

# Vendors, buyers both eager for Farm Market

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Saturday's wet weather didn't dampen the enthusiasm for the Downtown Beloit Association's (DBA) Farmers Market Pre-Sale on Saturday.

Vendors rounded up whatever plants and products they could find to sell, and customers braved the raindrops to enjoy what has become a hallmark of spring in Beloit.

Vendor Kathy Baumann said she sold out of asparagus right away, especially because of the low amount available due to the recent wet and cold weather. However she and her husband had scrounged around the yard digging up tiger lilies, irises and strawberry plants to sell to customers to tide them over.

"We needed something on the table," she said.

Baumann expects next week's warm temperatures and rain will help move the asparagus and other crops along so more produce will be ready soon.

Crystal Buhmeyer, program coordinator for the DBA, said 33 vendors were at the pre-sale, which started Saturday and will run each Saturday through May 25. The pre-sale includes jewelry, soaps, cheese, plants and crafts along with early produce such as asparagus.

Buhmeyer said the turnout of vendors was slightly lower than usual due to the weather, but the overall foot traffic to the event was relatively high.

Mike Murphy and his son, Ryan McGuire, said they were just driving around when they spotted the pre-sale. Ryan, who was in Beloit for the weekend from Chicago, wanted to see downtown Beloit and his dad, Mike, wanted to get an early Mother's Day present for his wife, Cathy, after he spotted some flowers.

"They are so colorful and bright," he said.

Murphy estimated spending at least \$84 on the flowers, but said his wife is worth it.

Murphy joked his favorite thing about the Farmer's Market and pre-sale is the interesting dogs he sees as well as his friends.

Vendor Kathy Baumann agreed.

"It's so fun to see customers and friends. Some just come down to say 'hi,'" Baumann said.

Jack Schandalmeier was busy selling his red strawberry popcorn that he grows with the help of his antique farm equipment. Although he said the rain chased some of his customers away, he was able to establish some new ones on Saturday.

Despite the rain Schandalmeier predicts a good growing season, noting he planted his popcorn on Wednesday. After tilling the soil to dry it out he said the field was in perfect condition. He advised his customers to buy up the popcorn soon, as he predicts he will run out by July.

Wade Zimmerman and his mother, Robin Cook, of Robins Roost Organic Gardens, were back at the sale this year to tout some of their new offerings such as farm fresh eggs. In addition to their plants for sale and produce to come, they will be selling “Worm tea” made from their compost pile which includes red worms. The residual moisture, or red tea, is collected for sale.

Zimmerman said the all-natural fertilizer is the way of the future. It won’t burn plants and is anti-parasitic. With an aroma like a rainy forest, he predicts the product will be big this year.

The main Farmers Market starts June 1, the weekend after the final pre-sale. Buhmeyer said about 90 vendors set up displays during the main market sale, which runs through October.

In the past, the pre-sale was held in the parking lot next to the Gantry, but Buhmeyer said too many vendors have signed up and the 300 block of State Street was home to the pre-sale for the first time on Saturday.

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