



PACIFIC COAST
FARMERS' MARKET
ASSOCIATION

FOOD, COMMUNITY, AND GROWTH: MY TIME AT PCFMA



After working for 13 years at PCFMA, I will be leaving the organization at the end of January 2024. There will be a lot that I miss about this job, but it's time for something new.

Food has always been a cornerstone in my life. I was fortunate to grow up in a family that cooked and where fruits and vegetables were present at every meal. I have a large extended family and when we got together it always involved big meals like lasagna made entirely from scratch; pesto, grilled salmon, and lemon parsley chicken; or roast pork, yuca, and black beans. Food wasn't just something you ate; an uncle's or grandmother's recipe was a topic of ongoing debate and appreciation in my family. Food was something to be shared and cherished.

In 2010, I moved to the San Francisco Bay Area with my girlfriend (now my wife) looking for a job. I was just looking for something temporary and was hired as a Market Manager at PCFMA. I oversaw markets in the East Bay, and immediately felt overwhelmed. Beneath the casual atmosphere of the farmers market, there were countless moving parts to manage. "Head on a swivel" was something I was told often and early but it took me a while to fully grasp.

Depending on the day, tasks at a market could include talking with a local elected representative about how to help spread the word about the market, explaining why a farm was late returning to the market because of flooding, or helping a first-time customer learn how they could get extra money to spend on food for their family through our Market Match incentive program. Eventually, I figured out how to juggle it all well enough to appreciate the community that arose around food at the market, built around face-to-face interactions between the people growing and preparing the food and the people eating it. I met so many different people from all over the Bay Area and from farms all over the state. I

became acquainted with over two dozen neighborhoods throughout the Bay, and with the work it took to grow and make the amazing food for sale at the markets I managed.

In 2014, I applied for and was promoted to the Director of Operations position at PCFMA. In this role, I shared what I had learned. I helped Market Managers support and grow their markets, respond to unexpected challenges and opportunities, and remember the positive impact of their hard work on the vendors in their markets and communities their markets served. I learned how to represent my organization at public meetings in front of town and city councils. I helped shape how PCFMA operated and how it was organized through all the changes and challenges that impacted farmers markets during the last decade. I joined industry groups supporting the operation of farmers markets across the state, building training programs and offering guidance to other market operators when they encountered similar challenges at their markets.

At times this job has been very challenging and sometimes there weren't great answers to those challenges, but I am grateful to have learned so much and met so many friendly people during my time at PCFMA. I still believe in the value of farmers markets and in the value of the small farms and food businesses they support. I will continue to visit regularly, but I will just be one of the many customers excited for the first pears of the season.

Ben Palazzolo

TAGS