

SARAH BLACKLIN
Market Manager, Carrboro Farmers' Market – Carrboro, NC

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Interviewer: Ashley Rose Young
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Transcription: Shelley Chance, ProDocs
Project: Carrboro Farmers' Market

[Begin Sarah Blacklin Interview]

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Ashley Young: This is Ashley Young with the Southern Foodways Alliance. Today is Thursday, August 18, 2011, and I’m interviewing Sarah Blacklin, the current director of the Carrboro Farmers’ Market for the Carrboro Farmers’ Market Oral History Project.

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We are currently in Carrboro, North Carolina. Sarah, would you please introduce yourself?

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Sarah Blacklin: Hi. I’m Sarah Blacklin and I manage the Carrboro Farmers’ Market.

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AY: And for our records, what was your date of birth?

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SB: May 23, 1983.

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AY: Awesome. So now we’re going to start off with some general information about your life just so we can build a context for this interview. And so I wanted to start off with where did you grow up?

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SB: I grew up right here in Carrboro, North Carolina [*Laughs*]. I--well when I was a little kid actually I lived in Virginia. And we moved around a lot when I was real little, but middle school, high school, college--and then later I did college in both Asheville and at UNC. I've been here in Carrboro, North Carolina.

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AY: Excellent. How was food a part of your--of your life growing up?

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SB: Oh well we--it was definitely--I did not grow up on a farm. It was--it was--it was a team effort. It was quick. We lived with my mom, my sister and I, so a lot of it was--was taken out--I mean, it was helping her cook dinner when she got home from work. So a lot of it was chicken, salad, and applesauce and frequently the applesauce would kind of--I mean I love my mom [*Laughs*] but the applesauce would bleed into the salad and the chicken, and it was a bagged salad. We cut open a bag of like *Fresh Express* or whatever and then put a chicken in the oven. And then that would last for, you know, the week or whatever.

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And then we'd have another meal we'd go to which was fettuccini, and it was basically just put the noodles in the water and have the water on before mom gets home and then put the--. So we definitely were not in any kind of eat local; it was fast and, you know, get it done, cover the food groups, and help mom and, you know, and then clean up afterwards. And--and the rule was mom wouldn't cook if the kitchen wasn't cleaned by the time she got home. So we always had to make sure the dishwasher was loaded and then she would cook, and then we'd do the cleaning.

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AY: Would you tell me about how you became interested in food and food as a career?

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SB: I fell into it actually. That's a good question. I think everything I've ever done has never been really premeditated; it's just been this kind of path that meanders and--and builds. Let's see. I--a friend of mine had actually--I had wanted to work for a farm and a friend of mine had heard about Ken Dawson's farm, Maple Spring Garden Farm, and she knew they were hiring. And I was twenty years old and I never had a driver's license. And I didn't need one and it cost too much to have a car, so I never drove. And I didn't know how I would get out there for the interview. So [*Laughs*] I basically had a friend drop me off in Cedar Grove. I interviewed with Ken. I later got the position, learned how to drive in all of two months before I was hired. He didn't exactly know I didn't know how to drive. I just told him I will have a car by the time you hire me. [*Laughs*]

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So I had to learn how to drive, buy myself a used car, and then I drove out to Cedar Grove petrifyingly with like this person I carpooled with, who was like totally scared and--and worked for Ken. I actually crashed his truck into the barn. The first week I like side-swiped--I was driving one of those big Ryder U-Haul trucks and I took out the gutter in--in the barn because I was still learning how to drive.

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So I basically was looking to get some hands-on experience. I always liked to work outside. We--we had some little tomato plants and stuff growing up--not much. I really just felt

disconnected from it and wanted to connect more. So I started by working for farmers and I was twenty and yeah; worked for Ken for four years. And then got really interested in foodways and lived in Eastern North Carolina for a small bit and worked--was really interested in fisheries, sustainable fisheries out there. And so I worked with them, put some energies into supporting our North Carolina fishermen and then came back here and ended up working for Ken one more year and managing the Market after that.

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AY: And can you name some of the fisheries that you were interested in--in Eastern Carolina?

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SB: Well it was really--I came--I came to it from a cultural studies background, so I had been out there studying wetland research and--and things like that during my undergraduate years and I met some folks that were focusing on essentially culture place-based history of--of the Outer Banks and Manteo and Ocracoke and ended up working for Alton Ballance who is author of a book *Okracokers* and when I worked out there I met some local fishermen. A lot of the old-timers would take me on their skiffs in the afternoon. A good friend of mine would do that quite regularly and--and teach me about different types of fishing techniques, cast net fishing, including gill net fishing, actually, pound net fishing, and at the time they were really trying to restore the local fish house there in Ocracoke. So there was a lot of efforts that they were doing to really get that up and running. And I--I was kind of just working with them and trying to--I was interested in all of that, so trying to support what they were doing and let people know about local fisheries in the Piedmont primarily.

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AY: So after you came back to Carrboro and you said you--this is after you were in Eastern North Carolina, you worked for Ken Dawson for one more year. How did you fall into coming to work for the Carrboro Farmers' Market?

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SB: Hmm. I was in his greenhouse [*Laughs*] and Ken has an adjoining property right next to Leah Cook with Wild Hare Farm and literally you could sneeze and you can hear the sneeze from the other property line. And I was in his greenhouse in the fall; we had just dug up tuberose. And if you know tuberose--are like these tuber bulb kind of things, and they divide every year and you have to separate them out and dry them in the greenhouse so you can save them for the next year.

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So I was--we had them all laid out in the greenhouse and I was packing them up after they had been drying and, you know, loading them up all--I think it was like all day we were doing tuberose. And Leah walked across the property line and said, "You know, have you thought about applying for this position?" I hadn't even seen it was posted. I had managed a bed and breakfast in Ocracoke and I had managed a small little business in town in my undergrad years, so I had a little bit of management experience. And I was working at a little nursery in Hillsboro at the time--part-time as well.

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And I thought no, you know, I don't know. And I went in and had lunch with Ken and we talked about it. And I decided to apply, so it was actually--Leah had put the bug in my ear.

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AY: And how long have you been working for the CFM, the Carrboro Farmers' Market now?

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SB: This is my fourth year managing the Market; and how long have I been working with the Market, if you add the time I was working for Ken--since I was twenty--and I took one year off, so seven years of working. I used to sell on Saturdays at the Market. Every Saturday just about--not every Saturday but a lot of Saturdays I would--I would sell because I lived in Carrboro so it was convenient for me to just wake up and get on my bike and--and meet him early in the morning.

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So I used to sell all the time, but when you sell it's very much different than--than managing of course. And also you don't know the whole membership. It's--it's a busy Saturday so you know who is across the aisle from you, who is directly to your right and who is directly to your left. Unless you take a lap you really don't see all the faces, so I felt very comfy with our neighbors. But I still didn't know all the--there's a lot of new faces that I had to learn and--and folks I met when I became the manager.

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AY: Who were your neighbors back then when you were working the stall?

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SB: Gary Murray and Sunset Farm. [Interviewer's note: Sunset Farms]. And then, at the time, now she's not there anymore, Miss Ruth was across the way, Ruth Sanford. Miss Ruth used to

make pies. She'd make like the mini-pie, sweet potato pies and then, you know, like various pies. She'd do, you know, god--pecan pies and all sorts of things. And at the end of market [*Laughs*] Ken would usually have me send over some produce, whatever we had to give in exchange for some mini-pies. And so [*Laughs*] that was like lunch was--I mean it was bad that we ate that many mini-pies. But Miss Ruth would then give us a bunch of mini-pies. And you're hungry at the end of the day so we'd eat mini-pies and usually give Miss Ruth some produce. And then right next to Miss Ruth is the Zacharys across, directly across the way from Ken as well. And Hazeline and Dalton, Mr. and Ms. Zachary and they are just the nicest folks, and Ken always said the nicest things about them as well. And I remember their granddaughter would come and sell so I'd always see--you know, she was about my age and she'd be across the way. So I--I knew the Zacharys. And then directly to our left was Will Endres and he has Will's Wild Herbs and he would burn incense and do all sorts of things, so you--you knew, you know--he had like the total eclectic gathering of stuff at his stand right next to you. So I always knew--I always knew Will.

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And I knew Alex and Betsy and some folks on that side as well but not very well [Interviewer's note: Alex and Betsy Hitt]. I just, you know--you glance. You kind of see your shelter but you don't really know much beyond your immediate neighbors I guess, or I didn't--I didn't as--as a farm hand because I wasn't the farmer, so--.

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AY: Did you form relationships with the customers in those early years and can you speak about that a little bit?

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SB: Oh yeah, definitely. I mean you definitely do. I mean it's just--well I think also growing up around here, you know, there was some relationships that I had already had. And--and Ken was-- Ken was very, you know--he let us know that it was work time and--and you could chat with folks. You know, that's part of the--that's part of the game is--and--and process and enjoyment of the whole morning is catching up with folks, too, but you also have to make sure you're paying attention and restocking and not standing idle if there are things to do.

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So we would definitely catch up with folks. A lot of customers that I would have to do some behind the scenes research to find out what their names are because you knew their faces so well and they knew you and they'd ask about you and they'd--. I mean I--I would know about their grandbabies or I would know about their kids. **[Laughs]** I had one person call me Aunt Sarah and I--I knew them so well but I--you know, you get one morning to catch their name and then if you don't ask them after that you've got to really work on it. **[Laughs]** And I also knew exactly, you know--I know this one woman would just--only liked purple campanula bell flowers and so we'd always set those aside and, you know--. You start to get into what people want and you--you know what their styles are and you know if they--they want to weigh it themselves or if they prefer you to do all that.

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And part of it too is a lot of mental math. And so you would--you know, you'd be adding a lot of things in your head really quickly and there's always those--those customers that were faster than you, so I was--you know, I remember them, too because they'd always be able to have the entire total ready like two seconds before I had figured it out. But no, I loved it. I mean the customer part is the fun part, a lot of it. Yeah.

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AY: I think this table is squeaking-- We're dealing with some squeaking noises. No worries, we'll just keep going. We'll just try not to bump the table as much. Okay, so as manager-- managing the Farmers' Market what does a typical Wednesday or Saturday look like for you? What are your duties managing the Market?

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SB: A typical Wednesday--I get to Market around one o'clock and I basically--it involves--I put up signs around town and I have to put up my no car wash parking signs because we really like the guy across the street who owns the car wash and he does not like it if we have customers park in his--his lot, so we always want to make sure to get those up. And when I do my--my block, I walk around the block, I usually stop and say hi to Cliff if I see him at Cliff's Meat Market. He--he keeps me up to speed on what's happening. And actually last week he welded a couple signs for me because they were not in good shape, so he's--he's always scheming on how to make things easier and he's just one of the nicest folks.

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So I put the signs up around town. So some of it's a lot of physical basic hauling and schlepping stuff out. I put shade cloths up on Wednesday, so I load my truck up about two full times and I'm really happy I have a truck. It would be--it would take longer if you had to push this by hand on a dolly. So I load up shade cloths so our afternoon farmers when the sun sets their--their greens don't wilt because in the morning we never have to worry about that on a Saturday. And in the afternoon that was one big issue for--for farmers.

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I also create the map so every--we knew where it's, you know--it's essentially like hosting. You know exactly who is going to--who are your floaters, where you put them, and everyone's preferences. I mean I usually know if they prefer a corner spot, if they prefer a shaded spot, if they have--you know, who--who is their favorite neighbor because they want to catch up with them. And if I--if I can accommodate those and still be within our rules I do try to. I unlock the electricity box. I get all that kind of thing set up. I block out parking spaces for our big trucks that otherwise can't pull through. And then we have essentially setting up our stand which is selling our tee-shirts and all that kind of good stuff. I--I bring out an ATM machine and I get that all set up. And--and then it's a lot of talking with farmers, collecting from farmers. If we have events then that's a whole other setup, making sure our folks know about that, signs are out, and that's basically it.

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So the doing the onsite is the kind of the--it's like the rewarding part. It's the fun part. It's when all the customers come up. And it's a lot of chat--lot of talk. A lot of customers come and it's--it's the time that you get to catch up with people, it's the time our farmers catch up with people, so you'll frequently see me having many meetings with our farmers all the time.

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Yesterday, Alex had a bushel basket turned over and he was sitting down and I was sitting down in the middle of the market and we were having like a little pow-wow and so yeah, it's a lot of--it's a lot of catch up, a lot of talk. I also--we set up our food stamp machine. We usually have volunteers come and want to make sure that--that works fine. I stamp WIC and our food access program certificates, so it's kind of a combination between programming, setting up, and--and social, which is a big part of it. And we want it to be--a big part is our social aspect of things. Yeah.

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AY: Do you have many customers using the WIC program with the food stamps?

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SB: Yeah, we do. Yeah, we sure do. We have a good amount. We still would love to see--see more but it's--it's been a good turnout. I mean we--we really like that program because it's convenient. I mean they're basically checks and farmers can deposit them like regular checks so it doesn't take a lot of overhead time in terms of our time and staffing, which is really, really, really convenient.

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So yeah, we do see a decent amount. We'd like to have more signage translated into Spanish and English so that it's a little bit more easy to use because we have a lot of bilingual speakers that come to market. But it does--our--our farmers are very comfortable with that program, so over the years they really know it quite well. It's not--there's no transition period with it or that they need to do to make sure--I mean they--they're very comfortable with it, so it's an easy one.

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EBT Food Stamps is great. We really like the program, but it takes more time. It's still--and almost any market will tell you that in the country right now is trying to bring a sustainable method into EBT Food Stamps. We see a lot of folks coming and using the program, but it does take more energy because you have to staff someone. The way it works is they swipe their card and then they use tokens that are spent at various markets. Then someone has to collect the

tokens, turn them into our third party company and then get that reimbursed. So it's much more of a process.

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So but it's still good. It's still really positive. And yeah, we really like our ATM machine because that has a fee that then helps pay for our food stamps. So we're--we're working on it; it's getting to be pretty smooth now. It's taken a little bit of time. *[Laughs]*

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AY: So that fee of the ATM goes right back to the Market?

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SB: Yeah, there's a \$2.00--it's \$2.25. Two dollars--there's a twenty-five cent charge that we then have to pay but yeah, \$2.25 goes to the Market. And then we use that for our--we--so far we're still paying off the cost of the machine but we will be using that to support our EBT program, so we can actually have it sustaining and self-run. So it's worked--so far it's working quite well, so we're pleased.

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AY: Great. I was also interested in learning a bit more about how farmers or vendors are chosen or apply to be part of the Carrboro Farmers' Market.

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SB: Yeah, I just had a phone meeting with someone this morning for a while. We have a lot of folks that call that are interested in becoming part of the Market. It's--it's a full process. We

really do that process all during the month of December and January. So it's a once--one time--sorry; throughout the month of January is when we accept applications. And then in December we assess our map. I'm trying to think of how to make that as--so we look at who has made their total number of selling weeks that year. So if you--the way we have it, if you make seventeen weeks or more you get a permanent space. If you don't make seventeen weeks or more then you lose your space or you never get a space, so if there are folks that didn't make their space and we have some free spaces at the Market that we can fill, and then within that we have percentages. So to keep it primarily a farmers' market, we have only--let's see it's eighteen percent craft and prepared food. We cannot allow more than eighteen percent of crafters and food artisans combined, meaning it's always going to be primarily farmer. So we always--we assess our percentages; we see how many prepared food folks and craft folks, if any, can be accepted and how many farmers.

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That's for both markets. We also look at the number of spaces period we have at the Market. Sometimes we're just full. And then even when we're full there's this other thing that our market does which is how much can Sarah handle? So we do accept more people than the map shows and then I call those my floaters. So most of the time not--100-percent of the farmers are not at market every single Saturday. So I have found I can usually accept eight extra people that I can float in as seasons change even though they will--our map is full.

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So that's sort of the process and then we go through a very long meeting in February when we review it. We try and make it fun. I bring samples of the food products. We--we hunker down until eleven o'clock and we just knock them out. We score them and it's a long night. And we try and keep in good spirits and it's--it's usually pretty fun. The food helps.

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AY: I wanted to know what were your--what were some of the challenges that you faced when you originally took on the position of managing the Market? How was that transition for you?

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SB: Hmm. That's a good question. That was--it was a bit overwhelming when I first took it on. It was in January and Sheila was kind of enough to do training but she had to open up the deli [Interviewer's note: Sheila Neal of Neal's Deli in Carrboro, North Carolina]. So I had--I had some training from Sheila but at that time I was running three markets. There was a Thursday Southern Village Market, a Wednesday market, and a Saturday market. And I had never even been to the Southern Village Market or knew anything about that one. And that didn't start until May. So when I just showed up at that market I had no idea what I was supposed to do because I--my training was like for two weeks in January. So I really had to just figure it out.

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I was given--I had a meeting with Alex and Leah and a couple of other folks and I had a book that I read that I was looking at, *The New Farmers Market* book and basically you just kind of had to learn as--as you go [Interviewer's note: Alex Hitt and Leah Cook]. One of the challenges was trying to figure out where to extend my energies because it's the only contact for the Market and we were involved with some food outreach groups. Sheila had done some great programming before. All the customer questions, the website, you know--QuickBooks, was I going to learn that? All the different pieces that I was trying to figure out okay, what--what goes where and how much energy do I devote to each of these.

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So in the beginning I just kind of went for it. I was like sitting on all these committees and **[Laughs]**--because I--you know, I didn't know what level of involvement to be in and meeting the town of Carrboro and trying to make sure that we were also accurately representing and working closely with them; it was a lot you know. It was a lot. And it is kind of--it is more of a public job and I wasn't used to that process, so that was--you know, I was nervous about everything I did. **[Laughs]** I--you know, and my--are my shoes not tied properly? Oh my god, I don't look professional enough. So I was definitely, you know, a little nervous about that. Now I'm probably a little too comfortable about that. **[Laughs]** I have my--my chucks and my jeans and everything. But in the beginning I just didn't even know just that the publicness of it was--was nervous--I was nervous about that. But at the same time it was exciting and I always had the red phone where I picked it up and, you know, called with questions all the time. I'm a big question-asker, so I called--called the Board and asked a lot of questions. **[Laughs]**

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AY: Over the past four years how do you think the Market has changed under your direction?

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SB: We've done a lot of outreach and I think that--that is something that I'm personally passionate about. So I can't help but bring that into what we're doing. It's not specifically in our mission that we should be making food accessible for all, and all of these sorts of things. That has been a pretty large project. I started applying for grants in 2009, the fall of 2009 and that was the first grants--that was the first grant that actually the Market, I believe, has ever gotten and we received a significant grant from RAFI and that helped--Royal Advancement Foundation International--and we teamed with UNC Public Health, so I started working very closely with the

Gillings Sustainable Agriculture School and within UNC Public Health, Alice Ammerman, they started providing us with interns [Interviewer's note: Gillings Sustainable Agriculture Program within the UNC Gillings School of Global Public Health]. And so I was trying to really leverage our resources. I--and it was sometimes overwhelming but--but really helpful in the long-run. We were—we've kept that relationship. We have interns from UNC Public Health. We've done a lot of food access with our grants and we were able to start the EBT Food Stamp Project, which is a huge project a couple years ago and now we're really having it be self-run.

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I partnered with Margaret Gifford and we have supported the establishment of Farmer Food Share, a food donation program, which we worked together to start in 2009 and communicated that idea to farmers. And that organization since has just taken off--is now replicated by tons of markets, so we feel very proud that we were there to help that get established. And I now work with their board and I'm on their board as well. So a lot of what we're really interested in doing is food outreach and do-it-yourself programs, really--we have a very interested community. So this year I applied for a grant. We received a small grant from the Ball Corporation, the Ball jar canning company, and so now we have all these do-it-yourself canning workshops and every workshop--proceeds go to hunger relief shelters. So we're really trying to get our community involved with knowing about all the different uses for making local food affordable, dispelling a lot of the myths between local food; I mean there's a lot of them there, being more expensive and how to really shop affordably, letting people know. We had a butcher come in and let people know how to really make local meat, how you can get the best bang for your buck using even more expensive items like meat and cheese, and really trying to get the word out through Market incentives, double dollar programs and things about getting new

EBT Food Stamp customers, bilingual translations, and working with interns and students from the university level to come to the Market.

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So it's--a lot of this had been happening at different levels. I think that my quasi obsession with that has--has helped push that forward. *[Laughs]*

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AY: Excellent. I also wanted to ask you some more detailed questions about the various programs that are in place. So we talked a little bit about Farmer Food Share, but I also wanted to talk to you about a new program, Farm to TABLE program that I believe was started in January and I was just wondering if you could speak a little bit about the Farm to TABLE program and also clarify who or what is TABLE, like T-A-B-L-E if you know.

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SB: That might be a better question for Margaret Gifford because she really runs the Farm to TABLE program within Farmer Food Share. So now Farmer Food Share has grown and they just received a grant from Blue Cross/Blue Shield, so they have five different components to their program now. So the one that most farmers' markets--and we're most closely involved with is their donation stations and that's where our farmers donate to hunger relief shelters. And then we do events leading up to that.

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The Farm to TABLE doesn't typically involve the Market; they're working with TABLE which is essentially--I might not be the best person to describe it, but with our working, our kind of remote workings with TABLE have been there's an afterschool program for kids and they fill

their backpacks up with food and send them home for, you know, kids at risk of hunger. And so they've really been working with Farmer Food Share for that.

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Now we did team with the Farm to TABLE program for one of our canning series events. So we did--we had April McGregor teach how to make pickles and so we had kids come and pack their own cucumbers into jars and we had reserved spaces working with Farmer Food Share and TABLE and so they reserved--they had kids come from TABLE and they--they made their own pickles and learned all about that. So we've done some work with Farm to TABLE, but primarily that's Farmer Food Share. So they could probably give a better explanation on that one.

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AY: And was that pickling event in this past July or was it--?

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SB: Yes. Yes, that was a month ago. That was the July event. We did--we made pickles and then we also did canned tomatoes. So that was really fun--and it's all outdoors. So we're trying to figure out, too; this is always like a constant challenge how to make these events work sometimes with no electricity or limited electricity and especially something like canning where you need to deal with sterilization and all of that. It's actually--it's really not impossible. It's just--it's thinking through the details and that--that's really a big way of saying it's just thinking through a lot of details. But it's fun. *[Laughs]*

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AY: And can you clarify for me who April McGregor is?

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SB: Sure. April--April is a local lady. She actually didn't really grow up here but she's been here long enough to where we call her a local, and I guess I'd say the same thing about myself. And she is--she's owner of Farmer's Daughter brand products, so they do--she does artisanal products and jams, chutneys, fermented foods, and krauts and Appalachian sour corn and all these kinds of fun things. So she does a lot of Southern foods with somewhat of a gourmet twist.

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April has worked with the Carrboro Community Garden. I've gone to April's classes and we've traveled in similar circles pre-Market, and so I just have always admired some of the stuff she's done with food. She's a cultural historian on many levels as well and very thorough about her research and place-based food systems. So she likes to, you know, she really goes out; she harvests some of her own things. If not, she's buying them from farmers and if not she's hearing the stories also and--and reading the history as to why she's doing it the way she's doing it. So what she does is very intentional. And she credits her grandmother and her growing up in Mississippi for a lot of her knowledge about--and her interest about foodways, putting food up, freezing food, canning food--and she's just been--she's just been awesome.

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She does dinners and other things. It's not all in jars. I mean she does big old hot plates and--and I--I just know that whenever we go to a buffet and we'd know--or some sort of event and we know that April was eating--or cooking, you know, it was like \$10 a plate I was there.

[Laughs] So anyway, she's--she's really cool. And--and I had the privilege of going with her to the Good Foods Awards in San Francisco. This morning we went--this morning--this January we

went as a team and it was a lot of fun just going through the Ferry Market and trying different foods with her and spending some time [Interviewer's note: Ferry Plaza Farmers Market in San Francisco]. So she's--she's a very cool lady and she's one of our most obvious--she's one of our farmers or artisans here at the Farmers' Market.

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AY: I also wanted to ask you some general questions about the Market so that we can get a sense of its purpose and how it functions as the market itself. So my first question is who does the Carrboro Farmers' Market source from, which farms, what kind of radius and those kinds of questions?

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SB: Sure. The Carrboro Farmers' Market is the most strict, is one way of saying it, in the state. But I don't mean that in a bad way. I mean I--I think it's a good thing in many ways. We're also very, very privileged. We--we--all of our farmers come from within fifty miles of Carrboro so that is less than an hour's drive. And a lot of other farmers' markets can't afford to do that. We happen to be fortunate where you can get buffalo and all sorts of different types of cheeses and we have rabbit and you have apples and peaches as much as you have--we have ginger now growing in the area at--you know, people are experimenting with soy. And of course your typical array of all our summer veggies. So you can get a lot within fifty miles of Carrboro, so we're very lucky for that.

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And we also require that the producer has to be at market to sell the product, which is also incredibly strict, and we're the only market in the state that requires that. And that means

that the--the farmer or artisan, him or herself have to be there at market to sell the product. And they can have staff, but they can't sell staff--they can't send staff in place of them except for two--they're allowed two substitutes, so we're not--we're not that cruel. If they're sick or something happens, you know, they can send someone.

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But I think part of our age, since we were established in--in 1979, part of our--our age helps with that because we were the first market to snag that rule. Because half of our farmers are selling in Durham and they're selling at other markets while they're selling in Carrboro on a Saturday morning, so not every market can afford that rule. A farmer can only be at one place at one time. So we were lucky I think and--and fortunate to have that rule early on so that it really creates wonderful relationships with our customers. And they know our farmers and they can ask our farmers. And our chefs love that, so they can ask our farmers, "Hey, I love the fairy tale eggplant you're growing. Can you grow more of that, John?" And, you know, and they can joke around. I mean it really is a big community.

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So our--I feel like our customers have that direct connection with our farmers even as much as I do in many ways that have been going for years. And so that's--that's pretty cool. So yeah. So it's a very small radius and it's producer only. It's obviously since it's producer only we're very strict about it being local only. We have fourteen random inspections we have on--we--we I guess visit. We visit our farms fourteen times for random inspections per year. And our Board of Directors is farmers, six farmers and one artisan or craftsperson and--to make seven Board Members. And we--they all in their volunteer time go out and inspect our farms. We have inspection sheets. We are very strict about "grow what you sell." And I don't think that you

could get a better way to regulate that than to have the farmers regulate that themselves. They know what to look for. It's--it's--it's a full process.

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And then in addition to that we can always do more than fourteen inspections in a year. If anyone writes a note or would like people to come and look at their stuff early for any reason, we definitely--we usually do--do more than fourteen a year. So it's a minimum of fourteen, so we are constantly visiting the farms [*Laughs*] and just wanting to see what's going on. Most people really like us coming out there because it just--they get to show everybody what they're doing and, you know, it's fun to have someone visit. So yeah. So that's--that's the basis. I mean there's a lot of rules that kind of filter down from there, a lot but that's the--that's the primary--.

00:34:44

AY: I also wanted to know--what kind of vendors do you have at the Market? So what are the artisans selling?

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SB: Well we--we're always looking for specialty products, so we have a lot of folks that are really pushing themselves to grow specialty products. We have a lot of expert farmers. A lot of our farmers were previous tobacco farmers, not a lot but a decent percent of our farmers were previous tobacco farmers that with the tobacco buyout are now growing vegetables, so that means they're fourth and fifth generation farmers.

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And they have--some of those farms are larger small-scale farms and they can really produce an amazing amount of stuff. So we have some larger small-scale vegetable producers

and then we have some really tiny, tiny little vegetable producers. And--and I say tiny; you can still grow a lot in a small amount of space, so you know, folks that are half an acre, three acres, and then we have folks that have 500 acres and they're growing wheat and--and have a whole different level of--of size. So we have that in our vegetable front. We have a lot of different types of meat. We have goat, lamb, pork, chicken, rabbit now, buffalo; there's probably **[Laughs]** an animal that I have forgot but there's a lot of them.

00:36:03

And we have in terms of artisans, we have--we have wine, we have a person that's growing their own grapes and making their own wine. We have--as I said naturally fermented foods and things that April brings from jams and chutneys to the sour corn and all those kinds of things.

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We have bread bakers and bread artisans; we have one bread artisan that is actually teaching a Grain Workshop next week and he is--he contracts with the farmer--or two farmers, but I know one is Cohen Farm who grows the grains for him and he actually contracts the grains and he then mills into his--he has grain sprouted breads so they're really moist and kind of the--the moist, denser, earthy breads. And so we have a farmer that's a bread artisan that's contracting with farmers and then we have other artisans like Chicken Bridge Bread and they have their own--they've had to work with USDA to get approved. They've built their own outdoor oven that is commercial size and they are just incredible. Monica is the pastry chef at Lantern and Rob used to be the bread baker at Weaver Street, so it's a happy union of wonderful baked goods and pastries.

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We have plant folks; we have a lot of people that sell plant starters, nursery items. We have all sorts of crafts. We have like Adirondack furniture, wooden spoons, basket weaving; when they look at craft they look at craft as a very traditional process, so they don't consider replications or anything like that craft. It's very much a--at the origin is this a handmade, handcrafted item--welding, so we have all sorts of kind of art sculptures and things like that. And fruits, we have--god, we have a lot of fruits coming on now--raspberries and apples, peaches, figs, pears. We have nuts and pecans; we have--let's see we have folks that are now doing homemade pastas and pasta sauces, pizza doughs. It's just--it just seems like, you know, we--we have--we have asparagus and even the harder to grow items. So we're very lucky that we have that kind of selection at the Market. We even have a hotdog vendor now who is--who is making his own hotdogs using Animal Welfare Approved pork and then he--he then after making his own hotdogs, he uses Chicken Bridges Bakery for the buns. And so they make his own buns and then he uses April's sauerkraut as a topping and then he also makes his own creamed corn toppings.

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Yesterday at market he had a fried chickpea that he puts on top of his hotdogs. He makes his own--he has a beer-mustard that he puts on top of it, so basically, you know, I'm just going on but there's a lot of different things in the Market.

00:39:01

AY: What are some of the items that have become increasingly popular or that customers have asked, "Hey, this is something we're interested in. Keep growing it." Has there been that feedback from the customer, the consumer--and what item or items might that be tied to?

00:39:19

SB: That's a good question. I--the--the common, the quick--the quick pops in my mind, probably this is typical of every market is tomatoes because our market, Alex and Betsy really coined *heirloom tomatoes* at--at--in the area for a while. They were the first ones to bring it to the Market years ago and then the kind of funky--now it's quite popular to know the term *heirloom tomatoes*, but now we just did a tomato event and we had over 115 different varieties of tomatoes at our market.

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So that's just always popular. People never seem to get sick of trying 50,000,000 crazy types of tomatoes. So that's definitely one thing.

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I think something that has increased--I think the value-added side is new. I mean I think for a long time farmers' markets just had, you know, kind of some sweet breakfast items when you went and you mostly went for the vegetables and now you still mostly go for the farmers as--as it I think as it should be. And--and now though I think we're finding that we--we've had such a rise in our artisan group, in our--in our breads and pastries and desserts. So for things like the holidays or really at almost any time people are really now thinking, "Okay, I can get specialty gifts. I can get all these specialty breads. I can get, you know, my cranberry sauce and my pies and my tea cakes and everything handmade here at market in addition to my brussels sprouts and all those kinds of items." There's a lot of room for growth in our winter market. We're year-round. So a lot of demand is going to continue to be on increasing more products during the winter market and we still have a lot. So I'm seeing, you know, these hard to grow items are always going to be popular because they're hard to grow like brussels sprouts, celery--the things that really grow really well in New England because they like cool, seventy degree constant

temperatures and North Carolina it's like 98 and then 60 and then 106 and then 45. So there's just--it just really changes.

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So those consistent ones are always going to be a demand but in general, people love the hot items--corn, tomatoes, melons, blueberries, all those kinds of things. And I'm seeing that people really like to get more involved now so they like to do you-picks. Strawberries, you-pick strawberries, you-pick blueberries, all across the board. People seem to really want to take the time to drive out and do it too, like you know, go to the farm stands, which has been kind of cool. That--I think that's--I've seen more of that.

00:42:13

AY: So in past years you think there's more of an effort on the customer's part to reach out to the farmers as well and to visit them like in their element?

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SB: Yes, definitely. I definitely think so and in fact, the questions--I at least from--from my perspective, working for Ken and I remember the questions the customers would ask then, which was five--six years ago, seven years ago versus now--the majority of customers are asking more complex questions. It's not just, you know, "Is this local?" Or some of the times **[Laughs]** people are like you know, "Did you grow this in North Carolina?" And I mean I had a question yesterday that probably does not fit in this category where the woman asked, why there was fuzz on the peaches. **[Laughs]** And we had to explain that that's peach fuzz, but it's good to ask these questions.

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But now in general we are seeing the questions are much more complex, so instead of, "Are you--are you certified organic, are you not"--that doesn't seem to be taking the forefront nearly as much now. The questions are more like you know, "What kind of green manures do you use? Do you do crop rotations? If you do, do you use landscape fabric as your cover or do you use plastic? And you know, how do your--how do your goats interact with your vegetable farm?" And are--you know, I mean the questions have really become--and a lot of our customers are--are home gardeners and hobby gardeners as well and some have small little farms. So they also--I mean I had someone bring their bugs in a jar to one of our tomato men and say, "Look, I'm pulling these off my plants. What do I do with this?" And he breaks it down and tells you what they are and what--. I mean because they are really the experts.

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So even the people that are just buying their produce from them, they're also like bringing in half their plant. I had another person that brought in dry tomatoes. When you cut the tomato there wasn't a lot of seeds. It was almost hollow. You know, "Why am I missing out on my fleshy middle part?" And Dave Denson one of our tomato farmers explained the likelihood of why his tomato did not come to full maturity. So there's a lot of different things that our customers have been--. I've seen the change just in the short amount of time and I see more young people coming to market than they used to. The age has--has--there's a lot more folks from the university level that are coming. There are class tours. There are--I mean this--this has been going on but much more so in the past four years than even when I was in college, so--.

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AY: I was also wondering how--so there's people who have their own gardens, their own gardens in their backyards. Has that affected the number of people attending the Market or do

you think it's enhanced the relationship with--with the Market? How is the home garden interacting with the Carrboro Farmers' Market?

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SB: I think that's a good question. I definitely--the Market is very pro do-it-yourself and have a home garden. I think it's great to have a home garden, and I definitely do not--. I think if anything it's increased the--the attendance at market, not--more just because of the value and the connection to food. If you're trying to grow your own food that's excellent and if you're eating some of your own tomatoes that's excellent.

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Our farmers buy from other farmers. I grow my own food and I still buy at the Market. So the chance that you're going to be so self-sustaining with everything that you just never come to the Market again is not something we're ever concerned about. If you are that self-sustained that's great, but hopefully you do still come to the Market and visit. Most of the time if anything, it just increases the connection with food and we encourage that; we have our kids seedling events. We give away seedlings for free and try and get home gardeners to start growing. We just really feel like it's a valuable part of appreciating the work that goes into the food. If you're growing it yourself and just supplementing with market or if you're--if you're not growing yourself and you try to do a couple home garden pot--potted plants and things like that, we're--I think it supports the Market most definitely.

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AY: And what is the reach of your consumer base? Is it mainly local like in the Carrboro--Chapel Hill area or where are your customers coming from?

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SB: They are--yeah it is primarily local. I say that but when we do customer surveys there's about ten to fifteen percent that are almost always out of town and not just--not just out of--well let me--let me clarify. When I say local I don't mean just Carrboro. We--we do some surveys where we see the zip code. We ask folks for their zip code. And yes, the--the majority is Carrboro, folks that can walk of course right here to market, but then we have a lot of folks from Pittsboro and--and Durham and Hillsborough and surrounding areas, Raleigh even, and we still consider that local. And--and then there's about ten percent to fifteen percent at--usually ten percent but sometimes it's been higher of folks that are way out of town especially during the holiday weekends. I mean we're just flooded. I mean sometimes we never know if Memorial Day is going to be really dead or if there's going to be a lot of people but most of the time people are coming as a--as a destination when they're visiting town. So we have people all over.

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As--as you and I were talking earlier, we had a whole group from Russia that was coming and visiting not too long ago, so it's not just--it's not just West Coast and East Coast; it's--it's all over, so yeah. So it's fun.

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AY: I recently read an article in the *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette* when I was visiting my parents of a woman who came to this area and she said, "I went to Neal's Deli, I went to the Carrboro Farmers' Market. It was great!" So that culinary tourism aspect it seems that the CFM is getting folded into that and it's interesting that you kind of have that--that a farmers' market is, you know, just as renowned as a restaurant nowadays.

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SB: Yeah, totally.

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AY: So now that we've been talking about the workings of the Market and who is--who is buying at the Market and who is selling at the Market I just wanted to know, in a general sense, what are the goals of the Carrboro Farmers' Market? If it were to have goals what are the goals?

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SB: We're still working on that question. [*Laughs*] I--it's something we visit a lot. We have Board retreats and, you know, always trying to hone in--actually I have a meeting with the Business School at UNC to try and hone in our specific goals. We have informal goals and one is always education. Another is outreach. We think food education is key. We always want to reach out to kids and make sure that we have young people also engaged in the Market as well as older mentors at the Market. We want to see more people coming to the Market always and we also want to see the Market expanding just outside of its physical space.

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You know, we'd love to see the Market as--as a symbol in the school systems, as a symbol when people are going into the local community, businesses, "Oh this was local. This was from our farmers." So we'd really like to--we--we work closely with a lot of local businesses and get a lot of support from local businesses as well and--and part of that is because we really value local businesses existing and we value our relationship with local businesses. So when we're closed we know that Tyler's is serving, you know, one of our farmer's pork and brat

and, you know, we're--we're trying to essentially establish that--that continuous relationship in the community that's present even when the Market is not open.

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So and then on the literal level we're working with the Business School and tons of other groups to always keep--keep--help us make sure that we are working towards our goals in a strategic measurable way. So and we feel like we have so far, but we think we can even be more aggressive and that in the future.

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AY: Now I also read recently that the Carrboro Farmers' Market was recognized by *Everyday Food Summer Special Martha Stewart Magazine*. And it seems that the Market is building a legacy for itself. And I was just wondering if you could speak to the successes of the Market.

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SB: Well that--yeah that's a good--. **[Laughs]** Well we feel very lucky to be mentioned in that. We--we worked--in 2008 at the beginning, when I had started but also just had kind of fallen into it at that point we were lucky enough to be able to be picked up and work with Andrew Knowlton and Bon Appétit and that article helped push our area again and a lot of support for the farmers at market across the board. And that started I think--it was just--it was a catalyst for more. We had already had national attention before. But that highlight that was pretty significant really also--also helped.

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And the movement as a whole has also been fantastic, but I think equally is our chefs in the area. It really has to go hand-in-hand. I mean we have excellent, excellent farmers but we

also have excellent, excellent chefs. And Andrea Reusing was just nominated; yeah she just won the James Beard for Southeast and she just came out with her new cookbook, *Cooking in the Moment* and then we have Sheri Castle who is one of our long-time farmers' market volunteers, and she just came out with her new book. Sara Foster just came out with her new book [Interviewer's Note: *Sara Foster's Southern Kitchen*]. We have Bill Smith, Crook's Corner, we have--I mean we have Amy and Poole's Diner [Interviewer's note: Ashley Christensen is chef-owner of Poole's Diner]. We just--we have a lot of--we have Amy Tornquist and Watts Grocery and we--and--and the other thing is as much as we sit there and say that we have--we require our farmers to be at market, our chefs come to the Market. So it's a win/win.

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I mean Andrea's attention and her support of the Market and other chefs' attention and their support of the Market helps us as well and so the direct relationships that our farmers have formed and then having a venue that we encourage those direct relationships to take place has been incredibly beneficial I think on--on both levels. So I--yeah, I think it's really--it's not--it's not this happened and this happened and this happened. It's definitely a collaborative process. And people get excited to see Karen and Ben Barker from Magnolia Grill, you know, shopping at the Market and buying from Alex or buying from Gary or buying from Charles Holeman. And they get really excited to see that. So it's--it--we have an event coming up in three weeks called our Annual Chef Event and that is when we highlight our chefs who shop at the Market, so not the chefs that just send staff, but the chefs who they themselves shop at the Market.

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We try to--and it's a huge event and they cook--we have--like fill the gazebo with eight of our top chefs that we rotate every year and our customers get a chance to talk with Bill, talk with Andrea, talk with Amy, talk with Kevin and they walk home being like, "Wow. I just had a

conversation with them for a while and it was pretty cool.” And so we also want to make it--we try to make an effort to highlight that relationships with our--that relationship with our chefs as well. And I think that all helps with our--our national attention, our location, our University support, and everything else, so--.

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AY: Has anyone come to you asking for advice on how to establish a market or to use the CFM as like a model?

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SB: I think--I think every market manager probably gets that question on how to establish a market. We--we may get it more than others because of how old we are and that we have been pretty successful in our programming and our community support. I do get that question a lot and I try my best to answer it, however I also let them know that I was not here. I did not originate--I was not here during the origin of this market and--and I can only talk secondhand from--from what I've learned with our market from where I've seen original ten rules which were listed out to five pages front and back essentially of rules, other rules and precedents, guidelines, prepared meat guidelines, prepared food guidelines, egg guidelines. We've created so many different regulations to really keeping it all local over the years.

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So where we are now is not going to be a natural comparison to where we were thirty-three years ago when we started. So I try to share what I know and our rules from the beginning, some things that have helped save us time, but also the one thing that I have learned that I really had to learn from starting the job was that it was patience because everything moves pretty

slowly. It'll move but, you know, you want to see a program start--great; well then just--just exhale and start with square one and know that you have to go through every stage and it might take two years before it gets off the ground. It might take three years. But it will happen. But it usually does not happen fast. And that's usually--that--that allows a lot of checks and balances to occur so we--we don't do any--we try not to make any huge major risks but yeah, we definitely--we get that question a lot. **[Laughs]**

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AY: In this technical age I was wondering how social media has affected the Carrboro Farmers' Market and perhaps that speaks to the younger students coming in.

00:56:05

SB: Yeah. That's a good question which is really funny because I have a filing cabinet at home with the title of one of my folders, my manila folders called *Facebook*, and considering my age **[Laughs]** I should not have a manila file that says, "How to use Facebook, Sarah." But I don't really--I never really loved computers hence enjoying working outside. And so I never had a Facebook page myself and I actually had an intern sit down and open mine and show me with my pen and paper oh, that's how you update your profile. Okay, so I had originally had my information in my starting of putting a Facebook page, I had Sarah Blacklin, all local, born in 1979, because I tried to put together a market page connected and it ended up connecting with my information. It was a mess. **[Laughs]**

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Point being is I'm ironically--I should not be the one in charge of our social media but I have learned a lot and the Facebook has really--it--the--the Facebook, I really do sound like a

grandma. *[Laughs]* Facebook has really helped our market tremendously, I think, especially in terms of just--I mean it's just so easy for a business especially for events.

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We have the tightest--well I think an incredibly tight budget to work around and so our--the way we get attention is not by paid ads. We can't afford paid ads, so we have to do events. We have to keep it public and we have to give our papers something to write about, something that we can do for free that they will write about. And so we still do that and having Facebook just helps--helps mitigate that as well. So basically we can--we can continue to give updates. We can put updates on Facebook at all times. I was updating it yesterday for April's canning event and already, you know, it just reminds people to come out to market when I'm not going to get a new thing in the paper for that event. So that's really, really helped us.

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It's totally different and I'm still--it's--it's different probably for a lot of farmers' markets to have Facebook pages. We actually had tweeted at a couple points where we have asparagus in the morning so I don't have a fancy iPhone but I did have volunteers that had one, so we could say, you know, "Hey, we have asparagus. It's eight o'clock; it's going to be gone by nine o'clock. If you get your butt out of bed and bring a coffee to market you can get some." So that is like--is totally new; it was totally new for us to try and that was really successful.

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Also just it's not so much social media you could say that--well list serves have also really helped us just being able to put the word out through some of our main food list serves and our student list serves. Even Triangle University Food Systems is a great--is a great list service *[Interviewer's note: Triangle University Food Studies]*. Well so that we get more student volunteers that way; that's how it plugs into their schedules when they're in the middle of the

library working and so that's really, really helped us. We didn't even have email for a long time and--I mean for the Market until I think it was like 2004, so the--the evolution between there and now has been pretty substantial.

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AY: And what would you say you enjoy most about the Market?

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SB: The people. I love growing food so I love the food aspect but the people is definitely where it's at. It is--it is like family in a lot of ways. I--I have Thanksgiving with some of our farmers, you know **[Laughs]** I--I--they really are--I mean it's really a community. I--I just took vacation with my grandmother and my great-aunt and my great-uncle and actually I have it on my list to make sure I email the membership pictures of my great-aunt and my great-- **[Laughs]** Now they--they might not all care but, you know, I want them to know what I'm up to and they keep me posted on what they're up to and how their health is and how their families are doing and their kids or-- It's really--it's really quite a community.

01:00:14

And you know, if I have questions I go to them, so I--I--you know, I love the growing aspect absolutely and that's central to everything. I think that's what brings all the people that I love to it is that central love of food and artisanship and working for what you really love. And I think that--that also helps develop and--and flourish these amazing personalities that I feel lucky to be--to interact with and personalities that are so different. Folks that have such different backgrounds, such different ages, came to this profession from so many different places, and all

connect in some level, and that I feel fortunate that I'm able to connect and genuinely enjoy talking to every single one of them is--is really a gift. That's--that's it. It's definitely the people.

01:01:09

AY: And as we kind of wrap our interview up I wanted to ask a question that I always find helpful to ask at the end of an interview; did I leave anything out or is there anything that you wish to speak to or talk about that we haven't really covered in the interview so far?

01:01:29

SB: Hmm. That's a good question. I don't know. I think you probably did. I mean I think a lot of it is just being at market and meeting the people, hearing the jokes. You know, a lot of it is the people. You have all the rules and regulations and you got to make sure it's a well-working machine. The Market needs to be functioning; it needs to have systems, so that everyone understands how it works and they all feel like they're an equal player in it. And they all have a voice because it is a member owned and operated market. It's important to make sure everyone feels connected to the Market, not left out and have information transparent.

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But a lot of it--so much of it is sending those cards around and sending the happy birthdays and making sure everybody knows. I got everybody together for a group picture a couple years ago under the banner. And they had never--it had--they couldn't remember the last time the whole membership got together for a group picture. And I put it on the website and then--and then they wanted some emailed out. And it was funny because getting them to leave the stands was like, "Oh god, what are we doing? We're taking a picture, are you serious? Oh god, I've got to pack up. I have stuff that's got to get in the cooler." And--and then we all went

under the banner and took a picture of us together. And then everyone was like, “Well look at that!” *[Laughs]* So you know, it’s nice; the--the community aspect, you know, sometimes we don’t want to slow down but it--it means a lot to all of us I think involved with the Market. And everybody that’s been involved with the Market takes a lot of pride in it communally. So--so yeah. That’s it.

01:03:04

AY: Well thank you very much, Sarah. I really appreciated interviewing you today and that will conclude our interview.

SB: Thanks, Ashley.

01:03:13

[End SFA-CFM Sarah Blacklin Interview]