



CITY OF ALBANY

JUN 17 2010

COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT  
DEPARTMENT

To: Jeff Bond, Manager, Planning Division

Cc: Leo Panian, Commissioner  
Peter Maass, Commissioner  
David Arkin, Commissioner  
Andrea Gardner, Chair  
Phillip Moss, Commissioner  
Farid Javandel, Vice Mayor  
Joanne Wile, Mayor  
Marge Atkinson, Councilmember  
Robert Lieber, Councilmember  
Peggy Thomsen, Councilmember

I am writing to you today in regards to the proposed Albany Farmers' Market. The Ecology Center is greatly interested in participating in the process to bring a market to Albany. It is my belief that the interests of the residents and City of Albany are best served with an open process that involves multiple stakeholders. Specifically, I would like to suggest that the Planning Commission initiate an open *Request for Proposals* in order to clarify the expected outcomes of bringing a farmers' market to Albany, and identify the organization most capable of bringing those outcomes to fruition.


The Ecology Center has a strong track record of operating outstanding markets that bring together farmers and community members in a symbiotic relationship. We are uniquely suited help build a vibrant farmers' market in Albany for the following reasons:

### **Experience**

As an organization, the Ecology Center has operated farmers markets in Berkeley since 1987 and has built a level of organizational experience with which few other farmers' market organizations can compare. Our staff has extensive experience organizing and managing farmers' markets and additional personal experience as farmers' markets vendors. We have worked closely with City agencies to make sure that all issues of traffic, health, public safety, and other logistics are contemplated and managed efficiently. All of our staff members are First Aid and CPR certified. We are experts at this; it is what we do.

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2530 san pablo avenue, berkeley, california 94702 telephone: 510-548-2220 fax: 510-548-2240 www.ecologycenter.org

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### **Institutional Support and Stability**

As an organization that runs Berkeley's residential curbside recycling program, Farm Fresh Choice food justice program, EcoHouse demonstration home and garden, the Ecology Center Store, and a variety of Information and Climate Change Action programs, while having a full time staff dedicated to our farmers' markets, the Ecology Center brings to its farmers' markets the full support and services of the wider organization. With a 40-year history, the Ecology Center is a stable and well-established, grassroots organization already serving many Albany residents and businesses. We can help Albany reach its environmental goals by leveraging our presence at a Market into greater greenhouse gas reductions, increased recycling, urban gardening, water conservation, and so much more.

### **Local Connection**

Berkeley and Albany are very similar communities with many ties. The Ecology Center recycling offices are about as far north as it is possible to be in Berkeley without being in Albany. The farmers' market program has a particularly strong connection to Albany. Katie Hannon Michel, Operations Manager for the farmers' market program, was raised in Albany and her parents still live there. Ben Feldman, who is responsible for overseeing all aspects of the farmers' markets in his role as Program Manager, lives in Albany with his wife and 2 young children. Other staff and members of our advisory bodies live in Albany as well.

### **Economic Development**

The Ecology Center's Albany Farmers' Market would support the business community as our North Shattuck Market has. By partnering with businesses in the district, we can offer greater pedestrian traffic, shared event activities, "Buy Local" promotions, chef demonstrations from Albany restaurants, and more. Heather Hensley of the North Shattuck Association, which was pivotal in bringing the farmers' market to North Shattuck, said "The Farmers' Market has been a huge benefit to the local business district by bringing the community out to the business district."

### **Values**

The Ecology Center markets are farmer-focused markets that are intended to serve both the community and the farmer. Many of our farmers tell us that the markets operated by the Ecology Center are both the best run, and the most profitable for them. Our markets also have clear, demonstrable ways in which we support sustainable agriculture and sustainable communities. This commitment allows us to draw the region's best and most sustainable farms based on our reputation and experience. We have many celebrity farmers among our ranks as a result.

We have worked hard to encourage organic farming and to recruit and support farmers who are making that transition. We have a very high rate of certified organic farmers at our markets, including one of the few 100% organic Farmers Markets in the country. We have worked hard to keep genetically modified organisms, methyl bromide, and plastic bags out of our markets, raising the bar for

markets across the state. We choose small, diverse, family owned, local farms that produce food of exceptional quality. And we have worked hard to make sure our markets are convenient and accessible to all residents by pioneering electronic food stamp systems (EBT) as well as credit/debit card services, and accepting WIC and Senior Nutrition Coupons. These practices are aligned with Albany's values, and residents and businesses will get added value from a market run by the Ecology Center.

I feel strongly that the Ecology Center operates our markets in a way that fits well with the community of Albany. We have 23 years of history to back it up. I look forward to the opportunity to participate in the process of bringing a market to Albany.

Sincerely,



Ben Feldman  
Farmers' Market Program Manager  
Ecology Center