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Catherine Barr



Photo by Tana Butler

Manager, Monterey Bay Certified Farmers' Markets

Catherine Barr manages the Monterey Bay Certified Farmers' Markets (MBCFM), a consortium that includes the oldest and largest farmers' markets on California's Central Coast. Founded in 1976, MBCFM now boasts a total of more than eighty vendors at four locations, including Aptos, Monterey, Del Monte (also in Monterey), and Carmel. (At the time when this oral history was recorded, MBCFM had a now-discontinued market in Salinas, while the Del Monte location had not yet been established.) Certification ensures that the fruits, vegetables, meats, and other products available at these markets are grown or raised in California by the farmers who sell them.

Barr moved in the late 1960s from the eastern US to Santa Cruz, where, she jokes, she discovered that vegetables do not originate in a can—“my first real shock as far as to where food really came from.” Her agricultural education continued when she married a fourth-generation flower grower, Jonathan Barr, and moved with him to Mexico to grow vegetables. After the Barrs returned to California in 1993, Catherine responded to a newspaper advertisement for a market manager, and beat out ninety-five other applicants.

In this interview, conducted by Sarah Rabkin at the Barr home in Corralitos, California, on May 13th, 2008, Catherine Barr described the responsibilities and challenges, pleasures and pressures entailed in managing multiple year-round farmers’ markets.

Additional Resources

Monterey Certified Farmers’ Markets: <http://www.montereybayfarmers.org/>

Vance Corum, Marcie Rosensweig, and Eric Gibson, *The New Farmers' Market: Farm-Fresh Ideas for Producers, Managers & Communities*, (New World Publishing 2001).

Jennifer Meta Robinson and JA Hartenfeld, *The Farmers' Market Book: Growing Food, Cultivating Community* (Indiana University Press, 2007).

Beginnings

Rabkin: It’s Tuesday, May 13th, 2008, and this is Sarah Rabkin. I’m in Corralitos [California], talking with Catherine Barr, who manages the Monterey Bay Certified Farmers Markets, which include the markets in Aptos, Monterey, Salinas, and Carmel. So, Catherine, I wanted to start with some early background about you. First of all, where and when were you born?

Barr: I was born in Port Angeles, Washington. My father was in the service. He was in the Coast Guard, so we did move every two years. He retired in the late sixties, and that’s when we moved to Santa Cruz. They were originally from San

Jose. [But] we grew up mostly back East, Washington, D.C. and Virginia, so we thought vegetables came out of a can. [It was] very interesting when we came to California, and they didn't. That was my first real shock as far as where food really came from.

Rabkin: So your family settled in Santa Cruz in the late sixties?

Barr: Yes.

Rabkin: And then what did your family do here?

Barr: My father is a pilot, so he taught. I was only in fourth grade, so I went through all the local schools, Cabrillo [College] included. And I started in the nursing program and worked for a doctor for a few years, got married, and worked for the phone company for about fourteen years as a supervisor. Then I retired from that, and we moved down to Mexico, and we grew vegetables around the Lake Chapala area out of Guadalajara.

Rabkin: So you married a farmer.

Flower Growing in Mexico

Barr: I sure did. He was a fourth-generation flower grower here in Watsonville. At one time, our farms produced ten percent of all miniature carnations in the United States.

Rabkin: Wow. And what is his name, your husband?

Barr: His name is Jonathan Barr. He's from the Boston area in Massachusetts, and when his father moved the whole family out, all seven kids out to California to grow flowers, people thought he was absolutely nuts, because you grew flowers in a greenhouse, and here you had the plastic houses. The family had several farms around in the Watsonville area.

Rabkin: So you spent some time in Mexico farming.

Barr: Yes, yes. We grew vegetables, and we sold the vegetables to a lot of gringos [who] were down in that particular area. Ajijic is a very renowned artist kind of area, so we sold to the Ajijic, a lot of the bed and breakfasts there, Chapala, and also in Guadalajara.

Dick Peixoto¹ was sending us seeds because we couldn't get seeds there. We were farming by horse. They wouldn't have tractors. And a lot of it was dry farmed, because, of course, a lot of the wells were dry around the Lake Chapala area. And one time we could not get the seeds out of customs. That was kind of the straw that broke the camel's back. We said, "We just cannot do business down here." And we really couldn't.

Rabkin: So Dick Peixoto had sent you the seeds.

Barr: All the seeds. And we could not get them out. Well, because, of course, we wouldn't pay the bribe.

Rabkin: Ah.

Barr: [Laughs.] My husband does take credit for that, because he went out, and he was in a very foul mood, and when the guy said, "Oh, well, gee, Mr. Barr, you're going to have to—" he just said: "I just refuse to pay it." And so they were going to send him to Mexico City, and he said: "You know what? That's it." And that's when we ended up coming back to the States.

Rabkin: And you've been back here since.

Barr: Ever since '93, yes. So we came home.

Rabkin: And how much land do you farm now?

Barr: We do not farm anything. My husband is no longer in farming. All the land that we have, we do rent out. None of his brothers are in farming. So that generation just kind of ended. I have two children. My daughter is a food safety graduate from Cal Poly. She works for Earthbound Farms at this time.² And my son is going to Cabrillo [College], studying Japanese. He's going to be going, hopefully, to Japan pretty soon and taking a different approach to what he'd like to do. So no more farming, except markets.

Becoming Coordinator of the Monterey Bay Certified Farmers Markets

Rabkin: So tell me about that. Tell me how and when you came to be the coordinator of the Monterey Bay Certified Farmers Markets.

Barr: When I came back from Mexico, I was working for a little company here in Watsonville called Smith & Vandiver. I was their purchasing agent. We did a lot of business overseas, selling lotions and potions. And [I] hated it, absolutely hated it. I saw an ad in the paper, “looking for a market manager.” So I applied, and I didn’t hear anything for three weeks. Then all of a sudden, out of the blue, Chris Banthien, who was on the board at the time (she has Valencia Creek Farms) called and said, “Would you like to come in for an interview?” I said, “Sure.” So I came in for an interview. It was interesting, the questions they asked. And again didn’t hear from them for about three weeks, and Chris called and said, “Would you like the job?” I said, “Absolutely.” I was one out of ninety-six applicants.

Rabkin: My goodness.

Barr: Yes. So I’ll tell you, the first day that I was on the job (it was at Aptos in March of ’93), and when I came home, I said to my husband—I said, “What the hell have I done?” I mean, it was just— I had such a headache, and all these people were just, like, “[Makes sounds.]” And I went, “Oh, my gosh.” At that time, the company or the organization just missed going bankrupt. They had a lot of issues when I came on board.

This organization has been around since 1976, and it was founded by Nick Pasqual, Bob Harris, Manuel Netto and Jerry Thomas.³ They started at Cabrillo [College]. They then went to Salinas, opened one there, went to MPC [Monterey Peninsula College], opened there, and then we opened Carmel probably about ten years ago.

Rabkin: So you mentioned that you were struck by the kinds of questions you got asked in your interview. Do you remember [them]?

Barr: Coming from the corporate background, when you go in for an interview you have a one-on-one. And then if you go to the second step, you have maybe a couple of other people. Here, there was the whole nine board members, and it was at eight o'clock at night. And, of course, my husband was still farming at the time. Farmers—we go to bed at eight. So I'm trying to stay awake, number one, and trying to be professional, and you have these farmers that are coming from really different backgrounds. You get the same questions: "Where do you see yourself in five years?" That was number one. I remember that being asked, and I'm going, "Oh, that's such a cliché." I just remember just looking at these people, going, well, just a different crowd. Just very different personalities coming out, and the inter-fighting between a couple of them when I was there being interviewed—the dynamics were very unique. But that was one question I really do remember, is the "Where do you see yourself in five years?" [chuckles] So anyway, sixteen years later, I'm still here. (laughs)

Rabkin: I'd love you to talk about the various tasks and responsibilities that make up your job. Maybe you could walk us through a day or a week during your busiest season.

Barr: Oh, sure. Yes. (Yes, you've got a couple of months?) (laughs) Basically with farmers' markets, true certified farmers' markets— And do you know the difference between a certified market and a non-certified market?

Certified Farmers' Markets

Rabkin: You're talking about the California certification process?

Barr: Yes.

Rabkin: Maybe you could say a little bit about that.

Barr: A true certified farmers' market, you get a certificate from your county, and what that tells you is that you can go ahead and hold the market, number one. You also have to have a health permit from the county, and that includes all your farmers. You also have to get a business license if the city requires it, use permits if they require it. So all those kinds of permits do need to be in check before you can start a farmers' market.

Certified means that all the produce coming to your market is from the state of California. It doesn't mean it's organic. It's just certified from California, not coming from Mexico, not coming from any [other] state. Now, with markets—

there's, like, 450 in this state, and they're good business. They're big business. So sometimes you get the cheaters. Being in the business for a long time, you can just peg them—which means they go buy produce; they get a certificate somehow, and then they try to come to market. Again, I don't know if it's just your gut feeling or whatever, or some of the questions you ask people, you can just peg them off right away that they're not specific growers. I'm lucky in that aspect. I do have the same growers that come back year after year. They're family. We know their history, multi-generation family farms. Part of my job is to make sure that they're on the up-and-up. If they're saying that they're organic, or sustainable, or no spray, we have to make sure that the papers are in order for that.

Rabkin: So they need to be certified?

Barr: They need to be certified in order to use the “organic” word. Now, at my particular markets we have very small family farms: maybe two acres, five acres, ten acres. Now that the USDA owns the “organic” word, a lot of them are registered with the state, which means they have an organic registered number, but they don't take that next step and be certified. So they can't use “organic.” And you'll see some of them in the market and it will say, “Bar D Farms, sustainable farming.” They use the organic practices, but they cannot use that “organic” word. I think people get a little kind of confused with that. I would say probably seventy-five percent of our farmers are organic, or they use organic practices, even though they don't use the word. Some of the larger farms, of course can pay the fees, and that's what happens with that.

A Typical Day at the Market

So my typical day. Let's just do Aptos [farmers' market]. A typical day starts about five o'clock [a.m.]. I get there early, even though the market starts at eight. I have a lot of farms that come within a 250-mile radius, which is considered local. So they travel, and it's nice to talk to them, see what's going on. Sometimes they beat me there. Some of them are sleeping in their trucks, waiting for somebody, and the bathrooms to be open. So I get there. Usually people know their places. We don't switch them around, because I think it's important that people [consumers] know exactly where their certain farmer is. If I have somebody by the orchid people, they're always there.

Usually during the market, I'm either calling 911 for some kind of emergency, whether somebody's fainted, or we've had accidents, or what have you. A lot of calls are requests as far as how to get into the market in the first place. We try to stay true to what farmers' markets are about, and that's farmers. We only limit a percentage, fifteen percent of non-farmers in the market at a time, and those are our meat people, our bakery people, fish people, et cetera. They round off the market really well. People can come and get things there. But I think, for farmers' markets you should have a real place for farmers to come sell, not have that middle man. And since they *are* small farms, they don't have a lot of outside sales, such as restaurants or what the bigger ones do. They don't sell wholesale. So we try to keep to that kind of tune.

Usually my day, then, for Aptos, ends about twelve thirty, one o'clock. Make sure everybody gets out okay, make sure cars start, trucks start, because sometimes that happens—you know, the batteries go dead. And so it's all day. It's either relieving somebody if they're by themselves, just for a little break to go to the bathroom or go get a cup of coffee. Or inspectors come uninvited, and so you're dealing with that sometimes, either the health department or the ag department. Make sure everyone's certificate is up. The certificate is what tells people where their farm is and what they do grow. So there's little things. Making sure that produce is off the ground and little things like that. So it's a long day, but it's a good day.

Rabkin: And how do you divide your week among the four markets?

Barr: I go to each market. I think it's important that a market manager does, just in case there're problems. And there are usually are—not big problems, but usually there are. I'm really excited this year. The board just hired me an assistant, so I'm, like, yay! So now she's down in Carmel. I've been doing this by myself for sixteen years.

Rabkin: Have you been the only paid staff member for the markets?

Barr: Yes, yes.

Rabkin: My goodness.

Barr: Yes. During the week, I do try to take Monday off completely. Sometimes it works; sometimes it doesn't. I usually get probably about fifteen, twenty e-mails a day. Same as far as for phone calls, especially during the busy time, where farmers or just vendors are trying to get a place to put stuff. So usually during the summertime, starting probably about March to probably November, we're slamming like that. December, January is a little slower, but you're always to make sure permits and so forth are in check.

Rabkin: So you get to each of the markets each week?

Barr: Each week, yes.

Rabkin: You mentioned this 250-mile radius that constitutes local. Are you limited to that radius for each of the markets?

Barr: No. For certified farmers' markets, they can be from anywhere in the state of California. I could say seventy-five percent [are from] from Santa Cruz, Monterey, San Benito County. The other twenty-five percent are either from Fresno, Madera, Stockton. We have Brokaw Nursery out of Ventura. Santa Maria is Benny Cortez. So that's about it. We don't really have a lot of people from the L.A. area, San Diego area.

I belong to the California Federation [of Certified Farmers' Markets]. I'm a board member. We get together and discuss issues with markets. And talking to the people from L.A. and from San Diego, a lot of problems as far as bringing

produce in from Mexico. We don't really have that up here, which has been really great. So I don't really see a lot of people from that particular area coming up here. It's a long haul.

Rabkin: It's a *long* haul.

Barr: Long haul. So I would say, probably Santa Maria, Ventura—that's about it as far as for length. You know, a couple of hours.

Rabkin: It seems like there must be a tension between wanting to provide market space for truly local farmers on the one hand, but also wanting to extend the variety of produce from growing seasons outside of our area.

Barr: Absolutely. Right. Again, very lucky as far as the same farmers coming back year after year. Cherry season has just started. Right here in Hollister it has not. You mentioned about the seasons. So we can extend that [season], and that really helps with the [Central] Valley guys. When I first came on board, it was basically the valley guys versus the local guys. It was just kind of like, "Uch, how can *they* be in here?" Well, your consumer is what's telling you what you need for the market. My whole philosophy is what's best for the market, not for an individual farmer or a farm, but what's best for the market. And so we've been true to that, and the board has given me full rein for that. I really appreciate that they let me do that, to be honest with you.

Rabkin: So you've landed on this balance of roughly seventy-five percent from the local counties. And that seems to work in terms of what customers want.

Barr: Oh, absolutely, yes. And your customer will tell you. A lot of the customers really have their favorites, and they'll only buy from their favorites, and if their favorite's not there, then, "Okay, I'll go try somebody else." But, it's a good philosophy, I think. That way you have that permanent footprint. It's something local.

Rabkin: I know that I watch for Swanton [Berry Farm] berries and Molino Creek [Farm] tomatoes.⁴

Barr: Yes, yes. Molino Creek! It's going to be a little late this year, I think. I look forward to their tomatoes, too.

Rabkin: Great. Are your efforts focused differently during the slower season?

Barr: No, because we live in this particular area, we're finding that the markets are getting a little busier during the wintertime. Usually that was kind of my slow time. Like, ah, breathe, time. I didn't see that for the last probably three years.

Rabkin: Interesting.

Barr: There's just been just too much going on, which is great. We got all the root crops and things like that. But people are really waiting for that fruit, that stone fruit coming out, those berries coming out, and that's when it's just really slamming. But, yes, during the wintertime, I think people are really interested in where their food comes from, so they're coming out to the market.

Rabkin: And three of your markets are open all year?

Barr: Yes. Aptos, Salinas and MPC [Monterey Peninsula College] are. Carmel is just from May to September. I think that's because each market has a personality of its own, and Carmel people tend to [be] snowbirds, so they leave. Once the fruit's gone, our customers are gone too, for that particular market.

Special Projects and Programming

Rabkin: Are there particular achievements or accomplishments that you're especially proud of during the sixteen years you've been doing this job?

Barr: We were voted Organization of the Year by the Santa Cruz County Farm Bureau. I speak at conferences, which has been really great. Anything to get the name, the Monterey Bay Certified Farmers Market name out there, I'll do. We do a lot of the school programs. I haven't had time the last couple of years to do it. Now that Amanda [Seely], the assistant, is on board, I like doing that. I like doing that community outreach. We do have a lot of community space available for nonprofits in our area, and I really enjoy doing that and giving back to the

community. We do a lot of fundraising. We have the Farmers' Market Bucks. That's a program that I started. People would ask us for, "Oh, do you have a donation to give to the school?" and so we would put these big, great baskets together. But by the time the thing came around, the lettuce would be wilted or the stuff would be—you know, because it wasn't refrigerated. So I came up with the Farmers' Market Buck idea, where we make our own money. Then you give out fifty or a hundred dollars of these, and they can use it as a raffle or something like that, and they can spend it on anything there at the market. And that way, it's kind of a win-win situation: good for the community and good for those certain farmers because you can spend it anywhere. And then the consumer can go ahead and make a choice.

We started the Shop with the Chef program, and, again, that's a win-win situation between farmers and for the chefs around the area. It gives them a little exposure, some of the newer ones coming up. So I really like that.

The Master Gardener program also tells people things about planting and whatever. This year, instead of the Master Gardener, we did Meet the Farmer, because there's a lot of farmers at the market that grow things, and people are really interested. What about their history and so forth? So, yes, I'm really happy about that.

Rabkin: So you'll schedule hour-long meetings, say?

Barr: They start in April, and they go through November. The Shop with the Chef is the second Saturday each month at Aptos, and then the Meet the Farmer is the third. I leave it up to that particular individual. Some people love to blab. Some people are really shy and they might do it just for forty-five minutes, and then there's answer-and-question period. Again, I leave it up to them. We give them the venue, and they just go ahead and take whatever they want out of that.

Rabkin: In Shop with the Chef, you'd have somebody like, say, Andrew Cohen?

Barr: Yep.

Rabkin: And he would talk to the interested people about what he might cook up from what's available at the farmers' market?

Barr: Yes. The only thing that we ask them to do, is to do it seasonally. Whatever is in season, go ahead and use. And, of course, everybody would like to do during the summertime because that's when we're all full of everything. We just had Chris [Howe] from [Café] La Vie last Saturday. Ach, a sweet little man! Did a great salmon dish and put fennel and kumquats. Because people don't really know what to do with that, and that sounds kind of like, icky. It was great. I mean, the smell was just phenomenal.

Rabkin: He cooks it up right there on the spot.

Barr: So he cooks it right up there. He tells you how to do it, what ingredients. A lot of the chefs, what they'd like to do is—they have favorites, of course, in the market. They like to go around and show you how to pick certain things out. Because people, again, if you're not really sure on something, they usually bypass it. But if you give them a little information on something, "Oh, you know what? I think I'll try that." I would never think of putting fennel and kumquats with salmon. It was delicious. It was a win-win situation for our farmers, a win-win situation for customers, and also for that chef. So, it's great.

Rabkin: You mentioned those events in connection with Aptos. Is that the main place where you have those?

Barr: It is. Each market has a distinct personality. Our Salinas market is very diversified. We have a huge Hmong population, which—you know, you think: Salinas? Really? A huge Indian population, so they're more into Asian vegetables and things like that. Carmel—you get the frou-frou people. Cooking demonstrations for them is not going to happen, only because they have their maids behind them picking up stuff.

Monterey Peninsula College—that is a real quick market. Even though it starts 2:30 to 6:00, we're slamming from about 2:30 to 4:30, because everybody's going home. It's a retirement area. People are there to chitchat and talk, and just to kind of see what's going on. We tried some of those things. Didn't work. So Aptos seems to be kind of like *the* place to go ahead and do it. That's fine. And

Cabrillo's [College] been really helpful as far as getting chairs and so forth for us. So, again, I think Aptos is the premier market for that.

Rabkin: It's certainly your largest market.

Barr: It is the largest. During summertime I have sixty vendors there. During the wintertime, I go down to about forty-five, which is still pretty large. Carmel, I only have room for twenty-five vendors, so it's always full. Same thing with Salinas, about twenty-five. MPC is about forty-five. And then during the wintertime, for MPC I go down to about, oh, probably about thirty. Again, it's good. Everything is there, as far as from A to Z, so I'm happy with that.

Community Colleges and Farmers' Markets

Rabkin: Three out of your four markets are on community college campuses.

Barr: Yes, yes.

Rabkin: Can you talk a bit about your relationships with the community colleges?

Barr: Love Aptos. Just great. Cabrillo [College] has been very generous to us. We started out in the Live Oak area, and then during the medfly (I don't know if you remember the medfly)⁵ because of where the border was, we had to move it to Cabrillo College. And we were what we call "in the hole," where they're building right now. During all the construction, it was, like, oh, my gosh! It killed

us. The construction just killed us. But Cabrillo was very gracious and said, “You know what? We always have a spot for you on campus.” So they moved us. We stuck it out. It was for two seasons. And then where we are right now is where our permanent location is. I like it, because it’s like, hey, we have an ocean view. It’s three tiers. Plenty of parking. People seem to be very happy. There’s a lot of space available for that. So great.

MPC, the same thing. We just went through a huge construction on campus. And, again, very gracious as far as letting us there be there. And, again, plenty of parking. These places—Hartnell [College], MPC and Aptos at Cabrillo College are out of the way. So people have to travel there. And there’s nothing really around as far as anything else. Carmel has the Barnyard, so people can go and have lunch or whatever. So they make an effort to come to the farmers’ market, and we really appreciate that. And we’re in neighborhoods. There’s houses around each of the campuses. So some people do walk and ride their bikes or whatever. I think it’s good to be on campus like that.

We do rent from the campuses. We don’t pay rent to the Barnyard, but all three campuses. They have a rent schedule, and I think it’s good for them, too. They need the money, so why not?

And we do a lot of things on campus. Like, Hartnell, we’re very involved now with the agricultural department there. People don’t know that Hartnell has an agricultural department, which is great, because you’re right in the salad bowl area. It’s a way for the college students to learn how to grow things. They learn

how to market things, take it from one step to the next step, and we're happy to do that for them.

Rabkin: Do you have a similar relationship at Cabrillo College with the horticulture people there?

Barr: We did at one time. After [one coordinator] left, it just kind of went downhill. They started for a while. They couldn't get the kids to come out on a Saturday morning. Of course, it's very early. So, kind of hit and miss with them. So we haven't really responded to that.

MPC, we never have, really. We have a lot of the students come down and shop, and we have a lot of the teachers as well, but nothing really horticultural, as far as that goes.

Rules and Regulations

Rabkin: How has your job changed over the years?

Barr: Hah! [Chuckles.] As I get older, I get very tired. With the government getting into the picture, there's so many rules and regulations now, it's really kind of hard to keep up with them, because they change since we're in different counties. We're in Santa Cruz County and Monterey County, and each county really needs to get on the same page in order to get these things, and it's just—it's a nightmare. But this is what I do for my farmers so they don't have to go through all that garbage. And some of them are old. You know, Nick Pasqual is

ninety-four and doesn't own a computer.⁶ How are they to know all these new steps that are coming out? A lot of them don't have e-mail. So I take care of all that kind of stuff for them. I'm kind of like—they call me Mom. Because the way it is as far as with the government regulations and so forth, they really got involved with farmers' markets, which, again, is kind of a grin-and-bear-it. I know that they're trying to do the best that they can, but sometimes it's just like, come on, people, get on the same page. It's making it harder for people to farm. It really is.

Rabkin: Are you thinking mainly of the state of California getting involved with certifying farmers' markets, or of organic certification?

Barr: All, all.

Rabkin: Everything.

Barr: Yes, everything. Organic certification. In California we're governed by the agriculture department, which has, of course, absolutely no money. We've been slammed with LBAM [Light Brown Apple Moth].⁷ We've been trying to deal with that, and that is a nightmare, because if you don't comply, the USDA has every power to shut you down. So where are these farmers going to go?

Light Brown Apple Moth

Rabkin: Right. So what kind of actions have you had to take in relation to the light brown apple moth?

Barr: Well—ha-ha! We’ve got— Okay—hmm, where do I start? We found out about the apple moth from our regular inspector, Marilyn Perry, here in Santa Cruz County. Marilyn and I have a really great relationship. I tell her things that I think are a mishap as far as her farmers, and she takes care of it. And she’s only allowed to do things here in Santa Cruz County. She told me about this, and she goes, “This is what I’m doing.” She was going to nurseries and putting out the traps. She says, “But we’re kind of on a hold pattern right now.” I said, “Absolutely.” She knows her farmers here in this particular county. The USDA got involved. Didn’t even know who Marilyn Perry was. I mean, this is just—you know, talk about the Three Stooges. Came to the market, and, of course, there’s, like, eight of them altogether, with their clipboards and just kind of like Nazi Germany all over again. I hate to say that, but that’s—you know. And of course the farmers are going, “Well, what’s going on?” I don’t know how many times I’ve had to send the same paperwork to two different people. It’s, again, c’mon, get on the same page.

They came out to people’s farms, and of course a lot of them thought it was like the Immigration [and Naturalization Service] coming out.⁸ They come on these huge big white trucks. All these people come out. They come and inspect. They come and do it all the time to certain farms. And they have not found one apple moth on these particular places. So I don’t know if it’s because they’re comfortable at these particular farms and these farmers aren’t giving them a hassle or what. But, again, I think the whole thing was just totally botched. It really was.

If it was kept on a local level, I don't think we'd have this big hoopla that we had, had in the past. And, again, I trust Marilyn Perry. I trust her judgment. Basically, she was just kind of thrown to the side. She knows her farmers. She knows exactly where to go, and they [the USDA] didn't really use her. They didn't— The information that I gave them, God knows where it is, you know?

Rabkin: Did you say that the USDA inspectors, when they showed up, had not even made contact with the county person?

Barr: Yes. Yes, absolutely, absolutely. They didn't do their homework as far as other market managers in the area, as far as farms in the area. I don't know. It was just botched altogether. I think it's going to get worse before it gets better, to be quite honest with you. So, again, if it was on a local level, on other aspects too, I think it would have been a lot better. I really do.

Rabkin: Were the inspectors inspecting the market as well as the farms where the produce is grown?

Barr: Yes, yes. They were thinking of quarantine. We've heard of stories up in the Fresno area, some of these farmers who did not have tarps on their loads to go to farmers' markets. Some of those USDA inspectors were on the— [phone rings, recording turned off]

I forgot where I was.

Rabkin: You were finishing up talking about the apple moth. Is there anything else you wanted to say about that?

Barr: No. I think enough has been said. [Laughs.]

Challenges of Running the Markets

Rabkin: What, if anything, keeps you up at night, thinking about your job?

Barr: The only night that I do not sleep is Friday night, right before Aptos, because that seems to be where the hotspots are. MPC is in the afternoon. Salinas is kind of like the down time. These farmers have been together for a long time. It's a smaller market so, like, we can do breakfast. One of the vendors brings sausage and egg sometimes, and we have birthday cake there. Again, it's like the wind-down of the whole market week, so that's great.

Aptos—have not slept in sixteen years on a Friday night. Because, again, there's just little things that have happened in the past, and you're always kind of wondering if they are going to happen again. My father always says, "If you're overly prepared, you never need it." I think for the Saturday market, I'm always overly prepared. And it's my own fault, but that's just in case. You know, just the "in case" things.

Rabkin: What other kinds of fires do you have to be prepared to put out?

Barr: Sometimes if there're cars in our lot, where are these vendors going to be parking? And, of course, we don't tow. I hate that. I know the Downtown Santa Cruz market tows. That's not a good way to have the community love you, you know, when you have a \$200 tow ticket. So we work around it. But when Cabrillo, for instance, was doing construction, sometimes the big old honkin' construction bucket trucks and so forth were there. It's like, okay, it's five thirty in the morning. Who are you going to call to come pick this thing up? We would try to work around it, but, of course, during the summertime it's just— My whole job, I think, as far as a market manager, is to take all the worry of coming to a market for a farmer. All he has to do is drive there, set up, sell his stuff, pack his truck up and go home. When he is happy, he's done that, my job is done.

I don't really have a job title as far as for market manager. It's what needs to be done. That's it. That's always been my philosophy. The assistant that I have—she has been on the other side of markets, selling for vendors, so she knows that aspect as far as the vendor. I really like her. She's smart. She's intelligent. She's quick, and she has that same philosophy. Whatever needs to be done to make that market day perfect for that vendor, that's what we do.

Like Family: Relationships With and Between Vendors

Rabkin: You referred to your relationships with the vendors as like family relationships.

Barr: Yes.

Rabkin: Can you talk in particular about any of those relationships with people you work with?

Barr: Yes. I think it's important, as a market manager, anytime I get an invitation, whether it's to a wedding or a baby shower or a whatever, I always go. Even though I am exhausted, or tired, or whatever, or it's in the [Central] Valley, I go. If this farmer has taken the initiative to even invite me, I think it's important that I go. So a couple of weeks ago, one of the farmers, Fred and [Joann Minazoli]—they are the cherry growers out of Stockton—their son just got married, so [I] ended up not going to market on a Saturday and going to the wedding over in Stockton. It was really nice and pleasant, and I was thrilled to be there. I've known David (it's so weird that he's married), I've known him for sixteen years, as a little kid [he'd] come and help at the market, and so it was just really interesting to see him take this next step into adulthood.

So I do that. I really enjoy going. Any time somebody asks me to go out for dinner or whatever, I do. Again, I'm kind of like the mom. If there's problems (because there are problems between family farms), I take care of that. I'm kind of the peacemaker. I've been very lucky: in the last ten years we haven't had any of these— You know, not that we get into fist fights, but we get in: "Hey, he's two inches over on my property line," you know? I mean, it's just—oh, please! We're supposed to be adults here.

I've had to deal with that in the past, and I don't have— We have a good group, so it's been really very pleasant. I have the perfect job. I really do.

Rabkin: It sounds, from things you've said, like there's a real advantage to having a market where you've got stability and relatively little turnover in your vendors, so that they develop working relationships with each other and begin to feel safe with each other.

Barr: Yes. Right, right. Our particular organization, I think, is a little different than other organizations. There's a huge one up in the Bay Area that has over fifty farmers' markets, and sometimes they are, like, three miles from each other. Some of them are really good; some of them are not. But they're there to fill the space. They're there to make that money. So whoever they fill that space with, they don't care.

Commodity Control

In our organizations we have something that's called commodity control. So here Sarah is, and you grow tomatoes. And John down the street says, "Oh, my gosh. Sarah made a killing on these tomatoes. I'm going to start growing tomatoes." And John's partner next door, Peter, says, "I'm going to grow tomatoes next year." Well, what does that do for Sarah's business? Sarah has been trying to really get this business together as far as just for tomatoes. I think she should keep that. If there's more than one person that has a commodity— We have fifteen lettuce growers, because that's what the market allows for in Aptos. We have several flower growers. Again, that's what the market allows for at Aptos. As long as nobody has a monopoly, they're fine.

And if a farm has been in the organization for thirty years, that's great, but it's the commodities that have the seniority. So, for instance, a flower grower who's been a flower grower for thirty years, great. If somebody wanted to grow flowers for this year, he'd have to go to the board for permission in order to do that. It keeps the peace, I think, that way.

Waiting Lists

If somebody does retire, or somebody decides not to come back to the market, we do take people off the waiting list. We have over 200 people on this waiting list. Again, we just don't have the room to expand, number one, and all the commodities are there. We do give our vendors who are there, as far as members, first choice. "Hey, you know what? The potato guy is retiring. Do you think that you want to grow potatoes?" "I don't think so." "Okay." And then you go to the next person.

Rabkin: So you begin with vendors who already have a place at the market.

Barr: Yes. There are some of them that have specialties. Like, you're not going to ask the fruit guy, "Hey, do you want to grow potatoes?" No. He wants to stick with his fruit, because that's what he knows. So if there's nobody who's really interested in that, then we'll take it off the waiting list, and we have. Phil Foster [of Phil Foster Farms] is a great example, Pinnacles [Pinnacle Organic Produce], out of Hollister. He was on the waiting list for ten years before we brought him in. I love him. He's great. He's been perfect for the market. He does all the

markets. And he's just real sweet, a nice family man out of Hollister, and he's local, and he does a good job. So he's a good addition.

Rabkin: I've heard young or relatively new farmers talk about the difficulty of getting spaces in the farmers' markets. And now that you talk about these waiting lists, I can see where the problem would come from.

Barr: Yes. Right. I do feel for these younger farmers, and I've had some kind of heated discussions with some of them. I will not tell you their names. Basically, "Hey, I'm a local grower. I'm an organic grower. I want to get in the market." "Well, there's a couple of things. We have some really older vendors. What do you want me to tell them? To retire? If I tell them to retire, it'll kill 'em. All they've known is farming. It's their life. It's their decision to get out, not my decision to tell them to get out. [For] a couple of these people who are in organic farming now—if it wasn't for these older farmers, there wouldn't be such a thing as organic farming. So learn from these old guys. They've been through this whole thing. They've been through—you wouldn't believe it, you know? So give 'em some credit. Also, grow something different than somebody else has. It's the same— Okay, carrots and beets and flowers and tomatoes. [pounds the table with each one] Okay, we got 'em. Grow something that somebody else does not have, something that's in demand."

And a lot of them: "Okay, I'm local." "Well, you know what? You need to pay your dues, too, just like these older people did. If you have to go over the hill [to San Jose], well, you have to go over the hill. If you want to sell your product, you

have to go over the hill. If you want to get into the wholesale (because a lot of the younger ones are in wholesale), “Okay, well, that’s fine.” They see farmers’ market as big business, and yes, it is. But, again, it’s not my decision to tell these older farmers, “It’s time for you to retire and get out.” [Makes raspberry sound] Won’t do it.

Assessing the Market

Rabkin: Yes.

Barr: So. And a lot of them don’t understand that. I can’t change their mind, so— Nothing you can do about it.

Rabkin: You’ve mentioned that you arrive at a cap for each commodity based on what the market will bear, how much clientele there is for a given commodity. How do you figure that out?

Barr: Yes. Because I’m at each market. I walk around. I walk around at certain times of the day. That’s why I don’t have a place where you can find me. Because I *am*. I’m very interested in what they’re doing. I can tell you how long this vendor will last through the day, because of what kind of commodities and how much he has on there. And it changes from season to season. It depends on the weather. It depends on if the seeds germinated, because sometimes they’ve had really bad seeds, like potatoes or whatever.

So, again, it's different every year. There are a couple of people, like Ronald [Donkervoort] from Windmill Farm just lost his property over here in Live Oak, and so now he's growing over by Moss Landing. Okay, it's going to take him a season to really get up to speed like he was before. So at the market you'll see him—by nine thirty he's out! He's out of strawberries. All he has on his table is chard. Okay, well, should I penalize this guy because he's starting again? Next year he'll be up to speed. So give him some time to recoup. That's what we need to do. And that's how we do it.

I look at around the market, at the very end. If there's somebody that has strawberries on their table, a couple of the farmers who do have strawberries, then it tells me I don't need another strawberry person in here because there is stuff left till noon. And there are certain weekends that are a lot busier than other weekends. So it just depends, from week to week, actually from season to season.

Rabkin: So you're watching what sells out, but you're also taking into account what's happening that given season—

Barr: Absolutely.

Rabkin: —and what's happening with a particular grower.

Barr: Right, right.

Rabkin: Once a vendor gets a space at the market, do they get to keep it?

Barr: Okay. When we do bring a vendor in, because in the past we've gotten stung, they're on probation, and it's as long as the board decides as far as how long a probation. It could be three months, which is normal; it could be six months. I have them sign a letter. We have an application. We have our rules and regulations that they need to sign, and initial where appropriate. And then they sign this probation letter, and this probation letter tells them what markets they're allowed to go into. Because they're not for all markets. It just depends on what markets I need them. It might not be Aptos, but I might have a space in Salinas. Also, what product that they can bring. Usually on a person's producer's certificate, it lists all the products that they grow. I might just need ten of those products. I may not need *all* of those products. So those are the items that they can go ahead and bring. And if they don't want to sign it, that's fine. "Well, thank you very much. We'll go to the next person on the waiting list." And they're pretty amenable. Again, they're pretty good. This is how we've gotten rid of some of the troublemakers as far as, "Okay, your probation— I've seen how you work. Don't particularly like it, and thank you very much."

Rabkin: So this would be people not adhering to the stipulations on their contract.

Barr: Absolutely. Yes, absolutely.

Rabkin: They're selling stuff that they don't have permission for.

Barr: Yes, or causing trouble. Or we find out that they're buying product, which is a big no-no.

Rabkin: Buying wholesale and selling at the market?

Barr: Yes, and then selling at the market. Hearing kind of little things, you know. Again, that's why I like to walk around and just kind of— I'll stand behind vendors, newer vendors, and see how they interact with customers. That's how I get a little information, insight as far as where the product is coming from. We had, for instance (and this just happened last year) we had a new avocado person [snorts] out of Gonzales, and, you know, your gut just sort of tells you there's something not right. You ask him something about a farming practice, and it just doesn't come off right. So I just kind of stood behind a little bit and found out that they were taking these stickers off of these avocados. So it was, like, okay— well, I can understand if you're selling wholesale; sometimes your stickers need to be for the supermarkets and whatever. Kind of did a little more fact finding, and it was just, like, mmm, it wasn't right. So I put the county on them. The county pulled their certificate, so they're not allowed to sell at any farmers' market, because of what I observed and what I overheard. So there you go.

Rabkin: Yes.

Barr: The integrity of the market is very important to me. Because some of these bigger places—they're there to fill a spot. They're there to get that stall fee. And that's not what we're all about. Since we're a nonprofit, as long as our bills are

paid, that's okay. You know, that's all right. We don't have a lot of money in the bank. That's fine, too. These farmers work really hard. They should really get most of their money, to go home and— You know, fuel prices and so forth— they're hurting this year. They really are.

Relationships with Other Farmers' Markets

Rabkin: What kind of relationship do you have with the Santa Cruz farmers' markets?

Barr: Nesh Dhillon⁹ in particular, the market manager there, or just in general with them?

Rabkin: In general.

Barr: Is there competition? Yes, a little bit. Is it good competition? Sure, because it makes me want to be better. And, again, when I'm walking around I see these moms with these kids go, "Oh, my gosh, I love this market. It's so clean." We don't have the drummers. It's a whole different aspect down there. It really is.

Rabkin: Are you thinking of downtown in particular?

Barr: Yes, downtown Santa Cruz. A lot of the farmers call it "the freak show." I mean, it's just— You get the grazers, people who come and eat all your samples and not necessarily buy. There's a lot of stuff that they have to deal with. I'm really fortunate that I don't have to do that at Cabrillo. But, yes, Nesh and I talk.

We have similar problems. Since I've been around for a long time, I can kind of tell him, "This is how I dealt with it. You don't necessarily have to just do it my way, but, here's a little solution or suggestion for you." He's fine. It's good.

California Federation of Certified Farmers' Markets

Rabkin: You mentioned a relationship with a California Federation of Certified Farmers' Markets.¹⁰ That's a network of people who work in farmers' markets around the state?

Barr: Yes. I believe there're twenty board members, and they're from all over California. They're market managers; they're farmers. There are also ag inspectors. We come together. We look at the problems and issues that the farmers' markets are having. There's a sixty-cent-per-farmer-per-market that we do send to the state, it's like a little kind of a quarterly that we give them. And that is to make sure that all farmers' markets in the state of California are run properly, that the inspectors are there. Sixty cents doesn't— It's not a lot. I know that they run out of money when it comes to taking people basically to court, because they do, some of these farmers. When they pull people's certificates, that's, again, big business for these farmers. So some of them fight it, which is fine. They don't usually win. [Chuckles.] And they're usually fined, too. It depends on what's happening. If they've been caught either buying and reselling, or they don't have a producer's certificate, or they have a certificate and it's bogus, which has happened.

And so the federation—we talk about stuff like that. We don't necessary talk about individual farms. We talk about what's happening in our industry. And then we have an advisory committee that advises on the state level as far as for any kind of new rules or regulations pertaining to farmers' markets.

Farmers' Markets Outside of California

Rabkin: Do you have any kind of network or relationships with farmers' markets beyond California?

Barr: Not really. I have gotten several calls from different states—New York, Alabama and Nevada. They're either trying to set up farmers' markets, or what we, as our industry, how we deal with certain problems. A lot of them are not certified. In Alabama, for instance, they just had people just kind of like on the road—you know, here and there, everywhere. And they were trying to get them all together in one spot. So that way it's just a one-day thing. These farmers are not on the road every single day for a couple of hours. They should be out there farming.

Rabkin: Yes.

Barr: So just kind of stuff like that. And other websites and so forth that they can go to. I like it. It's interesting. I like talking to other people from other states [about] what they're doing and so forth.

Rabkin: Do you see a big difference between California and the rest of the country?

Barr: Oh, big time. Oh, big time. I think because our growing season is so different. Such as, like, Maine. They have a farmers' market maybe for four months out of the year. And what do you have? What do you have a lot [of] up there? Mmm, not too much. So I think we're really lucky, especially in California. Our growing seasons are almost year 'round. Strawberries now year 'round? Who ever thought of that? So, yes, it is very different when you're talking to other states. "Oh, yes, we're thinking of having a farmers' market for two months." And I'm going, "Gosh, all that work for two months." But, again, people are very interested in where their food comes from. They're getting smarter. We have a saying in the farmers' market: "China does not have to bomb us, they just have to feed us." You know, with all that stuff that was happening with the dog food and the baby food and all this other kind of stuff?¹¹ That's scary. That is really scary. And I think, again, the consumer has taken an interest as far as where the food is [from]. They like to have that connection with that farmer. They really do. You see that in the market all the time.

Community Supported Agriculture

Rabkin: During the time that you've been managing these markets, in relation to that, there's been a surge in the CSA [community supported agriculture] movement.

Barr: Yes, yes.

Rabkin: Have you seen an impact from that on the markets?

Barr: Not at all, no. Some of our farmers were in CSAs: Ken Kimes¹² with the sprouts; Jerry Thomas¹³; Blue Heron. No. We used to have a CSA, too, with Lakeview. I think people— A lot of it is impulse buying when they come to the farmers' market. It's like, "Okay, what's fresh today?" Sometimes when you get a CSA box, it's the same old, same old, same old. And I think people were just really, generally like, "Oh, I don't feel like cabbage this week. I'm gonna go for broccoli." So it's good in that aspect, that you can have that choice about what you want to eat. So has it impacted us at all? No. I know Mariquita Farms and Two Small Farms, they have a huge CSA. I know that Andy [Griffin]¹⁴ is no longer going up to the Ferry Plaza Market because it just wasn't worth it for him. Good for them. If all their crop is, like, spoken for, absolutely. Yay! But no, it has not impacted us at all.

Struggling Small Farmers

Rabkin: Do you have many vendors who get all of their income from selling at farmers' markets?

Barr: Yes. Nick and Velma Pasqual.¹⁵ Now they're on Social Security, which is great. But they used to rely on their farmers' market work for income. It's been hard for them now.

Rabkin: What proportion of your vendors, would you say, make all their money at the farmers' markets?

Barr: Oh, I'd say probably ten percent. Yes, ten percent. I'm just thinking kind of in my head of the smaller farms who do not really have enough to sell wholesale. And so they can't compete with the big boys with that. So farmers' markets are their only outlet.

Rabkin: That's it.

Barr: Yes, that's it.

Learning the Job of Market Manager

Rabkin: Yes. When you were first learning this job, did you have helpers, or mentors, or connections with anybody who helped you figure it out?

Barr: No. When I was hired, I was not given a job description. This is when Santa Cruz had just opened up, and it was a downtown market. The Downtown Association was in charge of it. We didn't really have the sources that we do now for new market managers. We have conferences and so forth that tell new market managers the ins and outs of it. It was kind of like: "Learn it." And I did. I kind of made it what I made it. Sometimes I had a really good board; sometimes I didn't. Some of them were really involved, and some of them were tired, too. My hand was never held. So I had to do what I needed to do, learn what I needed to learn. Now that I have it kind of down, and now it's all computerized, it's been

really good and easy. I think it's great for Amanda, the new assistant, just to kind of look at that.

Relationships with Other Sustainable Agriculture Organizations

Rabkin: Do you have, or have you had, significant relationships with any of the local organizations that support sustainable agriculture, like CAFF [Community Alliance with Family Farmers]?

Barr: CAFF. No, we really haven't. I know that we have several members in our organization that are members of CAFF. Sometimes we get some really great people in there, and they're there for, like, six months or a year, and "I'm gonna change the world," and then in a year they're gone. So then you have this new person coming in. It's the same thing, like with ALBA [Agriculture & Land-Based Training Association], those type of organizations—again, really gung-ho young people. They're there for six months or a year, and they move on to something else. So not really. We're there if they need our support or whatever. Sure, we'll give it to them, but we're not really asked a lot, to be quite honest with you.

Rabkin: CAFF has their annual Buy Fresh, Buy Local guide.

Barr: Yes.

Rabkin: I noticed that they list all the area farmers' markets in there.

Barr: Right.

Rabkin: Has that been helpful for you?

Barr: It has. We do contribute to that with money, which is really nice. Slow Food Monterey—we're very involved with them. Kimberly Wright, who also sells for Bar D—she's very instrumental in that. I like her a lot. She also has a website [and] she goes to all her markets and tells people what's new and exciting, so that's been really great.

Music and Entertainment at the Market

Rabkin: The Aptos Market regularly features, in addition to the vendors, and the chef talks and so forth, music and entertainment. What contributions do you think that performers and presenters make to the success of a farmers' market?

Barr: Okay. Well, you're talking about the Farmers' Market String Band. And how that came about—gosh.

Rabkin: And the Great Morgani.

Barr: And the Great Morgani, yes. Frank [Lima]. Being Portuguese, I used to see him at all the Portuguese festivals. My daughter was a princess, so it was, like, "Frank, you're not in costume!" [Laughs.]

The Farmers' Market String Band came about, oh, I'd say about ten years ago. And they were just customers, because a lot of them are teachers and so forth. Darren [Davison] is a private investigator. They said, "Well, can we have—can we just start"—"Sure," I said. "I don't pay for entertainment. If you want to put a jar out, go ahead." They went from three people to what they are now. They are a really big draw. Again, win-win situation. They'll be playing at my daughter's wedding. They've gotten a lot of gigs through where they are. And they've done a lot of CDs. I just think that it makes it a nice little kind of homey atmosphere.

You know, the Great Morgani—Frank—you just never know what to expect with him, because he makes his own costumes. A lot of time on his hands, obviously.

Rabkin: [Chuckles.]

Barr: He's a different kind of a draw. He's there early in the morning, before he does his gig on the Pacific Garden Mall. He's kind of like the opening act [laughs] for the string band. But I enjoy that. I like that. And we do have music at the other ones as well. Not as prominent as the string band and Frank. Frank has tried coming down to the other markets. Did not go over well. Again, different personalities as far as the markets. We have a couple of guitarists and so forth. They just show up, and it's a first-come, first-serve [basis] at the markets. And, again, we don't pay for it, but it's a nice little background, yes. I enjoy them.

Rabkin: It draws a lot of families with kids.

Barr: Oh, gosh, yes. I love seeing these kids with their little shakers of fruits and vegetables enjoying it. Again, family atmosphere, and that's what we're trying to make out there.

Fostering Community

Rabkin: The two obvious functions of farmers' markets are to provide people with locally grown, good food, and to give farmers an outlet to sell their produce.

Barr: Absolutely.

Rabkin: Are there any other functions of the market, other services that you see that the Monterey Bay Farmers Market is providing?

Barr: Well, again, a community. You know, it's so funny. Since I grew up in Santa Cruz, I see a lot of the people that I went to grade school with. I like to walk around and just listen to people, "Oh, I didn't know you come here!" It's a gathering place. And this is a big social time for farmers, who are on the farm, and this is their only outlet, on a Saturday morning. So they look forward to it. That's the sad thing about Nick and Velma [Pasqual], because they've been such a staple at the market all this time, and they're not there. He's ninety-four. You drive to the market. This was their outlet. This was how they connected to community, too. So, yes, it's a big social thing, too, I think, with the markets. All of them, actually.

Low-Income People and the Farmers' Market

Rabkin: You've mentioned distinct differences among the clientele at the different markets.

Barr: Oh, yes.

Rabkin: And the sort of geographic and socioeconomic brackets.

Barr: Right.

Rabkin: I wonder, in general, whether you see much of a market clientele from lower socioeconomic brackets, low-income people.

Barr: No. You know, we really don't. We used to have food stamps. Through the four markets, if I got ten a month, that was a big month. It's not like a Watsonville market, where the food stamps, WIC [Women, Infant and Children Nutrition program] office is so close, and so Nancy Gammons¹⁶ who is there at that particular market sees a lot of them. We don't really at the market. I don't— No, I'm kind of going through my head here. Not really. Which surprises me. It really does. I know that they're there, but I don't really— We don't really have a call for the EBT [electronic benefit transfer]— the new food stamps. The WIC— we see a few of them basically at MPC.

Rabkin: That's Women with Infants and Children.

Barr: Infants and Children, but they also have what they call a brown bag program, and this is for senior citizens that are on a fixed income, and we'll see more of that at the MPC market. But that's it. And those are just for fruits and vegetables. They can't buy meat; they can't buy eggs; they can't buy nuts—just fruits and vegetables with those WIC coupons. We'll see them at the end of May to about November. And that's kind of about it. We really don't— We don't.

Rabkin: Do you see it as a price issue, perhaps?

Barr: I don't think so. As a market manager and as an organization, we do not set prices for what the farmers set. That is not our job. You'll see all different price ranges in the same commodity—anywhere from peaches that are a dollar fifty to three seventy-five. And, again, it's the consumers' choice whether they buy them or not. Anybody new at the market, we tell them, "Walk around first. See what you see. Compare, and then go buy." Because a lot of people—again, impulse buying. "Oh, my gosh! Peaches." Grab 'em. Well, there're several peach vendors there, and, again, it's the farmer who chooses what to charge them.

Sometimes we're higher than grocery stores; sometimes we're not. A lot of grocery stores—again, because cherries are just coming in—they'll get those come-in-the-door buys—cherries \$1.99 a pound. And then, of course, all the rest of the fruits and vegetables are priced higher. You'll see, during the season, prices will go up and down.

Rabkin: So it's not accurate to say that prices are generally higher at the farmers' markets than in the grocery stores.

Barr: No. Because we've cut out that middle man, too. Though, it depends on the season. If we've had a cold snap, which we had in April, it's going to damage a few of the crops. Fuel prices, whatever. Again, year-to-year it's different.

Changes in Local Agriculture

Rabkin: Your relationships with market vendors give you a really unusual perspective on the local farming scene.

Barr: Yes.

Rabkin: Are there issues that you've seen come up over the years, or particular changes and shifts you've seen in the local farming scene?

Barr: I've seen, as far as, especially here in Watsonville, crop changes. I don't know if you knew this, but years and years and years ago, Watsonville was the apple capital of the world. How many apple trees do you see now? A lot of people are going into row crops, a lot of berries. And I see that, which is kind of sad. You see these old apple trees just gone. How many years did it take for these apple trees to get there? I think that's number one.

I think number two is that California imports still a lot of fruits and vegetables from other states. Okay, we're helping them out. But I think it's really kind of

damaging to— Let's say for avocados. Avocados from Mexico coming in. It really hurts our avocado growers here in California. Where are *our* avocados going? They're not going down to Mexico. I think that import-export is really something that we have to look at. That's why we got out of the flower business. We could not compete with Colombia and Israel for miniature carnations. We really couldn't. We ended up selling one of the farms, and that's when we moved to Mexico. We couldn't compete with that. So I see that. I kind of hear that around as far as farmers, some of the ones who do go wholesale—"Hey, my wholesaler didn't take my stuff today because he got it cheaper." I was, like, well, great. Good thing they have farmers' market.

Conventional, Organic, Sustainable

Rabkin: Do you try for a particular kind of balance between conventional and organic growers at the markets?

Barr: I think there's room for both, to be quite honest with you. Again, it's the consumer who is going to tell that farmer whether they're going to buy it or not. I have more "sustainable" (I'll use that word) farmers in all the markets, more so than conventional. There's a few curmudgeonly guys that are just— They've grown it that way all these years, and that's the only way they're going to grow it, and you can't change their mind. But, again, if the consumer has this rapport and this special relationship [with] this farmer, they're going to buy from him no matter what. A lot of the farmers are very straightforward with you as far as what they use, so you've just got to ask them. There's room for both.

Rabkin: Have you seen a change in the degree of interest among consumers in organic versus conventional?

Barr: Oh, yes, yes, I have. We'll just talk about Aptos. People go, "Well, who's organic and who's not?" Because now that the USDA owns that word, people are a little confused.

Rabkin: Yes.

Barr: And so I just go, "He's considered organic, even though he doesn't use the word, but he has organic practices." I just point, because I know them all. I say, "You're safe to buy from them." And that's fine. Part of my job is to educate consumers.

Marketing the Markets

Rabkin: How much of your job is marketing—marketing the markets?

Barr: Carmel—since it started today, there's a couple of weeks of marketing that needed to be done for that. Same thing with Hartnell. Since we moved the market, and we did a huge, big splash, got a lot of publicity, free publicity, and that was great. Aptos—I do little things here and there. We have a great website. We have the newsletter that goes out once a month. I just had a website meeting, and back in August we had 52,000 hits on that website. So you know people are really looking at that. A lot of visitors coming into California are coming into the area, are looking to see what's there. So the count is great. But [for] people who

do not have website access—we do a little bit of radio. We try not to do print ads. Who knows if people see them or not? So not very much. Everything's been pretty much set in motion. So it's good. And, again, word of mouth. That's a lot of it right there, word of mouth. "Hey, I had a great experience at the market. You should go." Or people bring people. So it's nice.

Rabkin: Yes.

Barr: So not really a lot, I would say.

Rabkin: Do you have help with the website?

Barr: Yes. Daniel [Saenz] is our webmaster. He put this together. We've had several meetings. We had a website before, and it was just hideous. It just didn't go anywhere. Now, Daniel is really up on top of this, and he does all the changes and whatever. And we upgrade it every three months, and new things coming in. Diana Kennedy is coming.¹⁷ Do you know who she is?

Rabkin: Yes.

Barr: Yes. Oh, my God! That was a real coup for us. Put little things out in the newsletter. The newsletter goes out to about 2,000 of our customers right now, and we're trying to up that a little bit, for all markets. I think people like to see that. They like to see the recipes and so forth, and they like to see what the

farmers—the profiles and things like that. They like to be connected to that farm. They really do. I think the website has helped us a lot.

Rabkin: We should maybe say that Diana Kennedy is a Mexican chef?

Barr: Yes, yes. She's kind of like the Julia Child of Mexican cooking. She has a couple of cookbooks out, and so she'll be signing those, and doing a little talk, and—yeah! Oh, gosh! Great! Love it.

Rabkin: Exciting.

Barr: Yes.

The Future of Farmers' Markets

Rabkin: Good. Well, I know you need to go, so let me ask you a couple of wrap-up questions.

Barr: Yes.

Rabkin: I wonder what you see as the most significant challenges to the health and success of farmers' markets.

Barr: I think what they need to do is not have so many in the area. I realize competition is good, but if you have one every single week on every single corner, you're going to get some yahoos in here who really don't know the ins

and out of farmers' markets, and it ruins it for the people that have been around for a long time. I don't mean that meanly. Again, like I say, competition is great. If you're going to open a farmers' market, do it right. That's all. Just do it right.

Rabkin: Do you feel the local area has more than it can bear right now?

Barr: Saturated? At this point, yes. We have Felton, we have Santa Cruz that has three. There's Aptos; there's Watsonville. That's plenty. We're from one end of the county to the next. It's great.

Rabkin: I hear a lot of people say that they just love the fact that pretty much on any day of the week they can get to a farmers' market.

Barr: Yes, exactly, except Mondays.

Rabkin: Except Mondays, when you recover—

Barr: Yes, everybody recovers. [Laughs.] Because the weekends are mostly the busiest time.

Rabkin: Yes. What are your visions, hopes and goals for the next ten years, twenty-five years of farmers' markets?

Barr: My vision. I would really like to have the market stay true as far as the integrity, as far as what farmers' markets are about. Because I do see these newer

ones popping up. And they're selling Tupperware and the tie-dyed T-shirts and so forth. That gives people the idea that these are what farmers' markets are about. No. Farmers' markets are about that small family farm. It's that connection to that earth that consumers can get through their four hours every week if that's how they go to the market.

I really would like to see the government stay out of farmers' markets and all the rules and regulations, because we've been rules-and-regulated to death. Let us do our job. You know, let us do our job. These farmers have been at it for a long time— Again, very lucky, we've had multi-family farms in there. And so they're keeping that tradition. It's hard, especially in these economic times, for these farmers to hold on. Let them do their thing. I hope that the government will kind of stay out of it. I really do.

Rabkin: Anything else you'd like to add?

Barr: No. It's been a pleasure. I really like this. Thank you for asking me to do this.

Rabkin: Is there anything that you love about the job that you didn't get to effuse about?

Barr: I love the people. I really do. I've gotten to know a lot of the customers by name. I think that what brings them back is that you know their name. You know that they're there every week, supporting you, supporting your farmers,

supporting your organization. It's been my dream job. It really has. I am going to be cutting back a little bit. Amanda is going to be on board. So you'll see me at the market, but I'll be doing a lot of the behind-the-scenes stuff too. It's been great, really great.

Rabkin: Thank you very much, Catherine.

Barr: All right. Thank you, Sarah.

¹See the oral history with Dick Peixoto in this series.

² See the oral history with Drew Goodman of Earthbound Farms in this series.

³ See the oral histories with Nick Pasqual and Jerry Thomas in this series.

⁴ See the oral histories with Jim Cochran of Swanton Berry Farm and Mark Lipson of Molino Creek Farm in this series.

⁵ “*Ceratitidis capitata*, the Mediterranean fruit fly, or medfly for short, is a species of fruit fly capable of wreaking extensive damage to a wide range of fruit crops. It is native to the Mediterranean area, but has spread invasively to many parts of the world, including Australasia and North and South America. In 1982, California Governor Jerry Brown, who had established a reputation as a strong environmentalist, was confronted with a serious medfly infestation in the San Francisco Bay Area. Under heavy pressure from the state's agricultural industry, which believed that billions of dollars worth of crops were threatened, Brown authorized a massive response to the infestation. Fleets of helicopters sprayed malathion at night, and the California National Guard set up highway checkpoints and collected many tons of local fruit; in the final stage of the campaign, entomologists released millions of sterile male medflies in an attempt to disrupt the insects' reproductive cycle.” <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Medfly>

Before the medfly crisis, the Farmers' Market had been located at Live Oak School. Since that location was within the quarantine zone it was moved, first to a church in Aptos and then to Cabrillo College. See the oral history with Robbie Jaffe for more on this early history of the Santa Cruz farmers' market.

⁶ See the excerpt of an oral history with Nick Pasqual republished in this series.

⁷ During the time this interview was conducted, Santa Cruz County and other counties in California were embroiled in a controversy about how to control the light brown apple moth (*Epiphyas postvittana*). For one perspective see <http://www.panna.org/resources/lbam>

⁸ The INS is now called ICE—Immigration and Customs Enforcement—Editor.

⁹ See the oral history with Nesh Dhillon in this series.

¹⁰ See <http://www.cafarmersmarkets.com/>

¹¹In March 2007 American consumers learned that certain pet foods were sickening and killing cats and dogs. The industrial chemical melamine had been used in vegetable proteins imported into the United States from China and used as ingredients in pet food. In 2008, several thousand babies in China became ill, having suffered acute kidney failure, with several fatalities, having been fed formula milk contaminated with the same industrial chemical, melamine.

¹² See the oral history with Ken Kimes and Sandra Ward in this series.

¹³ See the oral history with Jerry Thomas in this series.

¹⁴ See the oral history with Andy Griffin in this series.

¹⁵ See the excerpt of an oral history with Nick Pasqual which is reprinted as part of this series.

¹⁶ See the oral history in this series with Nancy Gammons, manager of the Watsonville Farmers' Market.

¹⁷ Diana Kennedy is an authority on Mexican cooking who is sometimes termed "the Julia Child of Mexican cooking."