

Press Release

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: July 28, 2006

Crop Devastation Prompts Market Rule Amendment

COOPERSTOWN -- The flood waters have receded, but the damage has already been done. And for the first time in many years -- following lengthy deliberation -- the Cooperstown Farmers' Market has, for now, relaxed what is referred to in-house as its "80-20 rule."

In abidance with that rule, the objective of the Cooperstown Farmers' Market is and has been to support locally grown produce and locally made crafts. To that end, 80 percent of the goods and produce offered by each vendor must be produced within the environs of Otsego County by that vendor, a member of the vendor's immediate family, or by a representative of the vendor. For the remaining percentage of brokered products, there must be a sign posted to identify where those items were grown or produced.

However, the market is yet another of hundreds of area flood victims. Crop devastation has been so extensive that some vendors are unable to bring their usual abundance of locally grown vegetables to market.

Vendors and the market board met on Saturday, July 15 to discuss the recent flooding and what effect it might have on the popular community mainstay. Discussion turned to whether or not those who suffered severe crop damage would be granted permission to bring in vegetables grown by farmers who were not similarly affected, with the intention of maintaining both the market's variety and integrity.

The Cooperstown Farmers' Market policy toward brokered products is more stringent than those set by many other such venues. The mission of CFM growers, in particular, is to provide fresh local produce, the likes and quality of which cannot be purchased elsewhere.

Some in attendance spoke about the need to protect and maintain the integrity of the market, in spite of the disaster. Others shared this concern, but felt the 80-20 rule should be amended for the season to help those growers who had sustained major crop loss as a result of flooding.

Opinions varied, as several individuals were against the rule change, fearing that the quality of the market -- which customers have come to expect -- would be compromised. Others felt the rule should be amended for this season only, and argued that the vendors could be counted upon to ensure the integrity of the crops they sell.

A vendor representative on the market board said at the meeting, "The board's first responsibility is to the vendor; its second responsibility is to the customers. We must consider the customers before making adjustments."

He went on to insist that in the event of change, it should be made very clear to market patrons that the 80-20 rule had been suspended only as deemed absolutely necessary and as a direct result of the disaster.

Another board member was adamant that if the 80-20 rule was, indeed, waived, it would be with the stipulation that all brokered vegetables would still be grown in New York State.

Just as one vendor was concerned that customers would not be aware of, or would forget, the devastation caused to this area by the recent flooding, others strongly disagreed.

While his business was relatively unaffected by the record high waters, one man spoke about the plight of some of his fellow vendors and of many area farmers in general. He said of the proposed rule change, "People will understand. It is most important to be up front and honest, and most customers will appreciate it for what it is. Let them vote with their feet."

When asked, two Rules Committee members were reluctant to change the 80-20 rule, but at the same time found themselves conflicted.

One said he wanted no permanent change to the rule, but thought change should be allowed for special, temporary relief due to the flooding.

If the 80-20 rule is suspended for this season, he said, vendors seeking relief should be able to bring to market brokered produce relative only to what they would normally have grown. He felt that brokered produce brought to market should be limited to those items listed on that vendor's 2006 application.

The second Rules Committee member said he wanted to help farmers in need and thought the market should do so on a case-by-case basis.

When all was said and done, at the very heart of the matter was the heart of the market. When put to a vote, the proposed amendment was passed on Saturday, July 22 by the vendors with an overwhelming majority, 15-2.

The vendors do not take this year's temporary suspension of the 80-20 rule lightly, however, and the Rules Committee has made sure that only those growers who are truly in need will be granted this relief. According to the amendment, any seller seeking to supercede the 80-20 rule must submit a letter to the market board detailing "what crops were destroyed, what specific crops will be replaced from other sources and when during the growing/selling season. Only crops approved in the 2006 CFM Application may be replaced."

For 15 years now, the Cooperstown Farmers' Market has been providing area residents and tourists with farm-fresh produce. Toward the close of the July 15 meeting, one vendor said that, in the aftermath of this disaster, he wanted to maintain his range of products, level of quality and his own customer base. All agreed, and all have made a commitment to be completely honest and up front about the temporary suspension of the market's 80-20 rule.

"We need to tell customers exactly what we're doing and why," said someone else in the group.

Yet another vendor summed it up bravely, while bearing the customers' best interests in mind: "Hey -- this is what happened to us. This is what we're doing for you."

The Cooperstown Farmers' Market is sponsored by Otsego 2000 and operates rain or shine, May through December. The market is located just off Main Street, in Pioneer Alley.

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: July 10, 2006

“Clowning Around” Encouraged at Market

COOPERSTOWN – On Saturday, August 5, visitors to the Cooperstown Farmers' Market may be lucky enough to get their hands on an “Apple Twist,” “Banana Twist” or “Bean Twist.” What are they? Not the latest in culinary delights, but rather balloon sculpture techniques to be enjoyed as Zep the Clown entertains children, and adults, with his colorful balloon art.

Balloon twisting begins at 10:30 a.m. with a wonderful array of familiar favorites. Zep has a few new tricks up his sleeve, too, and he will continue to wow the crowd with his creations until 12:30 p.m.

Market regulars can look forward to the quality produce and items they have come to expect, among them home-baked sweets and treats, seasonal fruits and vegetables, fresh fowl and meats, and flowers and greenery, as well as handmade crafts and homemade soaps.

The Cooperstown Farmers' Market is sponsored by Otsego 2000 and operates from 8 a.m. to 2 p.m., rain or shine, May through December. The market is located just off Main Street, in Pioneer Alley. For more information, visit www.otsego2000.org/farmersmarket/ or call 547-6195.

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Farmers' Market Invites Vendors

COOPERSTOWN – Since 1991, the Cooperstown Farmers' Market has provided a lively setting for farmers, bakers, crafters and food producers to directly peddle their wares to Cooperstown's diverse summer population of baseball tourists and opera aficionados, as well as full-time and seasonal residents.

New vendors are always welcome at the market, provided they meet the prerequisites:

- Membership is limited to producers within a 50-mile radius of the market
- Vendors must produce at least 80 percent of the goods they plan to sell at market

-- Vendors are required to submit a copy of their liability insurance -- and any applicable licenses or certificates – with their application, as well as photos of their display

Vendors are approved through an application and jury process, to determine space availability and to ensure product diversity and quality in the market. For further information and an application form, visit www.otsego2000.org/farmersmarket/ or call Darla M. Youngs at 607-547-6195.

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New Manager Takes Market Reins

COOPERSTOWN – Regular patrons of the Cooperstown Farmers' Market will notice a new face this season as Market Manager Jennifer Hanson lends her expertise to the popular community mainstay.

Hanson, who started this past May, believes very strongly in supporting local agriculture.

“The idea of buying locally produced crops is of critical importance to our future – economically, environmentally, and for our health,” she said.

Born in New York and most recently from Washington State, Hanson has grown produce in a hobby garden and has been a member of Full Circle Farm in North Bend, WA, a community supported agriculture program, with which she “ate lots of fresh food, tried lots of new recipes, visited local farms, and attended special events.”

Her commitment to supporting locally grown produce and her strengths as an effective communicator and an organized planner landed Hanson this management position.

“Jen has so many talents that make her an ideal match for the Cooperstown Farmers’ Market. She is a strong supporter of local agriculture and appreciates the producer to consumer connection that we strive to create at the farmers’ market. We couldn’t be more please to have her as the new market manager,” said Martha Frey, Otsego 2000’s executive director.

Hanson holds a master’s degree in elementary education from Manhattanville College and a bachelor’s degree in recreation education from SUNY-Cortland. Among other appointments, she has taught at North Bend Elementary School in North Bend, WA and Greenwich Country Day School, Greenwich, CT.

Although she and her family – husband Erik and daughters Mikeeli, 4, and Natalie, 5 months – arrived here just last year, Hanson is no stranger to the Cooperstown Farmers’ Market.

“I was very pleased to learn of the market last summer, after relocating to this area, and became a regular customer on Saturday mornings,” she explained.

Hanson is enjoying Cooperstown, and finds her position as market manager to be a great experience.

“I am meeting lots of new people,” she said. “The vendors are extremely pleasant and hard-working.”

Hanson’s plans for the market are to make it more family oriented, with a wider variety of special activities. Along that line, Kids’ Day – held June 24 – was a great success. More than 40 children enjoyed playing with pinwheels, planting flowers and eating cookies.

“We’re trying to get some local students to do some face painting for the younger children,” she added. “I also hope to get some local chefs in to do cooking demonstrations using fresh produce.”

The Zucchini Festival is set for August 19 – “We’d also like to do strawberry, garlic and pumpkin festivals,” added Hanson – and Customer Appreciation Day and a holiday event are planned for later in the season. “We hope our customers will enjoy these events and take a moment to savor seasonal produce grown by our local farmers,” said Hanson.