

the Alvarez Farm



Alvarez is a contributor to the Market's Community Supported Agriculture (C.S.A.) Program. Through his successful farming Alvarez expanded to sell produce at 14 farmer's markets between the Tri-Cities and Seattle, including Renton, Columbia City, Kirkland, Madison, Lake City, Magnolia, Kent, Federal Way, Broadway Lake Forrest Park, Puyallup, Yakima and Pike Place.

"We are a one stop shop," said Alvarez. "People tell me they shop all the markets but always come back for my stuff because we have the best *and* the most."

During the planting season everyone helps to begin the season: clearing new fields (organically, with fire), preparing and planting, planning crop alternations, sowing and harvesting.

As the first crops are ready for market, the trucks (and vans) load and head out to the various markets, first with just a few onions, asparagus, etc., adding variety as the crops are harvested. Some head over the Snoqualmie pass to Pike Place and Seattle-area markets and others stay back "home" on the farm. Momma Maria and a couple others stay back for a Eastern Washington markets.

As the season gets going, a sort of rhythm

emerges: Wednesdays at about 3 a.m. loaded trucks head west to the Market (s). Organic Wednesdays are big at Pike Place, sometimes selling several truck loads of fresh produce. Then back again for the big Thursday pack-up to prepare for the busy weekends. Trucks constantly make the trip over the pass, freshening and replenishing supplies.

Sunday nights the empty trucks head back, leaving a token selling crew. Mondays the trucks are cleaned for the Tuesday pick-and-pack and off to market again.

"Now that I've tried farming, I don't want to do anything else," said Ray Bermudez, an honorary Alvarez, involved in all aspects of the farm and a familiar face in many Seattle-area farmer's markets. "There is always something happening."

The farm is set up to get it in and get it out with sorting and packing areas, cold storage facilities and the farmhouse compound. The farmhouse compound includes the peanut room, the staging and loading area and lunge areas. The entire hacienda is inviting in a big-family sort of way, the perfect place for kids to grow up.

All the decorations in the farmhouse are farming related, including a hand-painted Sarah Clementson watercolor painting of their stand at the Pike Place Market in all it's summer glory. Clementson said Larry Alvarez commissioned her to paint the peppers several years ago and she's been painting them ever since. The picturesque peppers are prominently featured on the cover of her new 2006 calendar.

For a Seattleite, the Alvarez Farm feels like another country in another time. Seeing the seeds, watching freshly picked crops wheeled in, it is overwhelming. Everything tastes better here, fresher, seeing what you will be eating growing, then pulled from the earth. It is the ultimate way to, as the Market slogan says, "meet the producer."



Rosa weaving a garlic strand on the farm.

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