

https://www.hoosiertimes.com/herald_times_online/news/local/farmers-market-s-future-course-to-be-decided-soon/article_29a37212-12e7-11ea-82d8-1374d2da7deb.html

FEATURED

Farmers' market's future course to be decided soon

By Emily Ernsberger The Herald-Times Dec 1, 2019 Updated 11 hrs ago



A counter-protester approaches Sarah Dye, left, at the July 27 Bloomington Community Farmers' Market after Bloomington police arrested a woman carrying a sign accusing the Schooner Creek Farm vendors of being associated with a white nationalist hate group. (Kurt Christian / Herald-Times)

Buy Now

As the year comes to a close, so does a contentious Bloomington Community Farmers' Market season. Plans for the future following a season full of white supremacy concerns, protests, arrests and national media attention are expected to come out in upcoming weeks.

At a Nov. 18 meeting of the Farmers' Market Advisory Council, market coordinator Marcia Veldman said that while they understand the urgency of the situation, the parks department and the advisory council are unsure of the next steps for the market — which the city could either keep public or turn over to a private group.

Vendors will sign up for the upcoming season in February or March. The next advisory council meeting is set for 5:30 p.m. Dec. 9 in City Hall, two weeks earlier than it would normally be, in order to discuss plans for the 2020 market season.

"We are in a really tough situation where people are hurting," farmers' market advisory council President Bruce McCalister, a vendor at the market, said at the Nov. 18 meeting. Mental, emotional and financial stress have been felt by many vendors after attendance at the market dropped this year.

Hundreds of residents signed a letter in June alleging the owners of Schooner Creek Farm, a vendor at the market, were involved in white supremacist activities. The letter based those allegations on online chat room conversations leaked by left-leaning activist site Unicorn Riot and FBI records of testimony regarding the vandalization of a synagogue in Carmel.

Schooner Creek Farm owner Sarah Dye acknowledged in August that she'd written the posts, but has since said she rejects white supremacy.

Dye is a self-described Identitarian and has aligned herself with the American Identity Movement's mission to "stauchly defend the preservation of America's historical demographics in the face of mass immigration, and are opposed to the demonization of and discrimination against America's white majority."

While Dye's beliefs are a concern for many, the Schooner Creek Farm vendors did not promote those beliefs at the market or otherwise violate any market rules.

The market became a more contentious place as the season continued, causing a two-week hiatus after a protester was arrested, and individuals representing groups including Antifa and the Three Percenters were present.

Panels were organized with professors from the Indiana University Maurer School of Law and representatives from the American Civil Liberties Union. They stressed that the city is required to respect everyone's right to free speech, even if that speech is unpopular, and cannot legally oust the Schooner Creek Farm vendors from the market on the basis of their beliefs.

In those two weeks, new safety measures were taken, such as blocked streets, camera installations and more police and public safety presence during the market hours. More signs detailing market rules and recruitment of market ambassador volunteers were also coordinated.

At multiple farmers' market advisory council meetings, vendors and market-goers expressed disappointment about the affect the increased police presence had on the market, making shoppers and vendors feel uneasy and less relaxed.

Attendance was cut in half from previous years due to the unrest.

In order to come up with solutions, the city set up many venues for public comment, as well as sending out a vendor survey. Comments may still be made at bloomington.in.gov/farmers-market.

Currently, the city is undergoing two initiatives to help find solutions.

The Bridge Initiative, a part of the Divided Community Project at the Ohio State University law school, launched in January to provide communities with mediators who have experience resolving civil unrest. Bill Johnson — a former three-term mayor of Rochester, New York, and

former head of Rochester's Urban League — has made multiple visits to the area to speak with government leaders and citizens. Mayor John Hamilton announced the Bridge Initiative's involvement in Bloomington in October.

According to a news release sent in mid-November by the mayor's office, the findings of the report will come out later this month.

Another initiative, Building Bridges, aggregates local and national resources including information about events, services and tools to prevent race-based discrimination and support cultural diversity. More information, as well as incident reports, can be made at bloomington.in.gov/boards/human-rights.

Activism

One of the effects of Dye's presence at the market was the formation of new anti-racism organizations in Bloomington.

No Space for Hate, a group that was codified after anti-racism activist Abby Ang learned about Dye's beliefs through the Unicorn Riot leaks. The organization set up protests at the market, along with promoting the boycott of Schooner Creek Farms. Part of its work also details reports about white supremacy, something Ang is very proud her group has been able to do.

"I'm really proud of what we've done about educating the public," Ang said. "I'm also proud of the volunteers and support from elected officials and leaders in town and what we have taught people who are learning how to be anti-racist."

Part of those educational lessons has been teaching people about how difficult white supremacy can be to notice, and that people who subscribe to such beliefs do not always fit the stereotypical images of such a person.

"A lot of people before this issue had thought of white supremacists as disenfranchised white boys living in their parents' basement making comments on YouTube. They don't see a white supremacist as a really nice farmer who was originally from Bloomington. It's interesting to see people realize it could be an every-day person, and I think we've made a lot of the larger population aware of that," she said.

During the off-season of the market, Ang said No Space for Hate hopes to continue making connections and alliances with different organizations in town, having community conversations about opposing racism and fighting for food accessibility for disenfranchised and low-income residents.

Regardless of what the city chooses to do with the market in the coming weeks, Ang said she hopes to figure out ways No Space for Hate volunteers can keep up their momentum. Burnout is something she worries deeply about, especially for activists fighting issues that are not easily resolved.

"Most of us didn't expect that we'd be still going six and a half months in. When we brought this to the city's attention, we thought decisions would be made sooner. We didn't have a sense at how long this would drag out," she said.

Delegating and balancing her studies has been a personal struggle, she said, and she knows her volunteers feel many of the same pressures.

"It's very different type of activism than planning a rally or protest, but doing something sustained takes a lot out of people," she said. "There's no guidebook how to fight white supremacy."

In the meantime, No Space for Hate will be working closely with other protest groups, such as the Purple Shirt Brigade, and food pantries, such as Pantry 279, and supporting farmers at collectives such as the east side market. They will also be at the Dec. 9 advisory council meeting.

Contact Emily Ernsberger at 812-331-4368, eeernsberger@heraldt.com or follow @EmilyErns on Twitter.

MORE INFORMATION



Dye's speech protested at Ellettsville library

Vendors still split despite return of city farmers' market

Bloomington Farmers' Market returning with new safety measures

City enlists mediator to help resolve farmers' market unrest

Dye: Schooner Creek Farm will be at farmers' market Saturday

Mayor to address farmers' market suspension Wednesday

City suspends farmers' market amid white supremacist threats

Farmers market turns from tranquil to tense

Farmers' market panel answers Schooner Creek Farm questions

Farmers' market committee responds to public comment on Schooner Creek Farm

White supremacist allegations follow market farmers

Emotions high over farmers' market vendors

Emily Ernsberger