

# A TWIST ON THE AVERAGE FARMERS' MARKET

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### ENTERING THE OUTDOOR MARKET

known as the Farm Patch emits a fresh combination of crisp produce and plants with complimenting vibrant colors. Customers leisurely shop around the delectable fruits and vegetables, but owner Mark Scarmardo moves swiftly through the displayed crates eager to assist anyone looking for their favorite ingredients.

Mark and his father noticed the lack of fresh, long-lasting produce in the Brazos Valley area, and in 1974, introduced the Farm Patch on South College Avenue. Though it began with basic fruits and vegetables, the store has expanded its products to include everything from flowers and herbs to salad dressings and varied cheeses.

"Our advantage would be our year-round products," says Scarmardo. "We can load squash out of Georgia or California during seasons when we can't provide it locally."

Though they have several products

offered year-round, the Farm Patch also offers seasonal and specialty items. This time of year, the Farm Patch is regularly sought out for fresh Texan pecans. Between local costumers, shoppers from out of town, and even orders from across the country, the Farm Patch is constantly selling Texan pecans.

"We go out to the orchards to get them so they're fresh," says Scarmardo. "Other places have

## THERE IS SOMETHING ABOUT A ROADSIDE MARKET THAT BRINGS ENJOYMENT AND RELAXATION

pecans available, but they aren't new crops. Once people try ours and know that we have fresh ones, they won't buy pecans anywhere else." The pecans are often bought as Christmas gifts or for baking pecan pies during the holiday season.

With Christmas right around the corner, the Farm Patch wastes no time bringing in Christmas trees ready to be purchased. Brought from Washington State, they are cut the day before loading to guarantee freshness.

Though the Farm Patch is

known for local produce, nothing stopped them from expanding into international territory offering imported items from Turkey, Greece, Italy, and a handful of other global locations. The international section is full with olive oil, pastas, cheese, sauces, drinks, and more.

Herbs have become popular for health and healing purposes, and the Farm Patch has more than 40 different herb plants lined up for

purchase. "There are lots of herbs used as medicine like rue, or herbs that can numb your sore mouth," says Scarmardo. "If you're a chef, rather than buying it each time you need it, what better thing to do than to plant rosemary out in your garden so you have it ready when your dish calls for it?"

One of the Farm Patch's trusty personnel, Mike Marino, has been a part of the Farm Patch family for 27 years. "I love just making people happy and trying to get them to come

back," says Marino. A favorite story of his occurred when a customer said he came to the Farm Patch simply to take in the aroma established by all of the fresh, genuine produce. "He said it reminded of him of when he was a kid in his grandma's cellar that stored all his vegetables and preserves," says Marino "He came in just for the aroma that made him think of his childhood."

A family business would not be complete without family to carry out the legacy, and Mark Scarmardo's son, Mark Jr., has plans to eventually own the market and has been around the store his entire life.

"I love seeing the enjoyment customers get as they shop around," says Mark Jr. "And they've known my dad for so many years and they like to see that The Farm Patch is kept in the family. The more I'm here, the more I learn, and the more I enjoy it."

Without the unique experience, though, the customers wouldn't be as satisfied regardless of the product's quality.

"We've had lots of people tell us to leave it like it is. It's nice for people to come back after several years to find that nothing has really changed," says Scarmardo. **i**