

To the Mayor and Council of the City of Manzanita:

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Hello members of the council,

I am writing to you today because it's June. To a farmer, June means that the spring plantings which began as seeds in late February, are now in full harvest. It means the summer crops are in the ground and growing fast with the fall plantings right behind them. It's time for harvesting the first carrots, snap peas, strawberries, butter lettuce, broccoli, beets, and for making fresh goat cheese and smoked salmon. It is a time of exhausting work; often washing produce and weeding rows until dusk at 9:30pm. All of this work and planning is done in anticipation of June- because this is the month the farmers market opens.

This is the month when all of the work is finally brought out to be shared and celebrated with our community. The smiles, support and joy of market makes every aching back and blistered hand and rain-soaked hour worth it. The money needed to keep our farms alive for another year begins in June and ends in September. In just a few short months, small farmers, fisherfolk, bakers, cheesemakers and ranchers earn the vast portion of their yearly income by selling their food directly into the hands of their community. It is a beautiful thing to be a part of- and it is **essential** in every sense of the word.

Healthy Community

I know that community health has been the main concern of the council in regards to the re-opening of the market. We all are deeply aware of the threat of Covid 19 and the potential impact it could have on our most vulnerable citizens. It was recognized by Governor Brown at the start of Oregon's emergency that open air farmers markets provide one of the safest ways for citizens to access food supplies and she declared them essential. Farmer markets around the state quickly adopted additional rules to protect both farmers and shoppers by requiring face masks, adding hand washing stations, and widely spacing booths and shopping lanes for social distancing.

On the north coast, the community of Astoria has held an essential food market every Sunday since mid-April to a deeply appreciative and supportive base of local shoppers. As one of the vendors at this market I have not only been supported by the needed income it provides but impressed by the care and patience of the shoppers, as well as the vigilance and organization of the market staff. The Astoria market has grown slowly with close supervision of the Health Department and the feedback of the community. As every farmer in a market is also acting as

an invested owner of the market and the community's health, we work in concert to provide the safest possible experience for our friends and neighbors.

In contrast, nothing like this level of care and communication exists at the busy grocery stores like Costco, Walmart or Fred Meyers. Often after the Astoria Sunday market we will stop to pick up supplies at one of these box stores for our elderly neighbors in quarantine. Never once have I felt as safe about the amount of space, the amount of people indoors together or the care of the staff while trying to shop. It is simply impossible to determine who has handled the food before you do at a grocery store. It is often shipped in from out of state and has been handled by dozens- if not hundreds of people before you. By comparison, farmers market goods are often brought from the field to the market stand in under 24 hours by the farmers themselves.

Expecting the elderly or immune compromised to enter a grocery store with so many risk factors vs. shopping outdoors at a local farmers market simply does not make sense. I have observed with my own eyes how much cleaner, traceable and responsive farmers markets are over grocery stores, yet for some reason the heaviest burdens of regulation seem to fall on the farmer's shoulders.

So what's wrong with the virtual market?

Farmers markets are built on real time community interaction. I would argue this is another essential service they provide. Seeing your farmer standing behind her piles of freshly washed vegetables is a reassurance that many of us desperately need right now. In a world awash in pandemic fear, economic woes and political unrest the lack of spaces to experience community is a serious issue. Food, farms and family are healing for the body, mind and soul. Even while wearing a mask and standing respectfully distanced there is a sense of togetherness at a farmers market. We go to market to fulfil our needs and support what we most value and it means something to see your friends and neighbors there too. With the devastating loss of Cart'm as a community gathering space I personally feel that losing the physical farmers market this year is just too much for the small community of Manzanita to be asked to bear.

The two virtual markets that have occurred so far are a mere shadow of the physical market. Sales for farms are low due to the complication of pre-ordering on computer and then the joyless experience of driving in just long enough for your trunk to open and close before you go home to isolation. It leaves farmers with perishable food unsold, customers with no experience of connection and market staff frazzled by the difficult task of turning a sensory filled beautiful community tradition into an online shopping cart. It broke my heart to see it in this state last Friday and so I turn to you the City Council and Mayor for support.

I am asking that you allow the physical Manzanita Farmers Market to resume with needed safety precautions in place as they have done in Astoria, Tillamook, Seaside and in so many other communities. I am asking that you do this without delay. Every week delayed for a farmer's market is a critical loss of income and product for a local farm and the extended

closure of many local restaurants means that there are now even fewer options for farmers to turn to.

I am asking that you call a special council session and discuss the safety requirements needed for a June re-opening the Manzanita Farmers Market with the market board and manager. It is essential to support our local farms during the COVID 19 crisis to ensure that a safe and locally sourced food supply be made available for all citizens of Manzanita and surrounding villages. A loss of the physical market for summer income seriously endangers the viability of small farms.

We have seen major upsets in the national food system and shortages due to the global pandemic and it's far from over. Now more than ever I believe we need your full support and recognition of farmers as essential workers and allow them a safe space to feed the community directly. This supports both emergency preparedness, local health, local economy and also keeps the community spirit up in these hard times. Please vote to re-open the market. Thank you.

Sincerely

Virginia Edwards

Manzanita Farmers Market founding board member.

Owner of North Fork 53 Tea Farm & Retreat and market vendor

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