

Market Thymes

A Publication of Pacific Coast Farmers' Market Association

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National Agriculture Week

March 14 through March 20 is National Agriculture Week. It is a time to thank those who bring you fresh local produce and other commodities from right here in California.

American agriculture is responsible for providing the necessities of everyday life... food, fiber, clothing, and even fuel. That's the message of National Agriculture Week.

Farmers, ranchers, agricultural associations, corporations, farmers' market operators, government agencies, and countless others across America will celebrate the abundance provided by agriculture. This year's theme is "American Agriculture: Abundant, Affordable, Amazing" reminding consumers how important agriculture is.

PCFMA is encouraging consumers around the Bay Area to show their thanks to California farmers and ranchers by buying locally-grown products, especially at local farmers' markets where consumers can purchase those products directly from the farmers themselves.



We hope you join us in celebrating American agriculture

during this National Ag Week. Shop your local farmers' market and thank your farmers for providing the freshest produce and other products directly to you. Buy local and buy fresh—your farmers will thank you for it!

Thank Your Local Farmer



Photo by Roxanne Terres, Concord Farmers' Market, Louie Palacios of Cecchini & Cecchini

Asparagus!

Asparagus is back in town! It is the harbinger of spring with tall green stalks of earthy-green locally-grown asparagus! From big fat jumbo asparagus to pencil-thin young asparagus, our farmers cut them right in the fields to bring to you the very next market day.

From the fertile soils of the San Joaquin Delta region to the irrigated Southern California desert, California leads the nation in asparagus production with more than 50,000 metric tons harvested annually. Most of this is marketed as fresh green asparagus.

The asparagus plant is a member of the Lily family. Its name comes from the Greek language meaning "sprout" or "shoot." Widely cultivated for its tender, succulent, edible shoots, asparagus cultivation began more than 2,000 years ago in the eastern Mediterranean region. Asparagus was first planted in California during the 1850's. The state's moderate climate, together with its variety of fertile soils, contributes to the outstanding quality of asparagus grown in California.

Selection and Storage

Select bright green asparagus with closed, compact, firm tips. If the tips are slightly wilted, freshen them up by soaking them in cold water. The fat spears are just as tender as the thin ones. Tenderness relates to color—the greener the better, and for white asparagus, the whiter the better.

Keep fresh asparagus moist until you intend to use it. Make sure you use your asparagus within 3 to 4 days, a week at the most.



Photo by Greg Zeroun, Market Manager

To freeze, trim off woody ends, leave whole or cut into 2-inch lengths. Blanch in boiling water for 2 to 4 minutes. Cool, place in freezer bag, and store in freezer. Do not defrost before cooking.

Do not re-freeze. Make sure you use asparagus within 8 months.

Everyone is Irish on St. Patrick's Day

On **St. Patrick's Day, March 17th**, the traditional Irish feast menu starts with Irish Brown Soda Bread. Main dishes consists of the "Dublin Coddle," made from kitchen staples like potatoes, carrots, sausages and bacon. Or try a hearty Irish stew which features chicken or lean lamb, together with potatoes, carrots, onion, mushrooms, and plenty of herbs and spices. Colcannon is a traditional St. Patrick's Day mash of cabbage, potatoes and leeks. For dessert, there is a traditional Irish apple tart.

"Dublin Coddle"

- 1 tablespoon vegetable oil
- 2 pounds seasoned pork sausage, cut in pieces
- 2 large diced onions
- 1 pound lean bacon
- 2 cloves garlic, minced
- 4 large potatoes, peeled and sliced
- 2 carrots, sliced
- Fresh herbs like parsley, thyme, sage, and oregano
- Salt and pepper to taste
- Cider



Heat oil in a pan; add onions and garlic and sauté until soft. Put sausages, bacon, potatoes, herbs and carrots in the pan with the onions and garlic. Cover with cider and cook over moderate heat for 1 hour.

Whole Wheat Irish Soda Bread

- 4 cups whole wheat flour
- 2 cups unbleached all-purpose flour
- 1 teaspoon salt
- 1 teaspoon baking soda
- 1/2 teaspoon white sugar or brown sugar
- 1 cup buttermilk



Combine dry ingredients. Add buttermilk. On floured bread board, knead dough for no more than a minute. Shape dough into a circle with a height of about two inches. Place on lightly oiled baking sheet.

With sharp floured knife, cut an x nearly halfway through the dough. Bake about 40 minutes in a 400°F oven. Dough should sound hollow when tapped with knuckles or handle of spoon when done. Place loaf on wire rack and let rest at least an hour before slicing.

Recipes: Debra Morris, PCFMA.

