

## The Beet

By Mary Niedenfuer

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*“A farmer's market is worth more than everything I've written.” –Wendell Berry*

The history of farmers markets dates back millennia. Even in early Mesopotamia, farmers sold their produce in local villages, often making a vital economic impact on the region. In the late 1800s, according to Stephanie March in her article “Food Market Frenzy,” demand was so high for fresh produce in Minneapolis that farmers’ goods often sold “under the table” before the market even officially opened. “By 1881, St. Paul had built a massive block-long great hall for its public market,” writes March. Minneapolis handled so much fruit and vegetables every season that a permanent structure was built in the 1930s. At the height of its popularity, the marketplace housed more than four hundred vendors.

Farmers markets in the U.S. enjoyed popularity until after World War II when the food industry began mass-marketing convenience foods. Refrigerated trucks hauled in exotic fruits such as avocados from California and oranges from Florida. The advent of supermarkets signaled the end for many farmers markets. As more women entered the workforce, the need for frozen, packaged foods rose, or so the advertisers convinced us.

The demand for fresh produce began increasing again in the 1980s. The popularity of farmers markets continues to grow: according to the 2004 National Farmers Market Directory, the number of markets in the U.S. has doubled in the past decade to over 3,800. Is it any wonder, when one can purchase peas, raspberries and tomatoes picked only hours earlier? We are re-learning the art of cooking with fresh ingredients and we’re enjoying better health for it. Connecting with those who grow our food is so elemental that we are reviving a tradition and interdependence with the earth that dates back millennia.

See you at the market, but here’s a tip: shop first, visit *afterward!*

New items at the St. Joseph Farmers Market this week are carrots, garlic, cauliflower, broccoli, beans, and sweet onions. Current items include raspberries, new potatoes, cabbage, kohlrabi, summer squash, snap peas, turnips, beets, snow peas, hydroponic tomatoes, cucumbers, eggs, yak meat, artisan breads, mushrooms, honey, maple syrup, jams, plants, cut flowers, herbal lotions and soaps, fresh and dried herbs.

Here’s a recipe for Summer Squash Casserole from market grower, Terri Emmerich of Emmerichs' Produce and Pumpkins in Albany.

5 cups sliced squash – yellow, light and dark green mixed  
½ cup sliced sweet onion  
2 cloves garlic, minced  
8 oz. mushrooms, sliced  
4 Tbsp butter, divided  
1 cup sour cream

¼ cup chopped fresh parsley  
8 oz. shredded cheese, farmer or mozzarella  
¼ tsp paprika  
Salt and pepper to taste  
2-3 slices cubed bread

Combine sour cream, parsley, cheese and seasonings. Sauté squash, onion, garlic and mushrooms in 2 tablespoons of butter until tender-crisp. Fold into sour cream mixture. Turn into greased, shallow casserole dish. Toss bread cubes in remaining melted butter until coated. Sprinkle over top of casserole. Bake at 375 for 20 minutes.