

I love living where there are seasons that help set patterns for our lives. As summer nears, I think of a pattern my girls and I formed last year. On languid Saturday mornings, we would stroll down to the local farmer's market in Choteau and enjoy looking at the booths and purchasing produce. My mouth would water, heading back home with our fresh vegetables and fruits, as I knew how scrumptious and nutritious the midday meal would be. I was also fortunate to happen upon some roadside stands in Dutton and other areas of our county. For areas of the county that do not have farmer's markets, I have suggested to 4-H members that organizing a farmer's market in their communities would be a great leadership opportunity. I guess I just have a soft spot for farmer's markets and feel they can be a worthy addition to any community.

Quite a variety of items could be found in Choteau at the fledgling farmer's market started the summer of 2007 by organizers Corlene Martin and Corrine Rose. In speaking with the organizers, I learned about the rules and regulations of farmer's markets and how any community in our county could go about establishing a farmer's market.

Originally farmer's markets were a common way for farm families to sell a value-added product from the roadside near their farmstead. This background is the reason that you can find many items for sale at farmer's markets that would otherwise be regulated differently. For instance, I would be able to sell jams and jellies canned in my home (a value-added agricultural product) at a farmer's market, but I would not be able to sell the same jams and jellies made in my home kitchen at a store front. In order to sell jams and jellies at a store, I would need to produce the preserves in an approved, licensed kitchen. As a seller at a farmer's market, I could bake cookies in my home; however, to sell the same cookies through a store, I would need to produce them in a licensed kitchen and work with the county sanitarian on proper licensing. Even though the farmer's markets are more loosely regulated, I encourage all vendors to use great caution and the latest food safety methods. Anyone considering becoming a vendor at a farmer's market this summer can contact either MSU Teton County Extension for food safety information and training or Corrine Rose, Teton County Sanitarian.

While each farmer's market can establish rules, the State of Montana has codes that govern products sold at farmer's markets. Some of those notable rules include: 1. A license is not required of a gardener, farm owner, or farm operator who sells raw and unprocessed farm products at a farmer's market, 2. A license is not required of a person selling baked goods or preserves at a farmer's market (Baked goods include bread, cakes, candies, cookies, pastries and pies that are not potentially hazardous – cream/custard pies would not be permitted. Preserves mean processed fruit or berry jams, jellies, compotes, fruit butters, marmalades, chutneys, fruit aspics, fruit syrups or similar products that have a pH of 4.6 below and that are aseptically processed, packaged and sealed.) 3. A farmer's market that is authorized by a municipal or county authority shall keep registration records of all individuals/organizations selling baked goods or preserves.

In addition to food, there are certain regulations regarding vendors selling nursery plants. The definition for nursery plants is fairly broad and includes pretty much everything, except for cut flowers. More information particular to plants at farmer's markets can be found at the website <http://agr.mt.gov/crops/nursery.asp>. Any business/individual, where nursery stock is grown or offered for sale (including farmer's

markets), is required to have a nursery license. Nursery licenses are renewed yearly. The main reason for this regulation is pest control.

The Rocky Mountain Front Farmer's Market in Choteau has a list of established rules that can be obtained from Corrine Rose or Corlene Martin. There is a \$5 cost for each vendor or a \$10 cost for truck space. The Rocky Mountain Front Farmer's Market will start this year on June 21 and remain in operation until September 6.

On one of the last weekends of the market last year, my mother came to visit and mentioned that my cousin Torrie Wolery, who is graduating from high school this year, was a vendor at the farmer's market in Chester. Torrie and her mother, Nancy, are notably creative. I listened as Mom described their booth and I could only imagine how cleverly they designed it. I called Torrie to learn more about what she did for the farmer's market and why. As a sixteen year old, Torrie was interested in touring Europe with a youth group. At one of the meetings for the touring group, Torrie inquired how other teens paid for their trips. They reported that mostly their parents just paid for the trip. "That was not an option for me," Torrie said. She knew that she had to come up with a plan to earn most of the money herself. With jobs somewhat limited for a teenager living in Inverness, Montana, Torrie and Nancy came up with the idea of having a booth at the farmer's market.

Torrie called her business "Red Wagon Bakery" and routinely baked for 6-12 hours per week to keep her booth well-stocked. She sold homemade bread for \$4 per loaf, pies for \$10 each and sour cream twists for \$3. She has learned to make mostly peach pies and triple-berry pies and reported that cherry pies were too costly to be very profitable, unless you really get a good deal on cherries. She also bakes up Danish pastries and a sticky bun that is a customer favorite.

Torrie decorates her table with burlap, metal buckets, bandanas, wheat and rope. Her bread loaves all go in a red wagon beside her booth. She says her mom makes "cute, little tags" for all the items. I am quite certain that the "Red Wagon Bakery" at the farmer's market is quite clever.

Torrie said she makes about \$200 per week at the market. Not bad for a bootstrapping business by a teenager. She did mention that her parents helped with some of the supply costs. She grossed nearly \$3,000 her first summer and used it to go on her European tour. While the tour was likely educational, I am as impressed with the education and skills Torrie achieved by running her own business and becoming a favorite at her local farmer's market. Torrie was able to learn her customer base and predict purchases and bake accordingly. One faithful customer bought two loaves of bread every week, so Torrie had those ready and waiting for him. Speaking of waiting, she says that many of her customers were anxiously awaiting her peach pies.

Not being a pie fan, I find myself anxiously awaiting Skip Hoyt's vine-ripened tomatoes at the Rocky Mountain Front farmer's market this summer. Whether as a vendor or a customer, I hope you enjoy the season's bounty at a farmer's market near you.