



Canberra Times
Saturday 25/10/2008
 Page: 1
 Section: General News
 Region: Canberra, AU
 Circulation: 34068
 Type: Capital City Daily
 Size: 593.31 sq.cms.

Market turbulence: vegie swindlers weeded out



REAL DEAL: A driving force behind the Capital Region Farmers' Markets, Hall vegetable grower Dave Pentony says at markets face the problem of trying to continue to produce but in't home grown. Photo: ANA/610 546/60000



FRESH AND EARLY: Between 5000 and 6000 people shop at the EPIC markets.

By Megan Doherty
 City Reporter

It's become a Saturday morning staple for thousands of Canberrans to head to the Capital Region Farmers' Markets to buy fresh, home-grown produce. But what started four years ago as a small venture of just 12 stalls at Exhibition Park in Canberra run by the Rotary Club of Hall has now become a major enterprise.

There are now more than 100 stalls, each one paying fees to the Rotary Club that have in turn financed \$500,000 worth of community projects.

But to maintain that success and the authentic home-grown flavour of the markets, its organisers are getting tough.

Since the beginning of the year, the markets have banned "four or five" vegetable sellers who claimed to have grown the produce themselves but had actually bought it from the Flemington markets in Sydney to resell.

The farmers' markets are also about to hire a part-time worker to visit farms to check the conditions under which products are grown.

It already has a producers' panel to

ensure it remains a genuine farmers' market, the produce to be sold directly by the farmers or their approved representatives.

Market spokesman Tony Howard said growers who cheated got a warning first and were banned if they slipped up again. "We want the people to know we do our very best to keep it as absolutely kosher as possible," he said. It was usually rival stall owners who weeded out cheating growers, often given away by selling out-of-season produce.

"At one stage we had a little flood of Chinese garlic in the place and the garlic growers who were there immediately brought it to our attention," Mr Howard said.

"If there's one product like that out of line, we just say, 'Take it off your stall immediately'. That's considered a warning. If they do it again they get a red card and they're asked to march."

A driving force behind the farmers' markets was Dave Pentony, who grows chemical-free vegetables at Hall on the property Gleann na Meala or "valley of honey".

He says every farmers' market in

Australia is faced with the problem of trying to eliminate produce that is not home-grown. "There's just too much of a temptation for people to pick up something cheap at Flemington," he said.

Mr Howard, meanwhile, says scuttlebutt that Rotary is engaging in "anti-competitive" practices by allowing only certain stalls to sell certain products is way off the mark. One regular to the markets, who did not want to be named, has suggested that he was told only certain places could sell, of all things, rye bread.

"I can tell you categorically, without any shadow of a doubt, that is absolutely false," Mr Howard said.

"We actually go quite the opposite, we actually encourage and foster competition because it's what the markets are based on. The only time anybody would be told to remove something from their stall was if we found out it was something they hadn't produced."

Between 5000 and 6000 people visit the markets every Saturday morning, the farmers coming from the region and sometimes from the central west and north coast of NSW.