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# Fresh veggies outlast winter cold in local market

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Downtown Providence isn't where one would expect to find live bluegrass jams, crisp apples and fresh mussels. But at the Providence Wintertime Farmers' Market, held Saturday afternoons at music venue and art gallery AS220, it's standard fare.

Farm Fresh RI, a non-profit organization that aims to link Rhode Island farmers to consumers, started the Wintertime Market in December.

The Wintertime Market is "important because farms don't just exist in the summer time," said Karla Simmons, from Simmons Farm in Middletown, who was at the market selling meat and eggs. "It's nice to have an outlet to sell directly to consumers even in the winter time."

"I like to support local farmers," said Alex Sommers, a Federal Hill resident who frequents the Wintertime Market, adding that the market is "fun - it's like a little meeting place."

The Wintertime Market "is a good opportunity for people who want to buy from their farmers' market during the winter" since "there's still a good amount of produce," said Jessica Knapp, development coordinator at Farm Fresh RI.

Knapp is currently working at Farm Fresh RI to build a permanent "year-round market space," she said. The Wintertime Market is "a jumping off point" for this project.

"Farmers' markets are a really important community event. It's a really festive part of a school or a neighborhood - it kind of brings people together in a way that going to a grocery store doesn't," Knapp said. It also allows consumers to support farmers directly, choose healthy foods and learn about the food they're eating, she said.

Providence's downtown farmers' market, another of the six Providence markets managed by Farm Fresh RI, will relocate this year from the city's downtown ice-skating rink to Kennedy Plaza at Exchange Street and open June 13. The market's move aims to "increase visibility," and to aid the city's and local businesses' attempt to "revitalize the downtown area," Knapp said. The new location was determined in part by an informal survey conducted by Farm Fresh RI, asking people who used the organization's Web site to e-mail suggestions.

Farm Fresh RI also oversees the Brown Farmers' Market along with Food Service Supervisor Steve Henderson and other Dining Services officials. Louella Hill '04, who co-founded Farm Fresh RI with Noah Fulmer '05, was the driving force behind opening Brown's market in 2003.

"Farmers' markets are important because it's a place for diverse parts of the community to dialogue and interact," said Hill, adding that the Brown farmers' market "is the only place where you see students and professors and staff mingling in a neutral environment."

Farmers' markets let small farms connect with consumers the way only retailers could before, Hill said.

But, she added, they also help promote public health by letting people "see where their food came from," Hill said.

Currently working as a cheese maker, Hill said, "A farmers' market allows me to explain to the end customer how the cheese was made and why it tastes the way it does, and to me that's incredibly exciting because that's not something we can do in supermarkets or Wal-Mart."

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