

# The World, Old and New, in the Trenton Farmers Market

By James W. Fernandez

TRENTON, N.J.—The season begins here with spring apples. Baskets of them in rows and rows on the right side of the Farmers Market entrance—a triumph of American horticultural ingenuity: Red Rome, McIntosh, Stay-

man Winesap, Delicious (red and golden), Jonathan, Granny Smith, Macoun.

The Stayer Family Orchards also feature a "Controlled Atmosphere" apple, one that has been kept over the winter under pressure and at levels of humidity that give it a freshness rare in a spring apple.

Local farmers from Pennsylvania and New Jersey, they say, have long gathered here. This market was built by the farmers themselves after the Second World War—a large Quonset-type building in the form of an X so that the farm trucks can back directly up to the stalls.

At the heart of the X, at the card table, sits Bill Marsh the cop, now retired from the outdoor force. A voluble conversationalist, he keeps an eye out for disorderly customers—you couldn't call them shoppers.

There is something close to the earth in the air and on the faces of those selling at the various stalls—you couldn't call them clerks: They have a more enduring commitment, and they are more closely identified with what they sell.

Somehow most of what is bought and handed to you here seems closer to the natural substances of our be-

ing than a shopper—a consumer—is likely to pull off a supermarket shelf.

The possibility of this primordial replenishment is part of what attracts one to the Farmers Market.

Much of America is here in the stalls. Henry Klimkowski, the Pulaskis, Paul Sohn, the Makrancys, Estenis and Sons, the O'Sullivans, the Russos, Cunninghams, Charles and Ann Stewart, Frank Helleis, Chalhams, Cartledges, a friendly black woman named Shirley Whalen in a watch-repair stall, a Korean woman named Murdock who keeps an Oriental-food stall. And if part of America isn't here, one expects that it eventually will be.

But it is really much more than America. At you move up the aisle you pass pierogi and prosciutto, bak choy and sesame seeds, dried litchinuts and marzipan, kielbasi and laschschinken, Italian and Latvian bread, and Betty's homemade babkas.

And at the far end from the apples there is a greengrocer. He features today, to be sure, fresh Jersey scallions and Boston lettuce. But signs newly lettered also lead to Chinese cabbages, Italian eggplants, African okra, Korean radishes, Swiss chard, Spanish onions, Belgian endives, Anjou pears, Chilean grapes, Jaffa oranges.

Later on in June, when the local growing season comes into full swing—this is, after all, the Garden State—every stalls will fill, and the market will burst with local produce. The foreign label will be forgotten, perhaps, in the pride of local productivity. But that doesn't affect the fact that these foods come from around the world.

What we eat fresh today in New Jersey are the foods domesticated by a multitude of peoples—potatoes and corn from the New World, apples and wheat from Southwest Asia, beans from the Mediterranean, barley and coffee from Ethiopia, rice from Indochina, soybeans from China.

We replenish our substance at this market with the substance of many peoples, and of many places—the horticultural ingenuity of the globe.

There may be some concern with "ethnic purity" here. Though the concern is usually with other and more primary kinds of purity. A stall is usually associated with one ethnic group, although in moments of need neighbors from adjacent stalls, and of other origins, sit in and help each other out. Many have sat opposite each other for a quarter-century.

And the hospitable big woman who sells "organic" eggs and who is Penn-

sylvania Dutch country-born is a bit uncertain about whether she is more German than Polish—or maybe the other way around. For while she was born in this country, she was taken back at an early age to a part of Germany that later became a part of Poland. And she married Polish. Anyway, the customer can be assured that the eggs are pure white leghorn from natural-fed chickens.

In these aisles, in fact, the preoccupation with ethnic purity is replaced by a friendly rivalry for the passerby's dollar and a cheery banter about the superiority of Stelletano's sausage, or Pulaski's sausage, or whether pierogi was a Russian or Chinese invention.

There is sly butcher's innuendo (pan-ethnic surely) about chicken legs: "With legs like these who wouldn't ask a good price." So there is a mutuality in this market. The benevolence of those who are providing plenty to others. The fellowship of the provisioner, the primary producer.

Salvador de Madariaga dedicated his book on "Americans" to Americans. "By Americans I mean persons," he said, "whatever their nationality, who do feel the new world spirit and the new world faith yet find it hard to part with the old tribal prejudices

and cozy insularities; people like you, dear reader, or me."

Maybe that's it—a New World spirit in the Farmers Market. The spirit of people who are pooling substantial things, their tribal resources as it were, in the service of a larger humanity.

Many people who buy in this market come from ethnic neighborhoods. No doubt much of value is preserved in such controlled atmospheres. But in the "New World" we might keep in mind that ethnic neighborhoods themselves are not self-sufficient.

Entrepôt institutions such as our Farmers Market are very old in history. And they play a crucial role in any new world. For they suggest, if they do not always achieve, possibilities of pan-ethnic cooperation.

They show how much each ethnic group has to offer the other—how much, in fact, each has offered the other down through the millenia. That's not a matter of faith. It's a matter of fact. It's as obvious as apples and oranges.

*James W. Fernandez, professor of anthropology at Princeton, most enjoys the paella cooked by his Estonian-German wife.*