

MUSKEGON FARMERS MARKET

The Muskegon farmers market, as an outlet for growers of fresh produce, is only 85 years old, but hay and wood markets existed in the city as early as 1867. Several sites were used including Market Square (just south of the present post office) and a triangle of land where Eastern Avenue, Clay and Ottawa Street came together.

In the spring of 1921, the Muskegon City Commission passed an ordinance formally establishing a market for farmers to sell produce. The Eastern Avenue location was secured for that purpose. There were no stalls or buildings at that time. Farmers sold their goods off the backs of their trucks and cars, or set up temporary tables. The market was held two or three times a week and prospered almost from the start.

Some of the prices of that first summer were: carrots, 3 bunches for 10 cents; sweet corn, 40 cents a dozen; apples \$1.25 to \$1.50 a bushel; and live chickens, 20 to 25 cents per pound.

In 1935, slum property was purchased and cleared on Webster Avenue between Cedar and Spring streets for a new market site. This was part of a WPA project to make jobs during the worst of the Great Depression. Covered stalls were built at that time, although some of the walkways for customers were not covered. Farmers came from Newaygo, Oceana, Ottawa and Kent counties, as well as Muskegon County. They sold both wholesale and retail. Many local grocery stores (especially those of the “mom and pop” variety) purchased their produce at the farmers market before their own stores opened. The market usually opened at 6am..

In 1964, the city rebuilt the farmers market at its present location, taking over property which had been occupied by Muskegon Rag and Metal. The move was made necessary by the eastern extension of Seaway Drive. About that time there were complaints from farmers that many sellers at the market were not farmers at all, but “hucksters.” In answer to those complaints the city tried a flea market at the facility one day a week, beginning in August of 1967. The flea market proved to be an immediate success and continues to this day.

In 1993, city planners suggested a move of the farmers market to a downtown location. The idea was that market activity would help revitalize the downtown. The

empty building of the former Muskegon Boiler Works was proposed as a possible indoor site. The then mayor of the city and much of the public opposed the move, however.

In 2005, with the opening of the Shoreline Drive East, the question of a move was re-opened. The new roadway cut off access to the market from the north. Nine downtown sites were considered as possible locations. The site receiving the most favor seemed to be Terrace Lots, an area bound by Terrace Street, Western Avenue and Shoreline Drive, and a former location of Continental Motors.

As of the spring of 2006 no firm plans were in place to bring about the move of the farmers market.