

A bend in the Hocking River

Surrounded by the forested hills of Southeast Ohio, the city of Athens, founded shortly before 1800, grew up around an oxtail bend in the Hocking River about twenty-five miles upstream from where the Hocking flows into the Ohio River. In the period since its founding, the city and surrounding territory have endured the extraction of coal and timber, followed by the decline of those industries. Most farms are small here. Clay soil and hilly, unglaciated terrain in this Appalachian region contrast with the black soil and flat land of northern Ohio and the Midwest. Marginal soils and depleted resources make Athens County and surrounding counties the poorest in Ohio and more like the rural counties in nearby West Virginia and Kentucky. But the natural beauty and sometimes inexpensive land have brought many to the area, including small farmers and specialty producers.

Athens is the county seat and the largest city in a several county region. Besides being a commercial center, it is the home of Ohio University, founded in 1804. By the 1960s the university had become the dominant employer and economic force in the city. When the university is in full session, its student and staff population nearly doubles that of year-round area residents, who number under 20,000. The university contributes to the success of the Athens Farmers Market by helping maintain the employment level and overall economic health of the town, by creating a well educated population, and by bringing to Athens many international students and faculty who frequent the farmers market.

Local markets, once common here just as in traditional Asian, Latin, and European cultures, are making a comeback in the U.S. Athens seems to have the right mix of ingredients – small growers, educated citizens, and a regional commercial center – to take advantage of a growing interest in fresh, quality food and local products. Support from city officials has provided an additional critical ingredient of success: an excellent location.

Market beginnings

The origins of the Athens Farmers Market lay in conversation among a few citizens and city officials in the early 1970s. At the Soil and Water Conservation District office in Athens, John Millar was a district conservationist. As he recalls it, one day Harold Dodd, a technician in the same office, suggested that Athens needed a farmers market and John agreed.

Donald Barrett, mayor of Athens from 1972 to 1984, recalls that a few local farmers began selling produce from downtown metered parking spaces. This created a potential conflict with licensed street vendors in designated downtown spots, and city officials encouraged the farmers market to find another site. According to Barrett, John Millar was key to the effort and was “the godfather of the market.”

Others including Marian Keller and Ruth Richmond and County Extension agent Kenneth Ackerman joined Millar and Dodd. Their search for a market site led to an offer from Landmark Cooperative of use of its property in town, as well as an offer from Athens County Fairgrounds board member Howard Stout to use that site. The market formation group was not satisfied with those two possible locations. Keller and Richmond suggested inquiring with the city about use of the East State Street park and recreation area. When the group did so, Mayor Barrett supported

the idea. The city also was sponsoring a new community gardens program near the proposed market site.

Barrett and others wanted certain agreements about the market, in particular that it not be used to sell crafts and that the market be used only for selling by the producers themselves.

Discussions ensued among the founding group, which then drafted the first bylaws and rules for the Athens Farmers Market, the basis for the bylaws and rules in use today.

Harold Dodd and others in the group began soliciting participation by area growers. At the Extension office, Ackerman helped by sending a letter to numerous growers in the area announcing the launching of a farmers market.

The market was planned for 10:00 a.m. Saturdays, using a small, unmarked paved area adjacent to tennis courts in the East State Street city park. The first market, held on a summer day in 1972, drew participation from three producers; on the following week, there were five. That summer, market participation peaked at a dozen vendors, mostly vegetable producers. Ed Rannow, a teacher at Athens High School who also sold honey at the market, was chosen as the first market manager, an unpaid position. During the first two years, producers paid \$3 per day, and Rannow collected fees from producers on each market day. Soon market members established a practice of paying \$25 for a full season or \$5 per day until reaching \$25. Beginning with the 1973 season, the market was open every Saturday morning from late April until Thanksgiving, and a Wednesday morning market was added for a second market day each week. Over the years, the growers, many of whom picked their produce early the same morning, have kept the starting hour at 10:00 a.m. Sue Rice, a long-standing market member, recalls that the market quickly drew customers, but during the first several years there were not many sellers. Most were vegetable growers. Crafts were excluded, with small exceptions for dried flowers and similar products from the growers.

Rannow was manager until his death in 1982. John Millar was then chosen as market manager, beginning with the 1983 season, and he held the position until 1992. Early on, market members elected Larry Payne as president of the market, a position he held until 1986. Bill Wethington, president from 1987 to 1998, followed him in that position. In 1999, Ann Fugate was elected president and has been re-elected in succeeding years.

Growing in the city recreation area

The market's popularity grew steadily, helped by its excellent location. Construction in the early 1970s of the Athens Mall adjacent to the city park greatly increased traffic on East State Street. The Kroger supermarket in that mall, less than two hundred yards from the market site, captured the majority of grocery sales in the area. A highway bypass for U.S. 33 and 50/32, completed in the late 1970s, placed a major interchange and State Street exits near the market site. The eastward growth of commercial buildings and increased traffic along State Street continued in the 1980s, including construction of the University Mall, another private development less than a mile east of the farmers market site.

After the first ten years, the farmers market was moved a couple hundred feet north to a larger paved parking area closer to State Street. The market used existing parking stripes on the asphalt pad, and Millar painted the first set of numbers in the 32 stalls adjacent to a grass

playing field. This row of 32 spaces – each 11 feet wide and about 25 feet front to back – constituted the available assigned stalls for the next fifteen years.

Over the years, while market members maintained the rule of selling only by the producers, the variety of products grew considerably. Early on, bedding plants became popular, and later shrubs and trees were added. The presence on a busy market day of several vendors of baked goods, eggs, and cut flowers eventually became common, along with expanded selection in the dominant categories of fruits and vegetables. By the 1990s, several producers offered poultry and several kinds of frozen and smoked meats, usually from pasture-based animals. Prepared foods also became more common at the market. Bakers as well as vendors of meats and prepared foods were subject to licensing and more scrutiny from the Ohio Department of Agriculture and the Athens City/County Health Department.

A busy market and a low entry fee attracted vendors from a larger territory. A few producers drove up to two hours to reach the market, although most were less than an hour away. Many of these producers also were selling at other markets, at their farm, or at other outlets in the area. In addition to Wednesday and Saturday morning, summer weekday afternoon markets were attempted at different times on Mondays and Tuesdays. These market days were poorly attended, and after a final attempt at a new location in 1999, the second weekday market was abandoned.

The Athens Farmers Market became more colorful as well. Vendors gradually improved their displays and compensated for the lack of a permanent shelter by bringing a ever-changing variety of umbrellas, tarps, and tents. By the mid-1990s, Saturdays in July, August, and September brought fifty vendors and hundreds of customers for up to three hours of intense business.

Congestion began imposing limits on the market as larger numbers of vendors and customers crowded the recreation area on Saturday mornings. With East State Street carrying increased traffic on only two lanes, market customers were elbow to elbow in the aisle, then bumper to bumper when trying to re-enter State Street.

The growth of the market has been aided by local media coverage, almost always positive in nature. Advertising by the farmers market has been largely confined to a small, occasional presence in one or two local newspapers, supplementing those papers' brief community event listings. One specialty vegetable grower has also sponsored an ad promoting the market, broadcast regularly by the local public radio and television station. Learning about the farmers market by word of mouth probably has been as important as anything in bringing customers to the market.

1990s: new rules, winter market

The Athens Farmers Market existed for its first thirty years as an unincorporated association. Most organizational business has been conducted at an annual spring meeting, held at the County Extension facility in Athens. During the first two decades of the market, typical attendance at these meetings was about 20 people; by the 1990s about twice that many usually attended. A fall potluck dinner, also held at the Extension building, occasionally provided a second yearly gathering point for market members.

John Millar served as manager through the 1992 season, after which he became assistant manager and Dave Gutknecht was designated market manager. In 1993, for the first time the manager's duties were compensated, at \$25 per week. The manager or assistant manager was on duty Wednesday and Saturday mornings to collect fees, direct traffic, handle questions, and ring the 10 o'clock opening bell.

Growers with an assigned market stall have always been able to keep their spots if they reserve their stalls again the following spring within two weeks following the business meeting. By the mid-1990s, with still only 32 assigned stalls available, a long waiting list had developed of producers wanting an assigned space. At the market site, a second, shorter row of stalls (unnumbered and unassigned) was used on busy days. Producers without an assigned space filled in the stalls available on a given day. Each year nearly 100 producers used the market over the course of eight months.

Several important rules changes were made in 1995. The per-day fee was increased to \$10 and the total annual fee to \$50. Also at that spring's business meeting, the market manager's pay was increased from \$25 per week to \$50. Annual revenue from fees grew to over \$3,000; in 1997 it was over \$4,000; by 2001 total fee revenue was over \$7,000.

Beginning in 1995, the Saturday morning market was continued year-round, and during the winter of 1995-96 a handful of producers were present each week over the winter. The manager's duties continued to be limited to the approximately seven months from a spring opening date until Thanksgiving, and fees were collected only during that period. Also begun in 1995 was participation in the WIC (Women, Infants, and Children) Farmers Market Nutrition Program. Since that time, each year WIC clients have received coupons that can be used to purchase fresh fruit and vegetables from participating farmers market producers.

Also in 1995, city officials announced a proposal for a major project in the East State Street park, which would require relocation of the farmers market. The following spring, Athens City voters approved an income tax levy to fund construction of a large multi-purpose community center in the area in which the market had been operating. Included in the initial plan was an open-sided shelter for multiple public functions including a farmers market. However, this shelter was dropped before plans were finalized. Any such construction would still have to address the location's parking and congestion problems.

New location, new growth

In spring of 1998, the Athens Farmers Market relocated to make room for construction in the East State Street city park. During the previous winter, the market manager and officers had approached the manager of the University Mall, a site less than a mile east of the city park, with excellent traffic access and a large parking lot. Mall owners and management agreed to allow the Athens Farmers market to operate without charge in the front section of that mall's large parking lot, immediately adjacent to State Street.

The new location boosted market traffic, since the site allowed for more stalls and wider aisles as well as much more parking for customers and easier access. Late summer Saturdays saw as many as 60 vendors on one day, with over 80 stalls in use. The stalls were narrower than at the old site, and producers were allowed to reserve additional stall space. In addition to a much

wider customer aisle between two facing rows of sellers, more market stalls and customer space were created by adding a side aisle extending from the center of one of the main rows. In the summer, this side aisle was extended further to create more stalls — although fewer customers seemed to turn off the main aisle to go up the extension.

A few rule changes – approved by the market members at annual business meetings – refined the market operation as it became busier. In 1999, the full annual fee was required by a vendor's second visit to the market. In 2000, that fee was increased to \$60 per stall per year. Accommodation of more vendors was encouraged by a bylaw change allowing options for 1, 1.5, and 2 stalls. Total fees, the sole source of revenue for the Athens Farmers Market, grew to \$10,000 by 2002.

Market expenses also grew, while continuing to be quite modest – equivalent to as little as 1 percent of total market sales. In 2000, the manager began receiving compensation for increasing off-site responsibilities, such as maintaining the member list and records, fielding inquiries, promoting the market, and collaborating with local allies and institutions. In spring of 2002, fees were increased to \$80 for one stall, \$130 for 1.5 stalls, and \$200 for 2 stalls. Also in 2001, for the first time a formal organizational foundation was established for the market. AFM compliance with workers compensation and tax laws was added to already existing liability insurance coverage. And after years of operating as an unincorporated association, the Athens Farmers Market filed papers in Ohio as a non-for-profit corporation. The AFM restated its purpose in the following statement:

The Athens Farmers Market shall operate on a not for profit basis. It shall serve its members and the public through education on the benefits to the community that result from supporting a locally based food economy and by providing a public market allowing direct connections between producers and consumers of local food and agricultural products.

In addition, in the fall of 2001 market members also approved the officers' proposal to file with the Internal Revenue Service for trade association status — 501(c)6. This status removes any federal income tax obligations for the farmers market, which typically has a very small annual net revenue. That application was filed in early 2002 and approved later that year.

Also in 2002, market members approved a proposal from the officers to establish a reserve for the future of the market. The intent was to save for possible future opportunities or obligations such as use of a piece of property and/or market shelter. The reserve funds are deposited in a local, interest-bearing account, to be used only with the approval of market members.

The year 2002 was the 30th year of the Athens Farmers Market and its fourth year at the University Mall location. Although the market has few assets and little long-term security, its economic importance and social vitality continue to grow.

The market scene, especially on Saturdays, has gradually acquired more of its own social atmosphere as customers linger to talk with friends, neighbors, and market producers.

Beginning in 2000, the market leadership launched a Farmers Market Café, a social space at the end of the side aisle on Saturdays. The market manager and representatives of other local organizations involved in promoting the local food economy set up a canopied space for customers, complete with displays, tables and chairs, and water and coffee by donation. The Café expanded in subsequent years and operates from May to October.

The Wednesday market was extended into December as late-season weather moderated. The Saturday market, still small in mid-winter, grew a bit in size each year. And the spring growth of the market came earlier and earlier, adding lots of flowers and bedding plants to the diverse mix of products. More and more people were coming to the market, not only for fresh foods but also for the lively and friendly atmosphere. In 2004, the regular market was extended an additional hour, making the selling period 10 a.m. to 1 p.m.

Beginning in 2004, in collaboration with the Athens Arts Commission and with approval from the City, the farmers market held a Sunday afternoon downtown promotional market once each month. While the event served to reach many campus and downtown residents with information about the full market on the east edge of town, low attendance caused the Athens Farmers Market to discontinue its participation after 2005.

In 2005, market stall fees were increased by 20 percent. Market managers were seeing increased demands both on-site and off-site. At the same time, the market was threatened by forced relocation resulting from possible construction and reconfiguring of the University Mall. Athens Farmers Market representatives continued to meet with City officials and other local allies in search of a more secure home for the market.

In early 2007, AFM members approved a complete rewrite of the market's bylaws and rules, in order to make these documents more clearly and accurately reflect actual market practices. No major policy or rule changes were made. These documents can be found at the AFM website.

2006: the word spreads

Moderating weather and increasing public interest supported the continued growth of the market. New owners of the shopping mall, along with support from key local allies, encouraged the development of exciting plans for the market future.

The year-round schedule supports quick expansion of market activity in early spring, beginning in March. And the late season market in November and December, formerly marking a significant slowing of market activity, has become much busier. All of 2006 and 2007 saw increased crowds of shoppers, more market Café activity, more bakers and ready to eat foods at the market, and more musicians and information tables.

The market also benefits from increased publicity, much of it free, from a variety of media. Articles praising Athens Farmers Market appeared during 2006 in *Audubon Magazine*, *Mother Earth News*, *Columbus Dispatch*, and the *Athens Messenger*. A discussion of unusual depth, written by a local graduate student, appeared in the Fall 2006 issue of *Focus*, trade publication of the American Geographical Society, and can be viewed at www.amergeog.org.

The annual Athens Farmers Market Directory received wider distribution than ever. Public participation also has increased through market coupons issued by the WIC (Women, Infants, and Children) program as well as through participation in the Senior Farmers Market Nutrition Program. Both of these programs, funded by the USDA, have seen high levels of client participation, bringing many new faces to the market.

Athens Farmers Market annual member fees were raised for 2006 to \$120 for one ten-foot wide stall, \$195 for 1.5 stalls, and \$320 for two stalls. The market's annual budget grew to around \$17,000. The manager's compensation grew in acknowledgement of increasing off-site duties,

and for the first time off-site work and pay for the market manager nearly equaled the on-site portion. The market manager or assistants were on duty at the market for about 38 weeks, while during the winter weeks (Saturdays only from mid-December to the end of March) the vendors in attendance organized themselves without benefit of a manager on duty.

2007: a change in course

Over the course of the year 2006, exciting plans were developed for a permanent pavilion for the farmers market. But those plans and the predicted future of the farmers market changed dramatically.

The 2007 market year began with a January announcement by long-time manager Dave Gutknecht that he would be stepping down on September 1. A succession plan was discussed, and the market's executive committee carried out an open hiring process. One of the applicants, assistant market manager Sarah Conley, was chosen to be the new manager, and her three-month training period began in July.

Meanwhile, the market visibly grew to new peaks in customer crowds and in the number of vendors. Summer and fall 2007 witnessed a 15-week string of Saturdays with more than 50 vendors, reaching 65 sellers on one day at the end of July. September's return of the University population brought out unprecedented numbers of new as well as familiar faces to the market aisles.

Adding to the market's popularity was its launching of a new service for food stamp recipients. With help from Athens County Job & Family Services, electronic benefits transfer capacity was installed, and the farmers market hired part-time help for a food stamp station on market days. The new service quickly gained users, and within the first few months the food stamp customers and their dollar volume spent at the market exceeded projections.

High hopes for permanent improvements at the market location were dashed, however. During 2005 and 2006 the new, local owners of the University Mall invested in interior improvements, secured a few new tenant businesses, and developed adjacent properties. Increased street traffic in the area also resulted from the opening of a new mall and big box stores on the other side of State Street, and additional businesses were projected for the market site and eastward along State Street.

Planning for a permanent pavilion at the market site involved a collaboration of the mall owners, the city of Athens, the farmers market, and its local ally ACEnet (Appalachian Center for Economic Networks). Advance support, among the grants contributing to this scenario, came from the Athens Foundation and Project for Public Spaces. Plans for the pavilion structure and a refurbished parking lot were drawn up with full participation in the design process by the farmers market and the mall owners.

With the project's multiple funding pieces apparently in place, at the end of 2006 preliminary construction bids were actually let. But one key grant that had been promised never came through, and the project stalled.

Months later, with no further progress on adequate funding and after raising the price tag of the proposal, the mall owners pulled the plug on the collaboration. They announced other intentions for development of the mall parking lot and requested that the farmers market plan to relocate.

Problems with the planned Pavilion at the Mall and negative comments in the paper upset the Mall owners. They asked the Market to start making plans to move. Several Market Board members meet with the Mall owners and were able to work out an agreement so that the Market could stay. The Pavilion plans were dropped and the Market started paying rent of \$6000 a year in 2008.

2008: Ann Fugate president, board members John Gillogly, Jack Cantrell, Becky Rondy, Rich Blazer, Rick Vest, Larry Cowdery, Roger Graves.

Long time market manager Dave Gutknecht stepped down and moved back to his home state of Minnesota. Many thanks to Dave for his years of service to the AFM.

Sarah Conley was hired as manager and Kip Parker and Joe Beres assistants. There were 71 members in 2008.

Market rent was \$6000 and fees were \$140 single, \$150 1 1/2 and \$400 double. Other sites for the market were considered including a return to the Athens Recreation Park. It was determined the Rec. Center parking lot was not big enough for the market and the Mall owners were satisfied with the new arrangement so we stayed at the Mall.

The Friends of the AFM was started by Joe and Lynda Berman. They started a market website, held cooking contests and had canvas AFM tote bags made. The CFI Donation Station was started by Keith Peterson. The SNAP/ token system started along with WIC and SFMNP (Senior Farmers Market Nutrition Program). Sarah and Ann created the token system for the SNAP benefits.

Sarah Started the Junior Chef School for kids to cook a dish at the market with one of Athens' fine Chefs and managed this popular program until 2011. Other staff members continued the Junior Chef School which has become a regular market attraction.

2009: Ann Tomsu – P, Jack Cantrell, Becky Rondy, Rick Vest, Rich Blazier, Roger Graves and new members J.B. King, Debra Bower.

Sarah Conley was manager and Kip Parker assistant manager. There were 79 members in 2009. Rent and market fees remain the same.

A trial farm verification program was started in which member farms were inspected to verify that they were growing everything that they sold. It was a voluntary program.

The Mall owners changed the name from University Mall to The Market on State. In December the indoor market was begun in the main entrance hallway of the Mall. Vendors had the choice of staying out in the parking lot or moving in for the winter.

2010: Jack Cantrell- President, Rich Blazier. Debbie Bowers. and new members Angie Starline, Chris Chmiel, Andy Arnold, Larry Cowdery.

Ann Fugate steps down as long time AFM president. Many thanks to Ann for her many years of service to the AFM.

Sarah Conley stepped down as market manager. Thanks to Sarah for her 2 years as market manager. Kip Parker was hired as new manager. Claudia Bayshaw

and Jan Spring was hired as assistant managers. Chris Burke was hired as Market Secretary and Michelle Gorman as promotions person. There were 85 market members listed in 2010. Rent and market fees remain the same.

A lease was signed with the Mall owners for the AFM to be located on their parking lot. All vendors were required to carry liability insurance.

The T configuration of the Market was eliminated. The center entrance to the Mall was closed on Saturdays so the market could extend as one row into the center section of the parking lot.

Market rules were updated with producer definitions and product eligibility guidelines.

Keith Peterson, founder of the Donation Station, steps down as manager of that program. Many thanks to Keith. The Donation Station has proved to be a great addition to the Market.

2011: Jack Cantrell – President, Larry Cowdery, Rich Blazer, Angie Starline, Debbie Bowers and new members Chris Bruno, Karen Hart.

Kip Parker continues as manager along with the others in staff positions. An all time peak of 98 members were listed with 25 on the waiting list.

An AFM Facebook page was established. The lease with the Mall is month to month.

Rent remains at \$6000. An ODA grant was lost and member fees increased \$15 to cover. New fees: single – \$155, one half – \$165, double \$415.

2012: Larry Cowdery – President, Debbie Bowers, Chris Bruno and new members Gary Molina, Maureen Burns, Ronda Clark, Jeremy Bowman.

Kip Parker continues as manager, Claudia Bayshaw and Jan Spring assistants, Chris Burke secretary, and Michelle Gorman promotions.

91 members listed for 2012. Rent remains \$6000. Fees the same

The Market is 40 years old, 1972-2012. Celebration events were planned for 2 Saturdays and an anniversary T shirt produced and sold for \$8.

A committee was formed to look into changing the market's governing board.

A fall member meeting was held to deal with several pressing issues. The market's rent was being increased to \$9000 in 2013 so stall fees were increased to: \$195 for a single stall, \$305 for one and half stalls, and \$455 for 2 stalls.

New rules covering meat products that must be from animals the member raised and non-food and forest item allowed to be sold at the Market were defined.

The committee on the board structure reported recommending changing to a member elected executive committee of 9 members serving 3 year terms. The terms would be staggered so that only 3 EC positions would be elected each year at the spring meeting, The nine EC members at their first meeting would elect officers among themselves. The new system was approved and would take effect in 2013.

2013: Larry Cowdery – President, Chris Bruno, Gary Molina, Maureen Burns, Jeremy Bowman, Ronda Clark and new members Ann Fugate, Star Hamilton, Patricia Thomas.

The new 9 member board as described above was put in place. The same staff members continued plus Maureen Burns in promotions.

Rent was raised to \$9000. Market fees were increased to single \$195, one and a half \$305, double \$455. 92 members are listed but a peak of 105 members was reached. A shed was purchased and placed behind the Mall to store Market stuff.

2014: Larry Cowdery – President, Gary Molina, Maureen Burns, Ronda Clark, Ann Fugate, Jeremy Bowman and new members Ed Perkins, Becky Rondy VP, Jack Cantrell Treas.

The same staff members were retained: Klp Parker- Manager, Claudia Bayshaw, Jan Spring Assistant managers, Chris Burke Secretary, Maureen Burns Promotions.

There were 83 regular members and 7 associate members listed in 2014. During winter 2013-2014 a Texas Roadhouse was built on the eastern part of the Mall parking lot where the market was located. Once again, it looked like the market would have to move. Various locations were considered but none found suitable. Meetings between EC officers, Mall owners and the theater owner produced an agreement by which the market could stay in the Mall parking lot. The market moved to the middle section of the lot between the new Roadhouse and the Theater entrance. Some of the spaces the market would occupy were leased parking spaces for the Theater. To use them the AFM agreed to change hours to 9 to noon and to be off the lot by 12:30 pm. Rent was raised to \$30,000 a year – the fair market value. A 3 year lease was signed with a 60 day out for both sides. The market's space and hours were now limited but it could stay put until a permanent site could be found.

Yearly fees were increased to pay for the increased rent – \$400 a single, \$1100 one and half, \$1600 double. The \$40 indoor winter fee was eliminated.

A member survey was circulated to assess the members opinions on a potential new market site. A majority wanted to stay on East State Street.

Another member meeting called for by the members was held in May. The Mall owners had agreed to allow a third market day. The EC planned a Thursday 4-7 market which was started in June and a new member category, the associate member, was established. Due to the limited space at the Saturday market the associate member could start vending at the Wednesday and/or Thursday market but not the Saturday market. Their fees were set at \$300.

Possible new sites for the market were reviewed. The options of the market owning and managing its own site vs. partnering with the City of Athens for a permanent site were discussed at length. The consensus was to partner with the City, not own our own site.

In the fall Athens Foundation President Susan Urano established a "Task Force on the Future of the Athens Farmers Market" with the purpose of securing a permanent and sustainable location for the AFM. Members included the Athens City Mayor, other city officials, two AFM EC members, other selected market members and other interested individuals.

2015: Larry Cowdery president, Jack Cantrell Treasurer, Becky Rondy vice president, Gary Molina, Ronda Clark, Ed Perkins, , and new members Marjie Shew, Stephanie Katterhenrich and Matt Starline.

There were 79 members listed. Staff is Kip Parker manager, Jan Spring, Kat Wargo assistants, Chris Burke Secretary, Bekky Hobson promotions. It was decided to split up the promotions work. The paid promotions person will manage web site, social media and special market events. Newspaper and radio ads and signage will be done by an EC volunteer. Ed Perkins and his wife Amy Abercrombie volunteer. Market rent and fees remain the same. Fines for selling early (\$20) and not being off the lot by 12:30 (\$50) were approved.

In September the Athens Foundation Task Force presented its site selection report to a special AFM member meeting. They recommended the market return to the City's East State Recreation Area. The City offered the area behind CVS and the Holiday Inn Express, currently used as a dog park, as the permanent site for the AFM.

Pros and cons of the site were discussed. The site is large enough to accommodate growth. It is close to the bike path and residential areas so some customers could walk or bike to the market. The City would provide the land and maintain the property. The disadvantages are lack of visibility from State St and proximity to the sewage treatment plant. An all new treatment plant was to be built which would greatly alleviate any odor problem. Market members voted on moving forward on this proposed site. All but two voted yes.

2016: Larry Cowdery president, Jack Cantrell, Ed Perkins, Becky Rondy vice president, Marjie Shew, Stephanie Katterhenrich, Matt Starline and new members Ryan Leach treasurer and Rick Vest.

There were 82 market members listed. The same staff members – Kip Parker manager, Jan Spring and Kat Wargo assistants, Chris Burke secretary and Bekky Hobson promotions. Rent remains the same. A budget surplus allowed fees to be reduced – \$400

single, \$1000 one and half, \$1400 double.

Rule change – Associate Members can sell on Saturdays November thru March in addition to the Wednesday and Thursday markets. There is plenty off room for them during the outside winter market.

Election procedure change: Candidates for EC positions are asked to send in bios to be included in the spring member meeting announcement. Last minute nominations at the meeting are still accepted. The President shall appoint at least 3 non-voting tellers to count votes on floor motions and to count ballots for secret elections.

The Thursday market is continued for the third year. Stephanie arranges special promotional events, called "Mingle at the Market" to boost sagging attendance. The Mingle Thursdays included a Bouncy House, Music, and a raffle of Market products.

Ed Perkins arranged for new AFM tote bags to be produced and sold at the

market. Todd Swearington in Guysville made the bags from material made out of 100 percent recycled pop bottles.

Bekky Hobson adds Twitter and Instagram to the market's social media presence.

Athens Foundation Task Force continues to meet planning the new site.

Leslie Schaller with ACEnet Food Ventures Center works with the EC preparing an AFM business plan and grant applications to fund the new site development.

Jack Cantrell resigns from the EC due to health problems. Many thanks to Jack for his many years of service to the AFM. The EC elects Paul Tomcho to fill out Jack's position. Becky Clark is hired as the market's promotions and events manager.