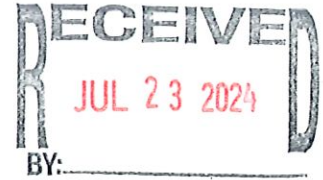


John Thomas  
23 Center Street  
Douglas, MI 49406



- ✓ Douglas Downtown Development Authority Board
- ✓ Douglas City Council
- ✓ Saugatuck Douglas Area Convention and Visitors Bureau Board

As a longtime brick and mortar retailer on Center Street in downtown Douglas, I am writing to express my concern and opposition to the "Retail" Market disguised as a "Farmers" Market in Beery Field. More specifically, I would have no problem with a legitimate Farmers Market in Beery Field, but I strongly object to a Trojan horse called a Farmers Market, but which is in fact a Retail Market with "some" farmers.

When the concept of the Farmers Market was announced in a Commercial Record article, the promoters said they would operate on a standard 80-20 "rule," which included "food" in the "Farm" category.

First of all, whose "rule" are they referring to? Secondly, if that is common in most Farmers Markets, why would our DDA, Council, and CVB agree to such a plan when the "food" coming into the market would compete directly with brick and mortar businesses in our downtown who sell the same things (i.e., coffees, teas, cupcakes, other pastries, and sandwiches)? Furthermore, why would they also back a plan that involves bringing 20% of the vendors into town to sell "other things" (i.e., art, candles, soaps, etc.) in competition with other brick and mortar businesses?

At the market on July 23, for example, I only counted 6 booths selling what I would describe as true farm grown products (including cheese and honey). ALL of the others (with one exception - the knife sharpener) were selling things in competition with downtown merchants.

SO, I ask these questions: 1. Is this really what people envisioned? 2. Now that we see what is really happening, is this going to be allowed to continue as is, or is someone going to insist that this become a legitimate Farmers Market? 3. Is anyone other than me paying attention or are people just turning a blind eye? 4. Where is the loyalty here? Is it to the itinerant vendors, or our full time merchants?

I would be the first to acknowledge that the people who backed this endeavor had the best of intentions. However, this market, like similar markets throughout the country, are NOT Farmers Markets. They almost always hide behind the title, and they almost always end up just like this one. Worse yet, once they are ensconced, they are almost impossible to change.

Right now, there are only a dozen or so booths. But as the Commercial Record article described, the plan is for 15 to 25 booths along this same model.

I argue that this can't be allowed to happen! It simply isn't fair to our brick and mortar businesses.

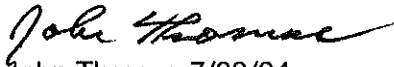
I know that there are people who will argue that the Farmers Market "draws people to Douglas" but I argue two things. 1. You can't tell me that a single person drove all the way to Douglas Saugatuck from Chicago, Detroit, Indianapolis, etc. because they heard we have a Farmers Market on Tuesdays. No, they drove here because of all of the brick and mortar businesses that have made this an important destination for decades. 2. If people believe this

will help our brick and mortar businesses, then make it a real FARMERS Market and not a retail market that competes with our brick and mortar businesses - not even for one day during our incredibly short selling season.

My solution to this situation is to have a Farmers Market that ONLY sells farm grown products - not including teas and coffees grown elsewhere or baked goods just because they are made from things "grown on somebody's farm somewhere."

Finally, for those of you who are reading this and dismissing my perspective because this doesn't pose any potential financial risk to you personally, I hope you will still understand the importance of this to those of us who pay tens of thousands of dollars a year to have access to customers on this street, as compared to the itinerant merchants now competing with us by renting a table for a few bucks every Tuesday during peak season.

Respectfully,



John Thomas 7/23/24

Douglas Merchant for 26 years