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## Orinda, Moraga farmers markets thrive during pandemic

By Sora O'Doherty



Orinda Farmers Market Photos Sora O'Doherty

The year 2020 was when the Orinda farmers market went to year-round operation. When the change was introduced, no one expected 2020 to be the year of the great pandemic. But shoppers at both the Orinda and Moraga markets welcomed the opportunity to buy fresh, local foods directly from vendors in a safe, outdoor environment.

Both markets are now open all year, Orinda on Saturday mornings and Moraga on Sunday mornings. A visit shows that local shoppers are still actively attending both markets to buy both fresh fruits, vegetables, fish, meat and eggs, as well as prepared food of many varieties, including cheeses, jams, dried fruits, honey, popcorn, and restaurant stands with offerings ranging from crepes to tamales. Both markets also boast tempting bakeries, with breads and pastries on offer.

This year, in the face of the deadly COVID-19 pandemic, the Orinda market began offering a food box service, known as Good to Go Boxes. These pre-ordered boxes include a seasonal mix of produce, to include vegetables and fruit. All products are from Orinda Farmers Market growers.

In addition, to the pre-selected boxes, shoppers can now select the foods they wish to purchase with a smartphone app called Tap4Markets. Orders must be placed by Thursday for the weekend markets, and the producers get paid directly by virtual checkout. All orders are then available for contactless curbside pickup between 10 and 11 a.m. in front of the Orinda Community Center. There is a nominal service fee per order. Amaya DeShasier has been working for the Orinda farmers market since the box program started, about six months ago. She says that it has been quite successful and that it makes money for the farmers, which is so important during the pandemic.

Omar Sidiq has also been at the Orinda market for about six months. He works at Donna's Tamales, a business from Martinez selling tamales, burritos, salsa and chips. He said that business continues to be pretty good at the Orinda market. The Upper Crust Baking Company comes down from Davis. Employee Luara Wilson says that business is good for the bakery, which has been at the Orinda market for three years. La Crepe a Moi is a Berkeley restaurant that serves both the Orinda and the Moraga market, and does great business at both serving ready-to-eat crepes, both savory and sweet.

Few vendors have dropped out of the markets, but there are a couple of new ones. In Orinda, it is the first year for Pete's Gold Honey. Beekeepers Peter and Jill Kemel run the family business, with hives in Concord and San Ramon. The two beekeepers have three children, whom they are teaching the art of beekeeping. They sell their all-wildflower honey at the farmers markets in Orinda and also Walnut Creek. Another husband-and-wife team, Katia Berberi and Steve Drapeau, started selling Anne's Toum, their Lebanese Garlic Sauce, at the Moraga market recently, and have been selling out each week. The company is named after Katia's mom, who passed away suddenly last year, and uses her recipe which she learned from Katia's father's Lebanese family. One little girl comes each week, crying, "Dip, dip!" Her father says that she eats the garlic sauce like yogurt.

Both markets have vendors of fresh seafood, Billingsgate Four Star Seafood in Orinda says that business is brisk, and From the Sea to You in Moraga. Danny Guzman, the Moraga fish vendor, says that they are blessed to be busier than before the pandemic. Their fish comes from Half Moon Bay and Santa Cruz, with some from Alaska and Hawaii as well.

Andrew Artadi of Great Valley Poultry says that although business is slower than usual, people keep coming steadily. Maria Ramos, and employee of J&J Farms, said that before COVID they did more markets. All of the farmers markets at Kaiser Hospitals have been closed, and even in Moraga she said that they cannot have more than 10 shoppers in their space at one time. But the customers are really good she added, very respectful. J&J also runs a farm stand in Hughson, California.

Anjelica Colliard, the market manager in Moraga, says that the market is thriving as a safe way for people to get food and be in their community. Both the customers and vendors are thankful for the market, she added. Only a few of the older vendors have left, and some younger vendors have joined the market, according to Colliard.

The Orinda farmers market is open on Saturdays from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. on Orinda Way in front of the Orinda Community Park. The Moraga farmers market is open on Sundays from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. in the parking lot at the corner of Moraga Way and Moraga Road.



Moraga Farmers Market



Pre-ordered boxes ready for pickup at the Orinda Farmers Market

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[back](#)

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