



Farmers markets move south
Greenfield, Soledad poised to launch projects soon
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South Monterey County is poised to open its first two certified farmers markets.

The city of Greenfield plans to debut the Village Green Certified Farmer's Market in April. It's expected to run from noon to 3 p.m. on the first Sunday of each month at the St. Charles Place Village Green center at El Camino Real and Elm Avenue.

In Soledad, a certified farmers market could start business as soon as June 7 on Encinal Street between Front and Monterey streets. The Oldtown Soledad Beautification Association plans to run the market from 5 to 8 p.m. every Thursday through the second week in October.

"Having a farmers market in Soledad not only provides healthy eating options, it also provides a family friendly community event week after week," said Jessica Harris, a board member for the association.

The "certified" label means all produce sold at the market are grown by the vendors themselves.

The effort got a boost last week when the Greenfield City Council approved rules, regulations and permit applications for the farmers market.

Suzan Ehdaie, Greenfield's associate planner, said establishing a farmers market is consistent with the city's growth strategy. Plans for the Village Green have been in the works for about a year, Ehdaie said.

"It's to bring the community together to revitalize the downtown area," she said, "and also to (regenerate) the economic landscape of Greenfield."

Following the council's unanimous vote of approval Tuesday, city staff now will send the required permit applications to Monterey County's Health Department and Agricultural Commission, which have the final say on whether the market will open as planned.

Such approval is expected within the next week, said April Wooden, the city's community development director.

"We should be on target for the April 1 opening without a problem," Wooden said.

Meanwhile, the city will visit businesses at the Village Green commercial center, which now has 15 open stores surrounding a park where the proposed market would operate, and ask for their input. The goal, Ehdaie said, is for the farmers market and shopping center to help each other thrive.

Businesses give their support

Fadhil Shaman, manager of the La Princesa grocery store in the shopping center, said Monday afternoon that while the monthly event may at first divert some of the store's business, it'll pay off in the long run.

"I think the farmers market will bring more new people into town," Shaman said, "so I'm 100 percent for it."

The Village Green Farmer's Market will initially include 10 to 15 vendors, Ehdaie said, who'll sell fresh produce and prepared food items, such as hot dogs and tacos. Entertainment by local middle and high school students will be offered at the park's gazebo area, she said.

The city will work with the Chualar-based Agriculture and Land-Based Training Association, or ALBA - a group that coaches farm workers and others in becoming small-farm proprietors - to attract vendors for the market from all over the Salinas Valley, Ehdaie said.

Soledad gives the nod

On Feb. 7, the Soledad City Council approved street closures and the use of city maintenance workers for the proposed Soledad farmers market, following a presentation by representatives of the Oldtown Soledad Beautification Association and ALBA.

The association is preparing vendor applications to go out Thursday.

Harris said she expects the market to debut in June with at least 20 vendors.

While farmers markets are just now coming to south county, they're well-established in other parts of the Salinas area.

Salinas offers two year-round certified farmers markets on the weekends. The Oldtown Salinas Farmers Market operates from 9 a.m. to 2 p.m. every Saturday across from Maya Cinemas on Main Street. The Salinas Farmers Market runs from 8 a.m. to noon Sundays at Northridge Mall.

Everyone's Harvest Farmers Market meets from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. Sundays at 215 Reservation Road in Marina.

Monterey's two year-round farmers markets are held from 4 to 7 p.m. on Tuesdays on Alvarado Street in downtown Monterey and 3:30 to 6 p.m. every Thursday at Monterey Peninsula College on Fremont Street.

Ehdaie called having a farmers market with organic produce a major triumph for Greenfield, saying it will bring a sense of unity to residents and attract neighbors from throughout the south county region.

"It's ... a means to introduce a local farmers market to the community," she said, "and support the local farmers and food vendors as well."

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