

COMMON GROUND

March 12, 2018

Dear Mayor Casale & City Council Members,

Thank you again for all of your support in bringing the Beacon Farmers' Market from the riverfront location into the heart of Beacon in 2017. We anticipated the move would be successful but it exceeded even our own expectations. Most notably: each of our farms did an estimated 35% better in sales, we saw a strong increase in weekly resident foot traffic and our food benefit sales (SNAP, FMNP/WIC etc.) nearly tripled. Overwhelmingly, customers were delighted with the move. Many residents now spend their Sundays walking into town, spending hours visiting the farmers market, the Beacon Flea Market and strolling down Main Street to finish their grocery shopping and enjoy Beacon's many eateries. Nearby businesses, including Beacon Pantry and Beacon Natural Market, have noted increased customer traffic on market days. We anticipate all of these economic benefits will only continue to grow as the Beacon Farmers' Market firmly establishes itself as a part of Beacon's thriving Main Street.

With all of these first year milestones in our back pocket, we are working on 2018 with a focussed goal of increased connection between the market and our Main Street neighbors. We see a great deal of potential success, with well thought out collaborative partnerships. Currently, we are working to identify potential sponsorship for a "Beacon Business and Non Profit tent", which would allow us to host small businesses and organizations as guest vendors at no cost. We are also brainstorming "market day" incentive programs, intended to drive customers from the market into shops on Main Street. And we intend to host more market programming focussed on highlighting local businesses.

With all of that said, we understand that some Main Street businesses still see the Beacon Farmers' Market as a drain on their potential Sunday morning and afternoon sales. My goal as Market Manager, (a part-time position), is to use any hours I have available outside of the market day to make better use of the market as a resource for our neighboring businesses. We are always open to and available for collaboration with local businesses. At the same time, the market committee and myself make all of our decisions with the ultimate goal of providing a thoughtful, engaging and affordable market experience for all of Beacon's residents.

To address some specific concerns:

- 50% of our vendors are agricultural. The remaining 50% predominantly utilize local agricultural products. Eight of our regular vendors are based in Beacon, four of whom also have shops on Main Street.
- We require all vendors to submit up-to-date licenses and any required permits each market season. Each vendor is required to carry liability insurance. Any vendor preparing food at a market in Dutchess County must be reviewed and permitted by the

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Dutchess County Dept. of Health, and they must reapply for that permit as required. Home processors are required to have an Article 20-C permit and comply with NYS regulations. Vendors requiring the use of a commercial kitchen must provide proof of commercial kitchen space or lease.

- The Beacon Farmers' Market has agreed to no longer accept out-of-state vendors moving forward. Currently, we have two vendors that join us from northern New Jersey. Both of these vendors have been with the Beacon market through "leaner" years, before many of Beacon's current Main Street businesses arrived. They have both put in a great deal of effort into building up and maintaining customer relationships, and can be credited with bringing many loyal shoppers from neighboring towns into Beacon each and every Sunday for the better part of a decade. Myself and the market committee, believe they are staples of the market's reputation, and that it would hurt the market to have them leave. Ultimately, it would bring less people into Beacon from our nearby towns from week to week. Their markets are also their primary sources of income. A fact we do not take lightly when considering our established vendors.
- Market vendors are instructed to park in parking lots further away from the market, so as to leave as much room as possible for customer parking. Most vendors park behind the VFW Hall or behind Rite Aid. Portable restrooms are provided by the Beacon Farmers' Market behind the Mobil Gas Station, as we were not permitted to have them at a closer location. We are hopeful that our budget will allow for additional signage this year to help guide customers to our restrooms, as well as under-utilized parking lots within the one block radius surrounding the market.
- You would be hard pressed to find a farmers' market similar to our own that does not have music. Our feeling is that we should utilize the platform available to host and pay local musicians that may not have the opportunity to play in more reputable establishments.
- We spend a great deal of effort researching and observing the economic and social effects of farmers' markets, particularly those similarly situated within a town center. Evidence across the board suggests that farmers markets bring a notable increase in business to an area, whether it be on the day of the market, or by familiarizing customers with neighboring establishments that they then return to patronize at a later date. A Hudson Valley example would be the Kingston Farmers' Market. They have been situated in the center of Kingston's Uptown neighborhood for 15 years. With concerns of business competition in their early years, the market has ultimately proven to be a big economic success for the area and has the overwhelming support of its nearby businesses.

The point I'd like to stress is that a farmers' market is so much more than simply shopping for produce. A farmer's market is a pleasant and engaging social gathering, free of politics or agendas, where residents from every corner of a community can enjoy a shared love of local agriculture and support small business. A farmers market is a place where neighbors meet,

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share stories, spend time enjoying each others company, snack on simple, affordable food and participate in arts programming or listen to local musicians. A farmers' market provides a direct link between our Main Street chefs and the farmers that grow the food they put on their menus. A farmers market is also a platform for small businesses and nonprofits, often not represented on Main Street, in search of person-to-person community connection.

The Beacon Farmers' Market has found a wonderful home on Veterans' Place. We ask that you allow us to continue building upon the success of 2017, and trust that we are ultimately working toward a common goal of Beacon's collective success.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Sara Sylvester', written in a cursive style.

Sara Sylvester
Farmers' Market Manager
Common Ground Farm