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Pickens residents get pick of the crop of farmers markets

Vendors say interest in locally grown food has created more sales venues

By Julie Howle
STAFF WRITER
jhowle@greenvillenews.com

EASLEY — Friday, Clemson will become the latest in a growing list of cities and towns in Pickens County promoting farmers markets, and local vendors couldn't be happier.

For some, the expanded interest in farmers markets is almost a perfect storm, a combination of growing interest in eating healthy foods and the slow economy.

"There are a lot more people who are interested in their food, more interested in where it comes from and how it's grown," said Daniel Anthony, owner of C&D Farms in Anderson.

Anthony said he will have a booth Friday when Clemson's market opens, and he plans to sell there throughout the summer.

Lisa Garrett, manager of Easley's farmers market, said such enterprises are "good for our economy. It draws people downtown. It shows that we are interested in helping our local farming community and supporting our local farms."

Garrett said Easley is taking steps to draw even more people to its downtown market. Last weekend, master gardeners talked about composting and set up a table where children were able to plant seeds and take them home.

She said they hope to have master gardeners at the market the second Saturday of each month.

On May 22, Square Root, a band out of Greenville, will be playing at the Easley market, Garrett said.

"We'd like to try once a month to have live entertainment," she said.

Meanwhile, Clemson's market will be open Fridays from 4 p.m. to 8 p.m. in the Crosspoint Church parking lot at 1019 Tiger Blvd., according to Arzu Yilmaz, city planner for Clemson.

That market will be open every Friday through Oct. 1 and will offer seasonal produce, handmade craft items and plants.

Yilmaz said they expect about 10 vendors until June.

She said that number will increase as the season progresses and farmers have more products to sell.

Anthony, who also has had booths at farmers markets in Anderson and Pendleton, said selling at farmers markets probably makes up 50 percent of his income.

"If you're looking for fresh food, the farmers markets are the best place to find it unless you can find a farmer that's selling from their home," Anthony said.

Easley officials are also trying to encourage Easley businesses to buy into the Saturday market. Garrett said she is working to get local chefs and restaurant owners to hold cooking demonstrations with items from the farmers market.

A restaurant week is also tentatively set for July 11-17, where locally owned restaurants will be encouraged to feature a menu item that is made using products bought from the farmers market or other local farmers.

Sam Norris, owner of Uncle Sam's Antiques in downtown Easley, said the farmers market brings people downtown and customers through his doors.

"When they leave there (the farmers market) they usually walk in my place and look around," he said. "It certainly is going to be a benefit to all of us down here just by virtue of the fact that it brings people down here on the weekend."

YOU CAN GO

For more information about the Easley market, go to www.easleyfarmersmarket.com or call Lisa Garrett at City Hall at 855-7900.

For more information about the Clemson market, go to www.clemsonfarmersmarket.org or call 653-2050.



JOHN C. STEVENSON / Staff

Shoppers enjoy the bounty of the Saturday farmers market in downtown **Easley. On Friday**, another venue for local goods enters the scene, as the city of Clemson opens its first market.