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Valentine's Day

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THE BAKER COUNTY

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The Beaver Street Farmer's Market (It's Still There)

LAVIECE SMALLWOOD
Staff Writer

If you haven't been to the Beaver Street Farmer's Market in a while you'll be in for a big surprise and change. But it is well worth the trip to see.

About the turn of the century many Baker County farmers peddled their produce and live stock to the Farmer's Market in Jacksonville, first located on Bay Street. They traveled by mule and wagon and they stayed the few days it took to sell everything, sleeping beneath their wagons, before returning home. The \$15.00 or so they made on their once a year trek lasted many of them an entire year.

As a small child in the 30s and 40s, my grandfather, Thomas Fraser of Sanderson, would allow us to travel with him to the Farmer's Market relocated at the foot of the Beaver Street over pass. Grandpa had an old Model-T car and it was loaded with produce. When we would get hungry, I remember he would shuck us kids an ear of tender sweet corn, Grandma would shell us some peas, and wash off some okra pods and sweet turnip roots. Of course we had fresh tomatoes, cucumbers and radishes so we children learned to eat and like raw vegetables.

When I reared my children in the 1960s, I went to the Farmer's Market on Beaver Street each Monday and brought back a bushel of oranges and grapefruit, and piles of fresh vegetables to feed my family for the week. Many of the farmers who peddled their produce were from Baker, Columbia and Bradford counties. They had been there for years, they remembered my Grandpa,



LaViece Smallwood/Staff Photographer

According to venders this fruit comes from Mexico and is supposed to relieve stress.



LaViece Smallwood/Staff Photographer

Local residents say that you won't find fruit and bigger or riper than what you'll find at the Farmer's Market.



LaViece Smallwood/Staff Photographer

Neighborhood shoppers survey over the produce as they search for the most freshest fruit they can find.

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Fruit Market

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and it was always good to see them and catch up on their families.

Not so anymore. The last of the old timers to leave was Mr. Collins from Columbia County. When I go now, the produce stands are rented by people representing nationalities from almost any country you can name and the hustle and bustle of the market place has changed. The old produce stands have been torn down to make room for modern buildings, but new ones have been erected a short distance away, still at the over pass on Beaver Street. Crates of fruits and vegetables are still for sale, but usually not locally grown. These are modern-day farmers, selling the produce from

cold storage trucks. You can buy a container of blue berries, raspberries or black berries, packages of washed and cut up greens (mustard, turnips or spinach)—all for \$1.00. Package salad greens as well. It pays to drive there and shop. The market leaves nothing to be desired, corn, potatoes, beans, peas, carrots celery, okra, hot peppers, mangos, cucumbers, strawberries, broccoli, papayas, apples, oranges, watermelons, tomatoes, all shapes and sizes, and grapefruit the size of a basket ball (actually grown in Tampa). Many of the vegetables are packaged organically grown. You can purchase by the bushel or basket. The venders are friendly and helpful. Some of the fruits and vegetables are not American, but tasty if you know how to prepare them, and the booth proprietors are helpful.

They sell a lot of prickly pears because when they tell you that you can release stress by eating them, you are willing to try the fruit. I did. It works too! And I learned something about sweet potatoes from a Bradford County farmer who said, "The Red Jewel sweet potato is best to any other kind". He said to never wash a sweet potato, just rub them off good with a rag, grease them good and bake for about 20 minutes on 200 degrees. He grows his sweet potato in boxes up next to the wall and waters them with freshly squeezed orange or grapefruit juice mixed in water. That, he said, is the best fertilizer you can use. I always go to his booth for my sweet potatoes.

You can also buy flowers, plants and dish gardens at the market. Also fresh chickens!

You should be advised to shop

around when you come, as prices vary from booth to booth. The market's biggest's customers are those who can and freeze because you can definitely buy cheaper at the market. If you really want to save money, car pool, buy in quantity and divide with each other.

By shopping at the Beaver Street Farmer's Market you can save bundles of money and it is an exciting experience. Take the children along. It is an education not taught in school.

To get there, take I-10 to Stockton Street exit, go north, dead-end at Beaver Street, turn right and the Market is at the foot of the over-pass on your right. You can't miss it. Or, if you want to drive Hwy 90 (Beaver Street), leave Macclenny and drive east directly to the over pass and the market is on your right.