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Sun Prairie and Elver Park host new farmers' markets

BY **LIZ MERFELD** JULY 6, 2017 5:00 AM



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**Elver Park offers easy access to produce and accepts SNAP/EBT.**

**On a recent Saturday morning**, Sherri Swartz and her daughter were on a strawberry hunt, dreaming of shortcake. Between errands, they stocked up at the new Elver Park farmers' market in the parking lot next to the splash park.

At Yee Circle Farm's table, they were first in line — in fact, the only ones in line. Quarts were selling for \$4, and pickings were good. Vendor Yee Ythao says that the market, which opened June 10 and runs Saturdays through September 16 (8 a.m.–noon), attracts families who live within walking or biking distance and seniors who appreciate the easy parking.

At the next table, Francisco Soza of the nearby Prairie Hills neighborhood was sizing up purple geraniums for his front porch. His wife, Taryn, shouldered a canvas tote erupting with spring greens, cilantro, asparagus and radishes. An impressive bounty for a 10-minute drop-in. They first heard about the market through their neighborhood association, which surveyed residents last fall to gauge interest. "This is super convenient," Taryn says. "I don't want to deal with parking downtown."

On the other side of the 12-table market, manager Aislynn Miller scanned the park for any sign of the tractor ride, due back any moment. Each Saturday, there's some attraction here, like hula-hoopers, science shows or live music. It's all an effort to "enhance the quality of life in Elver Park by providing an activity that continues to foster community and social interaction," says Joe Ryan, one of the market's organizers (and today's tractor driver), in an email. "And to contribute to the vitality, health, nutritional and shared values of the Elver Park communities."

The market accepts SNAP/EBT cards, too. It's as simple as scanning the card once and choosing how many \$1 or \$3

laminated market dollars you'd like. Vendors accept these and are reimbursed at closing.

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**Dante Graham of Bur Oak Gardens**

**Sun Prairie also debuted** a new farmers' market in June. Look for the Prairie Lakes market Thursdays from 3 to 6:30 p.m. in the parking lot of the Shoppes at Prairie Lakes, near

Costco. It features locally sourced produce, flowers, food and crafts.

“We thought a lot about the day and time,” says Scott Anderson, director of operations for Prairie Lakes.

Organizers wanted to avoid conflicts with downtown Sun Prairie’s established Saturday morning market. Thursday also “feels like a relaxing day and close to special weekend meals,” says Anderson, who notes it’s also convenient for people stopping after work.

One vendor is 82-year-old Leslie Kidd, who is selling beets, broccoli and eggs from a cooler. Kidd is a veteran seller, having vended for 18 years at Sun Prairie’s Saturday morning market behind the police department. “I have a following there,” he says, and he’s hopeful he’ll build one here too. His farm is based 23 miles east in Waterloo. Other vendors come from Reedsburg (Little Red’s Honey Farm), Beaver Dam (Chippy’s Kettle Corn) and Madison —budding entrepreneur Makayla Allen sells colorful scented bath bombs.

“We have carefully chosen vendors that complement each other,” says Anderson. From opening day, June 1, the number of shoppers has exceeded his expectations: “Our vendors are very surprised, for this being a new market.”

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