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Rawhide's Farmers Market worth the trip

by **Karen Fernau** - Mar. 30, 2010 12:00 AM
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Chances are the carrots in a symphony of colors, the miniature beets and the microgreens sold at Valley farmers markets were harvested less than 24 hours earlier. In turn, a record number of veggie-savvy customers flock weekly to the makeshift markets to buy direct from the farmers.

According the U.S. Department of Agriculture, farmers markets in the U.S. have tripled in the past 15 years. There are almost 5,300 nationwide, with nearly 15 in the Valley.

In addition to the fresh produce, shoppers are drawn to the outdoor shopping experience and an ever-expanding selection of specialty foods, from salsas to freshly baked breads.

Every market is worth a trip, but these six are favorites.

Rawhide's Farmers Market

The Valley's newest market allows shoppers to get in touch with their inner cowpoke while buying fresh fruits and vegetables grown on the Gila River Reservation.

The brainchild of Rawhide chef Michael Cairns, it also offers produce grown in the garden at the make-believe Western town and by Gila farmers and backyard gardeners.

"We buy the produce from the farmers and sell it for them because the last place farmers want to be on Saturday is away from the garden," Cairns said.

Along with green beans, lemons and other produce, the market sells Native American specialty foods including mesquite flour and tepary beans. Shoppers can enjoy a freshly cooked breakfast of chorizo and egg burros, strawberry pancakes with mascarpone cream, vegetable frittata or steak and eggs. Or nosh on tamales or fry bread topped with red-chile beef. A handful of the Old West shops are open, including the candy store, general store and museum. 8 a.m.-noon Saturdays. 5700 W. North Loop, Gila River Reservation. 480-502-5600.

Macdonald Street Farmers Market

This first-year market goes hand-in-hand with a weekly arts-and-crafts fair in Mesa's historical downtown. The sidewalk market showcases beef, breads, jellies and jams crafted by locals. After grocery shopping, stroll through MACFest, Mesa's Made By Me Arts & Culture Festival's second season of arts, crafts and live music. Last year, nearly 200 artists sold their wares. The market is small, but expect it to grow as more art lovers discover fresh radishes and food lovers discover handmade crafts and paintings. 9:30 a.m.- 2 p.m. Saturdays. Main Street and Macdonald, Mesa.

Downtown Phoenix Public Market

All great cities have markets downtown, and Phoenix has joined the ranks. Along with offering free-range eggs and grass-fed beef, the market brings people together to shop and eat. "The market offers so much, but what people really seem to want are farmers at the farmers market," said Maya Dailey of Maya's Farm at South Mountain. "Everything else is just a bonus."

At this market, the bonus is a bounty of baked goods, homemade tamales, local salsas, corn-fed pork, pasta and pickles. Artisans also sell their works, from goat-milk soap to silver jewelry and watercolors. A bonus is the adjacent Phoenix Public Market Urban Grocery & Wine Bar, downtown's only grocery store, the first in 30 years to open its doors. Outdoor market: 8 a.m.-noon Saturdays and 4-8 p.m. Wednesdays. 721 N. Central Ave., Phoenix. phoenixpublic market.com.

Old Town Farmers Market

This 2-year-old Scottsdale market is relatively new but feels established. Farmer Bob McClendon anchors the market with rows of his freshly

picked vegetables. Mark Lewis of Scottsdale shops there weekly, because "you just can't get vegetables that taste this good anywhere else."

Specialty foods include freshly roasted coffee beans, grass-fed beef from Double Check Ranch in Winkelman, corn-fed pork from Nebraska, fruit butters, honey, cheeses, hummus, pasta, wines from Granite Creek Winery in Chino Valley, breads by master baker Ben Hershberger of the Phoenician resort and Scottsdale's Sweet Republic Ice Cream. The market also hosts cooking demonstrations by local chefs. 8:30 a.m.-1 p.m. Saturdays. Brown Road and First Street, Scottsdale.

Town & Country Market

This midtown market combines farm fresh with New Age. Enjoy a chair massage or load up on soaps and other body products with healing properties. From vegan-food specialists to salsa makers to jewelers, this midweek market offers a variety of local vendors. Bob McClendon, the go-to farmer for top Valley chefs, joins others in selling freshly harvested vegetables and fruits. 10 a.m.-2 p.m. Wednesdays. 2021 E. Camelback Road, Phoenix.

Vincent's Saturday Market

Bring your appetite and shopping bag to this 19-year-old European-style market. James Beard Award-winning chef and founder Vincent Guerithault makes and sells his crepes, French-style wood-fired pizzas, omelets, panini, olive oils, crusty breads, buttery croissants and other favorites. Enjoy a glass of wine and light meal with friends before shopping in the tightly organized market that wraps around his landmark Vincent on Camelback restaurant.

One of the Valley's smaller markets, Vincent's offers a limited but well-worth-the-trip inventory of goods, including the chef's signature dressings, imported cheeses, custom chocolates, local honey, homemade jams and housewares.

Robert Lay, aka "Mustard Man" at the market, has sold his homemade condiments since the market opened.

"It's just a nice, old-fashioned way to do business. I know many of the customers, and they know me and my mustards," he said. "Those who sell and buy here know that what you get is quality. And how many farmers markets are run by top chefs like ours?"

9 a.m.-1 p.m. Saturdays. 3930 E. Camelback Road, Phoenix. vincentsoncamelback.com.

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