



Tyler Horne

Urban Harvest Farmer's Market - Houston, TX

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Evan Stern: All right. Today is Friday, March 28th, and we are speaking at the Urban Harvest offices in Houston, Texas. Now, to begin, for the record, could you give us your name and occupation?

Tyler Horne: My name's Tyler Horne, and I am the manager of the Urban Harvest Farmers Market.

Evan Stern: So, Tyler, to begin, no matter whom I'm speaking with, I always kind of like to begin by asking if you could describe for us your childhood home and tell us about where you grew up.

Tyler Horne: Grew up in Sugar Land, Southwest Houston, melting pot of the city. Been there pretty much my whole childhood.

Evan Stern: If you were to describe Houston, as someone who's never been here before, what would you say?

Tyler Horne: Houston is such a vibrant, diverse city, and it's full of everything that you could possibly hope for in an international city.

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It's got an incredible medical center. We've got diverse food options. We've got very neighborhood-specific sort of vibes. There's just something for everybody here.

Evan Stern: You mentioned food when talking about Houston. I know Houston is a famous food city. From your perspective, do you have any ideas, maybe the factors that came together that have made Houston into the food city that it is?

Tyler Horne: Well, I heard this the other day in a Kinder Institute talk, and they were saying that-- you know, I love Vietnamese food; probably my favorite. There's just a limitless amount of options for it in Houston. In 1975, they had less than 100 people in the census that were Vietnamese. Well, that population's exploded. It's been incredible for Houston. The dining scene is more vibrant because of it. So, I mean, it's just-- it's amazing to be from Southwest Houston, and just the amount of options.

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I was there yesterday at Aga's, picking up some to-go food, and I just was amazed. I was like, man, there's people from all walks of life here, eating. It is very awesome to bear witness to that.

Evan Stern: But, I guess, looking back on your childhood, growing up, what kind of food were you eating in your household, growing up?

Tyler Horne: My parents were-- my mom is from the Midwest, and some pretty basic things. My dad can make about four dishes, and he makes them all perfectly well. But the part that I remember the most was eating with my neighbors. Sugar Land, it's just all different kinds of people. One of my good friends, Ramin, his family made amazing Persian food, so I was exposed to that, have a deep affection for it and, you know, neighbors from all over the place, families cooking, and so I was able to be exposed to quite a lot of different kinds of food, just by walking down the street.

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Evan Stern: If I'm not mistaken, too, I read that you cultivated a pretty early interest in gardening. How did that start? Where does that come from?

Tyler Horne: Oh, my grandmother loved to garden, and she was a frustrated gardener when she moved to Texas. She always talked about how the gardening just wasn't the same. What she didn't realize was, is we have year-round gardening in Texas; and in Illinois, not the same case. So, we had always had a small garden. My mom and grandmother had roses, so I grew up taking care of those, kind of begrudgingly. I've decided that I won't plant anything in my yard that I can't eat now, so that's kind of my guiding principle. But my whole yard is covered in a garden now, growing tomatoes, all different kinds of varieties, and it's just fun. I was sitting out there last night, just staring at 'em, hoping it would rain.

Evan Stern: Well, I think worked out for you there, or it's about to work out; we'll see. But what has gardening taught you, if anything?

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Tyler Horne: You know, the idea of hope, just because when you plant, you never know what you're gonna get. I had a terrible tomato season last year, and I went back out at this season, and just with a bunch of hope that it would be better. And some knowledge, I mean, definitely, being surrounded by all these amazing farmers and gardeners has imparted a lot of information, even if it's just through osmosis. In listening to them talk, I feel like it's made me a better grower, and just a keen interest in being able to at least grow some of the food we eat at our house.

Evan Stern: But, I guess, looking back on your childhood, teenage, high school, all that stuff, what did you wanna be when you grew up?

Tyler Horne: I wasn't really sure. All my family worked in higher education.

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I had considered that but, post-college, it didn't really seem like the path that I wanted to pursue. I ended up at Urban Harvest as a volunteer. I just loved it so much. I actually wanted to work in a garden, and they didn't have a volunteer opportunity, but they said, "We need some help at this farmers market." That was in its fourth year of existence in 2008, and was a volunteer for a couple of years before I came on staff.

Evan Stern: Do you remember the first time you ever went to the market?

Tyler Horne: Yeah, the first time I ever went to the market was when I showed up to volunteer. I'll never forget the day, because my brother had had a bad motorcycle accident on 59 the night before. I had gone to go take care of him, with our family, and I had committed to go into that market in the morning to volunteer. So, on just very little sleep, I showed up to the market for my first day to do my shift.

Evan Stern: But what was it that made you want to get involved with the market as a volunteer?

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Tyler Horne: I was looking for some more connection in my life, and I wanted to be involved in something. I had taken a trip, really the only time I've ever not had a job. I took a month-long road trip, and I went up to Yellowknife in the Northwest Territories. We drove an old Volvo up there, and it was an amazing life-changing experience for me, and it gave me a lot of clarity and time to think through what I wanted to do. I came back from that trip, and I said, some things in my life need to change. I wanna find some volunteer opportunities. So, I found Urban Harvest, by just searching around. I'd actually been to their fruit tree sale because we had purchased trees

from the fruit tree sale, and that was how I realized that there was other things that they did besides selling their annual fruit tree sale extravaganza.

Evan Stern: So, this was 2008. At what point did it become a full-time job for you?

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Tyler Horne: I started in mid-2010 as a full-time employee on staff at Urban Harvest.

Evan Stern: Now, speaking of Urban Harvest, for the uninitiated, can you tell us, what is the Urban Harvest Market, and tell us a little bit about its history?

Tyler Horne: The market was founded by Urban Harvest in 2004, and its original intent was to provide an outlet for all of these gardeners in the city to sell their bumper crops. What grew out of it is what we see today. We're able to support large farms, you know, about 100 vendors any given weekend. So, when I started, we had, I don't know, about 20 to 25 that would show up. In those previous years, before I was involved, they said there were some weeks that they were lucky to get 10 vendors to show up in the early days. Really a testament to a core group of committed customers that supported it in those early years so it could grow.

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Evan Stern: Actually, we'll just circle back for a moment, too. Just out of curiosity, do you remember anything about that, your first day at the market, and what it was like that first day of volunteering with these people?

Tyler Horne: Oh, I absolutely just loved it. We had a greeter at the market. Her name's Jean Fefer. She's still involved in our organization, and she was just lovely. She was a gardener, and ran a community garden for people in recovery. I just thought, wow, these are the best people all

in one spot. I just knew it was an alternative for my-- that's not the right word to say. But it was refreshing from my day job, and I really loved the people aspect of it. That just continued to grow, and it helped me blossom as a person, for sure. I've always been pretty outgoing and friendly, but the job helped me meet so many people.

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That was kind of what kept me coming back was the people. As wonderful and challenging as they can be, it's definitely the people that have been the driving force behind me staying all these years.

Evan Stern: I know that your job entails many responsibilities. Can you tell us about all the hats that you wear and what all your job entails?

Tyler Horne: I'm responsible for the weekly operation of our Saturday market. I'm out there finding vendors, keeping lots of community organizations plugged in. We have one to two boosts a week that alternate with different area nonprofits, to do outreach. I am always kind of out and about as much as I can be, just supporting our vendors, trying to find new chefs for us to connect with and work with, trying to connect those chefs with our growers.

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That's a big part of my job is just advocating for our vendors, and trying to get them new opportunities, whether that's helping 'em find a commercial space to expand or a new account at a restaurant. Ultimately, our hope for a lot of the vendors is that they go on to grow bigger and better concepts, and that we provide a platform for them to be successful and have just a wonderful experience getting to meet the community.

Evan Stern: I was wondering, could you take me through what your typical Saturday is, from start to finish, I mean, what time you wake up? Take me through everything.

Tyler Horne: I am not much of an early riser for most of the week, but I have an alarm that goes off about 5.45. I have my clothes picked out, jump in the car, drive to the market, have a coffee. Then the market starts setting up around 6:30. We have vendors that actually get there before I do. It's just amazing. They come from a long ways. They love just a nice, easy setup.

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We get everything set up for the week, which is usually, you know, we have a bunch of tents that we set up. We have seating. We have trash. We have a musician every single week. We have live music 52 weeks a year. Then I go oftentimes and just check on everybody and make sure everybody's doing okay. It's a great opportunity to get face time with the vendors before they get busy at the market. So, I always value that little brief bit of time we have, just to go check in and say hi.

Evan Stern: What would you say is the most taxing part of your job?

Tyler Horne: Give me a second. Some of the challenges oftentimes with small business owners is that they are new to operating businesses, and so that can be challenging.

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But I think one of the biggest challenges that we have now is finding farmers. How do we go and get creative, and get our network expanded to meet new growers? I just called an egg vendor out of the blue yesterday because we needed a better price on eggs for our mobile market than we could get through the wholesaler we were buying from. I haven't talked to him in 12 years, and

he's still at the egg game, and going strong. So, it's just about building that network, checking on my blueberry grower as I was driving to lunch today to say, "Hey, Hirsch, when are you coming back?" you know, just keeping up with everybody. And knowing that also a lot of our vendors are aging out of farming, and so that's the other thing that kind of keeps me up at night is how are we gonna find a newer generation of farmers to replace the ones that are retiring?

Evan Stern: Is it hard for you to see farmers retiring? Have you seen farmers forced to give up the reins during your time at the market?

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Tyler Horne: We have, for various reasons. But, oftentimes, when farmers are getting out of business, there's usually a good story there, I mean, they're selling their farms, and moving someplace else or retire. I know some of our farmers will do it forever, until they can't, and so that's also really inspiring. They're just the hardest-working people, and I've learned so much from being involved with them. It's incredible, the work ethic that they have, and I find that just super, super inspiring as well as motivation for me to keep this place as vibrant and as busy as possible.

Evan Stern: I know it's hard to name, but reflecting on the relationships that you forge with these farmers and vendors, looking back on your years, are there any interactions that you've had with them or stories that you can share that have just been really personally impactful for you?

Tyler Horne: Oh, there's so many. I mean, when I was-- I'm doing a project right now of looking back on photos from the last 17 years of being involved.

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There's moments that have just brought me to tears, looking at these pictures of vendors that are no longer with us or otherwise. There's a story that is front of mind for me, where we had one of our farms, Atkinson Farm, they had a fire in their barn, and they lost a tremendous amount of things. Through it all, they were incredibly positive. Some local chefs, Chris Shepherd, and vendors banded together, and did a little benefit for them, and it was just super touching. I mean, I love the Atkinson family. We were there for their 50th wedding anniversary. That was a big surprise. My daughter goes there and picks strawberries. It's just full circle in our life in so many ways. They're one of the ones that's just an anchor at our market, and we're very lucky to have them.

Evan Stern: Now, Mr. Atkinson is a very special fellow. My mom buys from him. I remember, early on, she didn't realize that it was cash only.

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He said, "Oh, well, if you're coming back next week, just bring me the cash next week." I think that's the kind of thing that you experience at the market that you're not gonna necessarily find anything else but-- any place else. I can't speak today, my goodness. You've said that finding and recruiting these vendors is absolutely among the greatest joys of this job. But what do you look for in a vendor?

Tyler Horne: One of the things that's been interesting recently is we get a lot of vendors through referrals, now, through other vendors, or through our network of people in the culinary world. Either we'll know them or we'll have somebody refer us to their pastry chef. There's a restaurant recently that the pastry chef just blew my mind. I didn't know him, but a couple other friends in

the industry vouched for him. He's on the docket to be reviewed here soon. The way we-- sorry, I need to step back for a second, because I got nervous.

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Tyler Horne: The way we find-- what was your question again? I got kind of like tailspin on that.

Evan Stern: No. Oh, I probably asked, you know, I mean, what do you look for in a vendor?

Tyler Horne: When we're reviewing vendors, we look for two really important things. The market has a firm rule about the radius that they come from, from in Houston...from-- ugh. Okay. Start over. When we're evaluating vendors for the market, two big priorities come into play for us. One is that they are the direct producer of their product and that they're located within 180 miles of Houston. For the value-added side, if you're making, let's say, prepared food, we wanna see you incorporate ingredients from growers at our market so, that way, it all comes full circle. It doesn't have to be everything, but we wanna see demonstrating that you're able to source from local vendors.

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Evan Stern: We were talking about some of the farmers aging out and everything. But, across the board, what are some of the most persistent challenges the farmers you work with face?

Tyler Horne: Weather, I mean, really, weather is challenging. I do a rain dance every time we get some rain. We've had some significantly dry years here. But these seemingly more frequent freezes have also been a big challenge to our growers. We've had flooding. They are literally up against Mother Nature. They continue to keep the faith and stay positive, but I know that there's

some times where it's just so hard. You look at our market after one of these major weather events, and you can directly see, even if you aren't from Houston and you just stop by, something's going on, because we've got way less offerings for a lot of the vendors.

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But I will say this, I'm encouraged to find that vendors are becoming more resilient. We have a farm that we work with that grows amazing lettuce, and they are located in acres homes, and they have finally cracked how to grow lettuce through the summer, which is just amazing. It's not easy, and we've seen 'em have some ups and downs through the years, but they've had more consistent ability to grow year round, and adapt and learn how to do it.

Evan Stern: You were saying earlier that in Houston, you do get year-round gardening. What are some of the challenges farmers face that are maybe unique to this particular region?

Tyler Horne: The price of land here is challenging. That's one thing that's a big impediment to them being able to scale and grow is where they're gonna acquire more land.

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In terms of climate, it's very humid here, so that presents some challenges. It's much easier to grow in drier climates, for a variety of reasons. But Houston oftentimes feels like you're wrapped in a wet blanket when you walk outside; like today, a pretty good example of it. But those are some of the things that come to mind. I think, also, there is not as large of a farming community here as there are in other parts of the country. So, the farmers, oftentimes, I think, from talking to them, while they have friends involved that they've met over the years, there's not like a great central place for them to all connect in Texas.

Evan Stern: Obviously, this is a unique climate that we have here, with the rain and everything, but what are some things that grow here that just grow beautifully in Houston, in the Houston area, that you think are just wonderful crops that we have at our fingertips here?

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Tyler Horne: You can grow such a variety of things here year round. I think that we really produce some world-class strawberries here. I've tried strawberries from all over, and I'm always impressed. But the thing that I really believe in is our peach vendor has absolutely exceptional peaches. They're grown in Mexia. That's like right at the limit of our market radius. But I'll put those peaches up against any peach. I've been to every state that grows peaches, and tried their peaches, and I think Lightsey Farms peaches are, bar none, some of the absolute best. She grows so many different varieties of them, and educates the customers about when their peak season is. There's nothing better than a Texas peach.

Evan Stern: I couldn't agree with you more. I will take a Texas-- I will put a Texas peach against a Georgia peach any day, but that's just between you and me [laughter].

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But you were talking about facilitating relationships between the vendors and local chefs. Are there any stories you can share about that and any relationships that have happened between chefs and the vendors in the market?

Tyler Horne: We have an amazing community of chefs that come every single week. One of my favorites is Anita from Pondicheri. She is just such a gift, because she actually discovers things at the market oftentimes that I've overlooked or I didn't even know about. She'll write an article in the *Houston Chronicle* that she does that profiles different products from our market. It's just

really nice, because it gives people an opportunity to learn about things, including myself sometimes. There is a gentleman in our market that's growing a very kind of rare bean, and it's from Mexico. I had never even seen it or heard it. She took great interest to it, and is writing an article or has written an article by now about it. It's just really neat.

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But some other examples of chefs that have been extremely supportive to us over the years, and just really have put their money where their mouth is, as far as investing in local agriculture and supporting farms, I mean, Chris Shepherd just did a show at the market, where they filmed-- it's *Eat Like a Local*. It's really a big honor to have him come out. He's been a supporter of us from the early days of hosting at his restaurants. He hosted one of our first Sunday Suppers back in 2012, and has just been a force of good things for Houston. What he's doing with Southern Smoke is awesome. But the part that I love is he comes and still buys whatever he can for the week, and tries to incorporate that into the things that he's doing.

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Evan Stern: Just kind of like building from there, too, are there any ways in which you can talk about how the market has impacted Houston's food scene? Is there anything you're like, yep, that happened because of the market, maybe?

Tyler Horne: Oh, I love this story. We have a vendor or had a vendor, sorry, that's called Street to Kitchen, Graham and Chef G. Benchawan Painter is her name. They came to me, and wanted to do Thai food at the market. I told 'em, "Yeah, I have a Thai food vendor. I don't know if we really need two." Then that Thai food vendor left, and he was one of our stars, and we really

missed him. But we got Graham and Chef G out of the deal. They made this phenomenal Thai omelet. They were at our Saturday market, and just kind of developed a following.

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They went and opened their first brick and mortar, and it was such a cool story because I looked at the deal, and I was like, "This looks perfect for you guys to open up in Magnolia Park." The rent was right. Everything was great. Then they won the James Beard Award, and it was such a honor. I mean, I was flying home to Houston when I got the news, and I just could not believe that they had gotten not only the nomination but won, and I was so proud of them. They're just such wonderful supporters of Urban Harvest. To see them in their current space is even better. So, everything's been an evolution. They have this beautiful space in this project called The Plant, and they're killing it. Their food is-- it's probably my favorite place to send somebody in Houston, and one of my favorite places to go eat.

Evan Stern: Well, I'll certainly have to check it out at this point. Conversely, are there any other stories that you can share about how the market has impacted the lives of your vendors?

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Tyler Horne: It's amazing to look out and see how many friendships are made, oftentimes just by happenstance because people become neighbors at the market. I don't really-- I always try to ordain giving somebody a space they prefer out of the spaces that I have, but it's somewhat of a roll of the dice. You're gonna be spending 52 Saturdays two feet away from somebody. These friendships that form are really beautiful. The part I love is the customers really connecting with the vendors, too, and becoming a part of their lives. I'm reminded oftentimes and it would be remiss without mentioning the unofficial mayor of the market, Bonsai Phil. I'm not sure that he

comes there anymore even to really sell bonsai trees. He's just there for the social aspect, and loves everybody, and knows every single customer, and every customer knows Phil. All the vendors love him. It's something very special, and I think it goes both ways.

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It's great for the vendors, and the customers really feel connected to what we're doing.

Evan Stern: Speaking towards that matter, I was just asking about vendors, but are there any stories you can share about the ways it's maybe changed or impacted customers? Are there any stories that you can share or remember about that?

Tyler Horne: I have a great one. I had two customers cross paths at the market, and I thought to myself, I know them both very well, and I went, gosh, they'd be perfect together. So, I called a dinner party that night, just really for the reason to introduce them, and they just got engaged this weekend, and I love that. Colin was the brewer at Saint Arnold's, and Rachel's just this amazing artist, and both good friends but had never met each other, and they met at the market. There's another wonderful story, Judy and Richard Kaplan.

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Judy was a customer at the market, and she told this story on *The Moth*, so I feel like it's okay to tell this story [laughter]. She met Richard, had been recently divorced, and Richard and her eventually went on a date. They found this amazing story of connection and past lives crossing over. I mean, it's just so special, like, the place is something beyond just a place to go shop for food. It's not just about romance, I mean, people meet their friends there. I see all the time, I love that the regulars kind of get to know each other. They're like, "Hey, I always see you in line," and they'll strike up a conversation and, next thing you know, they're friends. It's very cool.

Evan Stern: Well, I'm a sucker for *The Moth*, so I have to go digging through the archives to find this story now. Talking about all of this, can you tell me about how the pandemic impacted the market, and in what ways it made you pivot?

Tyler Horne: Oh, the pandemic. It was wonderful for our market in some ways, and it was really challenging in others.

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Our business increased overnight. People wanted to be outside in a safe space, and so we started seeing record attendance. On the vendor side, we saw an increased interest in really qualified, wonderful vendors that wanted to join. So, it was a very good time for the market. I think, nationally, at a market level, I think that sentiment would be echoed. It was also hard. It brought out some of the best and some of the worst in some people. I think, from a management standpoint, there was definitely some rough patches, and we got through it. I think what it provided us, particularly in the early days, when everything was really locked down, it gave people an opportunity to go outside and shop, and see people, and still see that face-to-face connection that makes the market so special. That actually thrived through COVID, and it was really-- it was good.

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Evan Stern: Am I mistaken, too, in reading that you did bring, like, introduce a mobile aspect to the market, like, going into different neighborhoods with a truck or something, or did I make that up?

Tyler Horne: Yeah, we have a mobile market as well. It's incredible. We go into what we call our priority communities, and we do a kind of full experience of what you might expect to find at

the market, but we are selling it, and we sell everything at the wholesale price that we purchased the food from. So, we get a pretty great discount on the products, and we're able to sell those to our customers. I'm actually involved in that as of recently, and it's been really rewarding work. It's a very different experience for me but, actually, every time I go home from a mobile market, I'm reminded of some interaction I had with somebody that day that was really special.

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People love getting to hear this story about their food. Since I know all the people we're buying this product from, for the most part, I sometimes will tell 'em about this. Yesterday was strawberries. I was saying, "These strawberries are grown 45 minutes from here at Atkinson Farm. It's a wonderful place." She had her daughter with her, and I said, "You should take your daughter. It's a great place, and you can go do a You-Pick Strawberry.

Evan Stern: In what ways have you worked to try to help address food insecurity, and deal with the food deserts, and issues of that nature?

Tyler Horne: That's the whole goal of our food access program is to provide healthy locally grown food to everyone. We have a SNAP Double Up program and, essentially, up to \$40 of your SNAP can be spent in a form of a double-up credit. So, that way, that's for fruits and vegetables only, but if you spend \$40, you get another additional \$40 for fruits and vegetables.

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So, that program's been really successful, and we take that at our Saturday market as well as all of our sites for our mobile market.

Evan Stern: Just kind of like speaking about that, something that I think is strange in this polarized moment, a lot of people have come to associate markets like this as a favored shopping destination of upper-income, latte-sipping urban professionals. What do you say to that?

Tyler Horne: I think one thing was when you actually start shopping at the market, you realize that the customer base is extremely diverse. I mean, the stereotype of that, there are probably some things that ring true about it. But I think, especially because we're in Houston, you look around, and it's extremely diverse, and our customer surveys constantly surprised me with what we find out. Oftentimes, the market, even though that there is the perception that things can be more expensive, there are deals to be had.

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The peaches we have are exceptional. They're no more expensive than the peach you buy at the store. Oftentimes, if you buy in bulk, it's even less expensive. So, we're actually oftentimes on par with things that you can find at the grocery store, particularly for staple items. Some of our more specialty things can be more expensive, but our goal is to be able to provide a place that everyone can shop and find value in.

Evan Stern: Has anyone, maybe SNAP benefits, or anyone from maybe different backgrounds, is there anything that you can speak to how it is for them? Have there been any stories that people have shared with you about what it's meant for their communities and them individually?

Tyler Horne: Lemme think for a second. I mean, I have a couple good ones, but I might need a second just to process a good one to tell you.

Evan Stern: I'm also horribly inarticulate often in the ways I phrase questions.

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Tyler Horne: No, your question's, I think your question's great, and I have a lot of those stories. I also just wanna be somewhat private about those because--

Evan Stern: Oh, of course.

Tyler Horne: --I'm thinking, like, a good-- one of 'em that came to mind, I was like, no, I think it's too private. The customers that we see at our booth for SNAP are largely very interested in the mission of local food. Well, sorry, lemme think about it for a second, and we'll get back to that one. That one's a tough one for me because I wanna phrase it in a way that sounds fair but also doesn't divulge... But I think there's a good nugget for that. Maybe that might be a question for our food access director at some point.

Tyler Horne: But I have a story.

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Let me think on that, and maybe I'll be like, all right, Evan, I'm ready for that one.

Evan Stern: Totally. No, the way that it goes with this, I always think of everything that I should've asked or said always when this stuff [laughter] is done.

Tyler Horne: No, that's okay. Like I said, I'm flexible. If you think that there's some gaps in this that we need to fill in, I mean, the food access program is amazing and it is, at the market, as I see it on Saturdays, probably it's front and center. We have customers that come, and it's really nice to be able to welcome them to the market and give them an opportunity to be able to double their spending dollars at the market. I think they feel really grateful to be able to do it as well. They oftentimes will come back and talk to us about all the awesome stuff that they got at the

market that day. It's nice to see people bring their families, and make a day of it, and get to experience the market.

Evan Stern: Totally.

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But, speaking about that, I know that Urban Harvest's mission is to connect people with their food on a deeper level. What are the benefits of doing just that?

Tyler Horne: I think people really connect with being able to-- the person standing behind the tent is the person that grew their food. That's a big part of what's made our market successful is that we have always been about the vendors participating themselves. Like they aren't employees but, by and large, for the most part, you're gonna find Mike Atkinson standing behind his booth, greeting you every single weekend. That is true across the board for a lot of our growers, and that experience of getting to know them, them being able to speak to specifics that you would never get from your neighborhood butcher, like, our rancher the other day turned me on to this new amazing cut of beef called a Thor's Hammer. I'd never heard of it. It was delicious. I went home and put it into my smoker, and I was like, "I would've never heard of this if it wasn't for you giving me a challenge on how to cook this."

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I think there's also an above-average knowledge base of how to cook things. So, I hear customers ask farmers all the time, "How do you cook this?" They oftentimes know, you know, they'll tell 'em a quick little recipe of how to do it. "What do you do with a sunchoke?" That's a common question, and our farmers can oftentimes rattle off a few different recipes. I think that's pretty

special. I don't know if you get that when you're staring at the produce aisle at your local grocery store.

Evan Stern: What are your hopes for the future? Where would you like to see the market in another 10 years?

Tyler Horne: The market is in a really unique place right now, and I think what I would love to see us have is more specialty growers. We're really kind of trying to invest in finding them and bringing that type of product to the market. One of my retirement dreams is to become one of those specialty growers.

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I wanna be a blackberry grower. I think it'd be so interesting. We have blackberries for sale, for sure, but like just a blackberry farm, like, we need more growers like that. Those are the things that bring people out, and those are the types of things I think that set our market apart is that we are really grower-focused. We don't do any trinkets. We don't do any kinds of crafts. We are just food. I think the most out-of-bounds we get is we have a knife sharpener, and we all thought that seemed like a pretty important thing to have at a farmers market, so we've had that-- I inherited our knife sharpener. We've had our knife sharpener there for a really long time, and it's great. But, to get back to the point, it's really about food, and I think keeping the focus on that, while we probably could've grown in terms of vendors larger over the years, quality food, that's all judged by a committee. That's another thing that sets us apart is that we have a group, which I'd like love to tell this story of the committee because it's really what's been fundamental to the success of the market.

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We have a very well-rounded group of people that look at the individual applications that we receive that meet our criteria, and they go out. We facilitate a meeting for people to apply, so we get to try their food, we get to hear their story. We have a farmer, a rancher, a chef, a food writer, a board member; it's a very well-rounded group of people that look, and they all are in support of wanting to make the market a more vibrant place. So, it's really great to get to meet with them four or five times a year, and review applicants.

Evan Stern: I've probably already asked this, several times already, but why are markets like this important?

Tyler Horne: Well, I think they help farmers that are of a certain scale and size be able to do more direct-to-consumer sales and less wholesaling.

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So, they're able to fetch a better price for their products. I also think that our market has incubated a lot of businesses to grow into the next step. I've seen so many vendors over the years go and open brick and mortars or start wholesaling. It's encouraging to think that we give somebody an opportunity in a very low-cost way, and we see them go and make the next step. I could tell you 20 stories off the top of my head of people that have gone off to do bigger and better things. It's always fun to think that they got their start in our little parking lot on a Saturday morning.

Evan Stern: Looking back on your time, if you can name it, what's been your proudest accomplishment?

Tyler Horne: Just seeing the market grow and evolve over the years.

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We increased the attendance and the vendors by probably double to triple from when I started. That's no small feat, in and of itself, just to stay in business all these years, and keep trucking along, and stick to our mission of supporting local agriculture. But I would think my proudest accomplishment, as I look back on it as well, is we have given people a place in Houston that is known to a lot of people, and it's a place that I feel like you can't just create overnight, and there's not a blank check that can make what we've created happen. It's hard to build something like that quickly. I think it's just the success of our vendors that have really created what the market is. I mean, we're just an instrument. It's not any giant secret what makes farmers markets successful, I think, once you really start to look at it.

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But I've been really lucky to learn a lot in this job, as well as advance my knowledge of food and cooking, and I'm surrounded by friends that I've met through the market. The joke is, how did you meet Tyler? There's a probably pretty good strong chance that I met you at the farmers market at some point, and I love to collect those people. So, professionally, I think the growth is probably my favorite but, personally, it's the people. I've been so lucky to get to meet so many different kinds of people, and I love that, I mean, I live it up.

Evan Stern: If you were to go back in time, and tell your teenage, college-age self that, you know, you're 20–25, this is what you'd be doing, how do you think that kid would've reacted?

Tyler Horne: Teenage self wanted to do a very different career path, and some things happened along the way that gave me-- that led me to this.

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I feel like this is probably the most perfect fit for my personality is having a job where I leverage all these relationships to make this thing happen every single Saturday. Actually, while it was probably an unlikely thing to me, I certainly had no idea, at even 23 years old, this is what I would be doing. But I'm really glad it all worked out the way it did, and Urban Harvest has been an amazing organization to work for. I've met so many great people involved with this, on a board level and on a volunteer level as well, that have really impacted my life. It's tremendous.

Evan Stern: Before we leave, do you have any final thoughts that you'd just care to share?

Tyler Horne: Gimme a second. I'll think on that. I mean, I will tell you this.

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There's a conference for farmers market managers that takes place. It was enlightening to meet people because I feel like, oftentimes, when I show up to any kind of a professional function, I'm for sure the only person there that's ever run a farmers market, probably. It's a fairly niche skill set. But it definitely was nice to commiserate with all these other growers-- not growers, sorry. It was nice to commiserate with all these other market managers, and realize that it's kind of a crazy job, actually, like, it's definitely-- it seems, on the surface, pretty simple, but there's a lot of nuance to it, and there's a lot of just-- I feel like my LinkedIn profile should say I specialize in dealing with difficult people. I had a musician go berserk today over something that was just minor. It's so funny, like, we mediated it out, and I think it's fine.

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But it's just like, you know, running a community event is not without its share of funny and witty stories. I've joked over the years I probably should write a book about this. There's definitely some great stories. There's probably some-- maybe one day, there's a good Harvard

Business School case study for this. I'm a big fan of reading those every once in a while. I feel like the farmer's market's got some good instructive stories that could be shared about managing and, you know, just how do you be fair and create a welcoming community space? It's not the easiest thing to do, but it's definitely a fun challenge, and I love that.

Evan Stern: Well, Tyler, we thank you so much for the work that you do and have done for this community, and thank you for speaking with us today.

Tyler Horne: Thanks, Evan, it was a pleasure.

[End]