



PACIFIC COAST  
FARMERS' MARKET  
ASSOCIATION

## LOOKING BACK AND PLANNING AHEAD



*Allen Moy, Executive Director*

As 2024 draws to a close, I am taking advantage of the slow pace of incoming emails to reflect on the past year at the Pacific Coast Farmers' Market Association (PCFMA). The year brought new faces and new partnerships, but it also brought a few new challenges and the departure of some longtime members of the PCFMA family.

As I look ahead, I am confident that our team is not only ready to take on new challenges and take advantage of new opportunities but that we are excited to do so.

### **Welcoming New Leaders**

In 2024, PCFMA welcomed new leaders to both its Board of Directors and its staff.

In March, the PCFMA Board of Directors participated in a training with the Center for Volunteer and Nonprofit Leadership (CVNL). Inspired by that training, they set out to recruit new members who could add a diversity of experience, supplementing the active participation on the Board of farmers and food producers who sell in PCFMA's farmers markets.

In October, the Board elected Cindi Gershen and Devin Kinyon. Cindi is a restaurateur and nutrition educator with deep connections in the local food scene. Devin is a professor at the Santa Clara University School of Law and a customer at PCFMA's Downtown San Leandro Farmers Market. In their short time on the Board, these two new members have already been actively engaged on committees and sharing their viewpoints from the customer side of the farmers market.

The PCFMA staff also welcomed new leaders to our Operations team under the direction of Elisabeth Garon who was promoted to Director of Operations. Lis started at PCFMA as a Market Manager who was promoted to Operations Coordinator then to Regional Manager before departing for a position at the Alameda Food Bank. She returned to PCFMA in the fall of 2023 to revamp the organization's training program and then stepped into the Director of Operations role in January 2024.

One of the first tasks that Lis undertook as Director of Operations was building a team of leaders to support her and PCFMA's farmers markets. In February, Jason Rodriguez was promoted to Regional Manager. In March, PCFMA hired Cheyenne Erickson and Brooke Souza as Regional Managers who brought previous farmers market experience to the role.

This new team hit the ground running, and their success is evident. Over the course of 2024, PCFMA operated 35 farmers markets that collectively were open for 1,525 days. These farmers markets provided sales opportunities to over 200 farmers and 250 food producers and artisans while supporting over 2 million customer visits.

### **Engaging with New Partners**

PCFMA's success depends on a network of partners and allies in every community in which we operate a farmers market; from local governments to property owners to business and community organizations. In the summer of 2024, PCFMA entered a new partnership with the Foothill-De Anza Community College District to take over operations of the [De Anza College Farmers Market](#). Early on in this partnership, the District has proven themselves to be incredibly supportive, committed to ensuring that De Anza College is a resource that enhances the surrounding community.

As 2024 ended, PCFMA entered a partnership with Vallejo Main Street to support the Saturday farmers market in Vallejo. Since the market's inception in 1999, PCFMA has worked with the Central Core Restoration Corporation (CCRC), a nonprofit organization supporting businesses in downtown Vallejo. With CCRC wrapping up its operations at the end of 2024, CCRC Board members connected PCFMA with Vallejo Main Street, helping to ensure ongoing local support for the [Vallejo Farmers Market](#).

### **Fighting to Keep Farmers Markets Accessible**

Early in 2024, PCFMA and farmers markets throughout the state were faced with a daunting challenge: the state's fiscal crisis led California's governor to recommend removing state funding for the [California Nutrition Incentive Program](#) (CNIP), the statewide healthy food fund that for years, had successfully leveraged state funding to draw down federal funding for the [Market Match](#) program.

Over many months, farmers markets and their supporters throughout California launched the “Save Market Match” campaign to restore state funding for CNIP. After dozens of public hearings and meetings with legislators, hundreds of signatures on petitions, and a rally on the steps of the state Capitol, [Market Match was saved](#). State funding for CNIP was restored and while it came too late for the state of California to attempt to draw down federal funding for 2025, it ensured that Market Match could continue uninterrupted. This means ongoing access to fresh and healthy California-grown food for low-income customers and sustained sales for small-scale California farmers.

## **Dealing with new Weather Challenges**

Among the many reasons that California is the nation's most productive agricultural state – in addition to its large size and the incredible efforts and innovations of its farmers – is the mild climate that much of the state enjoys. Up and down the state, between the ocean and the mountains, are multiple micro-climates exempt from the punishing winters and heavy snowfall that farms throughout the Great Plains routinely see, and ideal for growing fruits, vegetables, and nuts.

This “Mediterranean Climate” also makes California a great place to operate farmers markets. The abundance of fresh fruit and vegetables means that farmers markets are lush with produce and the mild climate makes shopping outdoors enjoyable throughout much of the year.

PCFMA has always planned for winter weather, recognizing that while winter storms make outdoor shopping or managing a farmers market rather soggy, the winter rains that fill reservoirs and snowpack in the mountains are essential for spring and summer irrigation on California farms. PCFMA’s plan for extreme winter weather is designed to keep farmers markets safe while continuing to provide year-round outlets for our farmers.

But recently, PCFMA has also needed to plan for extreme summer weather. In recent years, heat waves have been more intense and lasted longer. This combination creates dangerous conditions for both those who are working long hours at the farmers market and those who are shopping at the farmers market. In 2024, the heat wave that struck around Independence Day and lingered through the Bay Area forced the closure of popular evening markets when it was determined that it was too dangerous for market sellers and patrons to be outside at the peak of the heat wave.

Unfortunately, it appears that this pattern of weather extremes and intense heat waves will be an ongoing factor for farmers markets to deal with in the coming years. In response, PCFMA is updating its policies on pre-emptive farmers market closures, working on new communications tools to quickly communicate with farmers market sellers, and budgeting for the potential of more summer closures due to heat in the future.

## **Saying Goodbye to PCFMA Family Members**

In June, the Bay Area food scene lost one of its most passionate advocates with the passing of [Narsai David](#). Among Narsai's many accomplishments – which include his restaurant, television appearances, and popular radio show – was Narsai's lifelong commitment to California farmers. Narsai was a founding member of PCFMA's Board of Directors serving as its first chair, which later garnered him the accolade of "Chair Emeritus" upon his retirement from the PCFMA Board.

In the early part of 2024, the PCFMA staff saw the departure of three key leaders who had helped to build and sustain the organization, especially during the challenging years of the COVID-19 pandemic. [Ben Palazzolo](#) departed PCFMA after nearly 13 years, including 9 years as PCFMA's Director of Operations. Paolo Obillo and Greg Pursley, two PCFMA Regional Managers, left early in 2024 after more than 5 years in that role. All three of them had risen through the organization after starting as Market Managers and contributed enormously to PCFMA's success during their time at PCFMA.

This year, we bid farewell to Debra Morris, a valued member of the PCFMA Marketing Team who dedicated nearly two decades to our organization. Joining PCFMA in 2005, Deb became a familiar voice through her contributions to our communications efforts. She penned monthly emails to customers, keeping them informed about our farmers' markets, and authored insightful articles in local newspapers, highlighting the importance of supporting local agriculture within the Bay Area community. More recently, Deb provided invaluable assistance to our customers through the "Dear Deb" column, answering their questions and enhancing their understanding of PCFMA's role as the farmers' market operator. We extend our sincere gratitude to Deb for her years of dedicated service and wish her all the best in her retirement.

## **Looking Forward to 2025**

As the calendar changes from 2024 to 2025, we are looking forward to new opportunities.

In late 2024, PCFMA was awarded a Specialty Crop Block Grant from the California Department of Food and Agriculture (CDFA) to launch a series of nutrition education activities in our farmers markets using the [POP Club](#) curriculum developed by the [Farmers Market Coalition](#). The team that will lead and implement this project is coming together with the first events planned for March 2025.

This project is an exciting follow-up to PCFMA's 2019 project that supported school field trips to farmers markets. When the pandemic closed schools in March 2020, PCFMA's project was forced to transition to provide online content instead of in-person activities. While we are incredibly proud of what PCFMA's team accomplished with farm tours and cooking demonstrations during the revamped project and the subsequent USDA-funded “

[Beyond the Market](#)" project, we are looking forward to the return of face-to-face engagement with kids again in our farmers markets.

We are also looking forward to pending changes in three of California's healthy food access programs. The state of California has stated that the WIC program which provides nutrition assistance to expecting and new mothers and their children, will be made accessible in farmers markets in early 2025. That will be followed up by the introduction of electronic benefits for the WIC Farmers Market Nutrition Program (FMNP) and Senior Farmer Market Nutrition Program (SFMNP), replacing the paper vouchers that the two FMNP programs have traditionally used.

The changes to these programs will present challenges to get farmers and farmers markets enrolled, and to educate consumers on how to access and use the benefits. Meeting this challenge successfully means increased access to California-grown fruits and vegetables for low-income families and sustained sales for California farmers so PCFMA is preparing today to meet that challenge.

In 2025 we will also continue our partnership with CVNL. They will conduct leadership training for PCFMA's new staff leaders and leaders of other Bay Area farmers market organizations. In March, CVNL will facilitate a strategic planning process with PCFMA's Board of Directors and staff leadership to help the organization further strengthen its foundations, processes, and programs to ensure the organization's ongoing success and sustainability.

There will undoubtedly be other challenges and opportunities that arise in 2025. We have learned after more than 35 years of operating farmers markets that the only big surprise is when there are no surprises. As we step into the new year, we do so with optimism and confidence that we can build upon our past successes and the lessons learned from past challenges to continue to bring food, fun and a sense of community to the Bay Area through our farmers markets.

Happy New Year and Cheers to a Happy and Healthy 2025!

TAGS