

that got its start at CCFM.

Chico is known for its Thursday Night Market, too. Unlike the Saturday market, which run by its own organization composed of its vendors, the Downtown Chico Business Association puts on the Thursday event, which is as much a street fair as a market, with live entertainment along with food trucks and booths for myriad businesses and groups.

Balگوoyen, who grows produce at Riparia in southwest Chico, said he tried selling at Thursday Night Market a handful of times but did 10 percent of the business he does Saturday mornings. He, like Ariza, has developed a loyal clientele at CCFM, where growers predominate and the market has grown into a weekly community ritual and a defining part of Chico's identity.

"For the size of our community, ours does very well," Balگوoyen said. "It's pretty easy, Saturday morning at 9 o'clock in the summer, to think, 'Wow, everyone is shopping at the farmers market!' The truth is most people don't, they buy their produce and most other items in supermarkets—but Chico has the demographics so it can support a very vibrant market."

New challenge

CCFM had hoped to commemorate its milestone with a community event. Then coronavirus quashed the plans. Coon said he tells his board that it looks like they'll now

have a to wait for a 41st anniversary celebration.

Still, he's grateful they have reason to celebrate. Coon is in his 30th year raising livestock; he and his wife sell their meat via the Chico market. They chose CCFM at first because of proximity to their north Chico ranch, but as he got involved in the market's leadership, he gained fresh insight and appreciation.

"The farmers and the artisans and the craftspeople of the market really have a say in how its run—that's really unique," Coon said. "It gives the [vendors] who make up CCFM a real sense of ownership and involvement. They're passionate about their market."

CCFM has three staff members, including a manager who started just three weeks ago, Tanner Hansen. They and the board have adapted operations to meet public health guidelines, such as increasing the space between vendors and requiring face coverings. CCFM also set up additional hand-washing stations.

"COVID affected us in ways we never could have imagined," Coon said. "It's been unexpected and a day-by-day source of concern, for all of us in the community really. A lot of our customers who come to the farmers market are extraordinarily grateful because they feel unsafe in a closed building, so a certain number of people have come to me directly and said thank you—because without the farmers market, they wouldn't be doing a lot of shopping."

Indeed, on a recent Saturday morning, attendees and vendors interacted with characteristic chatter, wearing masks or face shields.

The social aspect is important. Coon said the farmers market may well be the only community event at the moment. For growers such as Ariza, the market long has been her social outlet—with fellow growers and with customers.

"I'm kind of a loner a bit," she said, "so that's kind of a nice aspect, the friendships there."

Balگوoyen said the market provides an opportunity for Chicoans to connect with the source of their food—learn about the people who grow it and how its grown.

"People who don't shop at farmers markets, they don't know what they're missing," he said. "People only know what they've experienced. They see some of these wonderful varieties of lettuce that don't make it to supermarkets, see all these varieties of heirlooms [tomatoes] ..."

"There's so much joy in buying your food from the farmer, getting to know about what he grows, what's in season, what the qualities are. Come to the market and meet your farmer."



Farmelot co-owner Bruce Balگوoyen, pictured at the Saturday market in 2011, has sold at the CCFM for 33 years. PHOTO COURTESY OF FARMELOT

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