

Farmers Market off to a rousing start

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BEVERLY — It took less than 30 minutes for the strawberries to sell out at the Beverly Farmers Market.

A steady stream of customers stopped by yesterday, on the stand's first day of business, to buy local honey and sauces, shelling peas, Swiss chard, and masses of strange, curled stems with bulbs attached.

"What the heck is that?" asked Annette Pelletier, who lives in Centerville.

Garlic scapes, said Katie Fiorella, community outreach coordinator for The Food Project, a Lynn-based organization that employs local high school students, sells most of its produce at farmers markets, and gives the rest away to food pantries and shelters.

The Food Project has a farm at Long Hill in Beverly and has also teamed up with Ms. Cellaneous Specialty Foods in Lynn and Green Meadows Farm in Hamilton for a farmers market across from the Beverly Cooperative Bank on Cabot Street. They'll be there every Monday from 3:30 to 7 p.m. until October.

Since they started three years ago, Fiorella said she's seen many regulars in Beverly, and a growing number of new people stopping by, asking questions and buying something.

"It's good to see people wanting to be more engaged about where their food comes from," Fiorella said.

Pelletier was both a regular customer and an intrigued one, as



MATT VIGLIANTI/Staff photo

Annette Pelletier of Beverly asks Katie Fiorella from The Food Project in Lynn a question about garlic scapes on the first day of the Beverly Farmers Market.

she held up the pile of garlic scapes — the green tops that grow on garlic bulbs.

"They're weird-looking," she said.

They're good chopped up and sauteed with olive oil and Swiss chard, Fiorella said. Pelletier bought both vegetables.

"Whatever is available, I'm buying it," she said. "A lot of times I have nothing planned for Monday dinner, and I plan dinner around what I find here. It makes it kind of fun."

That was the sort of dynamic there — not buying dinner, per se,

but buying what's available.

"As the summer goes on, I get whatever they're offering," said Nancy McLane, who lives about a mile away. "I've had much better produce here than anywhere else, even at other farm stands." She also likes that she's buying local food, employing local people and supporting hunger relief efforts by shopping there.

Reports of diseased mainstream food — like the recent salmonella outbreak in tomatoes — are also encouraging people to buy from a stand, rather than a grocery store.

"I'd rather buy locally myself," Diane Cahill of Beverly said. "Especially with all the scares lately."

Even when she's not concerned about getting sick, seeing "fresh" corn on the shelves in May makes her laugh, especially when the truck that transported it from Florida or somewhere is parked outside, she said.

It doesn't mean she won't buy the corn, but when presented with an alternative, like the farmers market downtown, she'll take it.

"I'd rather buy the fresh stuff," she said.