. Keeping profits at home multiplies the local economic impact significantly more than money spent at a chain store. Profits spent locally circulate through the economy, creating benefits that reach far beyond the initial dollars spent. When money is spent at a large chain, by contrast, the profit leaves the area.

Despite obvious benefits, farmers markets face the challenge of making fresh, local produce available to a broader range of consumers. To encourage participation by those on restricted budgets, many farmers markets in Idaho have expanded their reach by adding Electronic Benefits Transfer as a method of payment. EBT is a means of providing fresh, local food to needy families and can comprise a large percentage of sales. However, according to the Idaho Department of Agriculture, it requires thought and planning to implement. Although an effort in the right direction, distortions remain that leave the poor and much of the middle class shopping at the supermarket.

Despite those challenges, the rebirth of farmers markets has changed the American food and agricultural landscape. They are something old made new again—retracing our roots as we look to the future. A return to simplicity and quality, a love of good food, artisanal bread, grass-fed meat and handmade crafts—all flourishing in the midst of our microwaved, drive-thru culture.



Jennifer Shelby of Star graduated with a B.A. in Economics and a minor in Visual Art in December 2012. Now enrolled in Boise State's graduate program in Community and Regional Planning, she plans to work with communities to achieve economic development goals.