

## Indoor Winter Farmers' Market serves local products despite weather

Written by Carly Stinson, Daily Vidette Staff Writer  
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Cold weather will not stop the Downtown Bloomington Farmers' Market this season as they present the first ever indoor winter market, featuring meats, eggs, and produce for purchase.

This Saturday, Feb. 18, the McLean County Museum of History will host the event. The first one of this series was held Dec. 17.

The regular season is outdoor and usually goes from May to October, with the addition of a Thanksgiving market, which is held at the U.S. Cellular Coliseum each November.

The event will begin at 10 a.m. and will go until noon. Admission to the museum will be free during the hours of the market.

According to Marisa Brooks, events, outreach, and marketing coordinator for the Downtown Bloomington Association, the indoor winter market is another alternative to the grocery store.

"Basically, you can go to the market and its like shopping at the grocery store. You can pick up your meats or vegetables, and there is something for everyone," Brooks said.

The idea is to take the typical outdoor market, and place it indoors to continue to provide the Bloomington-Normal community with fresh local goods in the winter when the weather doesn't permit outdoor venues.

There will be several vendors available including beef, chicken, pork, egg, herbs, flour, and cornmeal. Price ranges are reasonable, with the typical chicken weighing four pounds, and costing about \$15.

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According to Hans Bishop, PrairiErth farmer, the produce for sale is of the highest quality and freshness.

"The quality of the food we sell is always going to be top notch, if the quality is not there whether damaged due to cold [temperatures], other weather related issues, or pest issues, we don't sell it," Bishop said.

Bishop added that they always harvest everything the day before the market to ensure it is at its peak freshness and will last a while after the customers take it home.

According to Brooks, shopping at the indoor market provides for a unique experience that is lost when going to the large chain grocery stores, as it allows customers to form relationships with the vendors.

"[Customers] develop a relationship with the people [they're] buying food from. At the grocery store, you buy a brand and a package, and [you] may not know anything about Tyson or Perdue chicken. However, at the market you can talk to the vendors about their chicken, and find out what they're fed, providing everything and anything you want to know," Brooks said.

According to Bishop, the winter season brings a sweeter tasting produce in products like carrots and spinach that is not present during the regular season.

"These things get sweeter because of the frosts, so the plants convert the starches to sugars making winter produce much more flavorful," Bishop explained.

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The first indoor winter market has come with success, and holds high hopes in terms of growth. Both Brooks and Bishop have experienced a growing interest from the community, as attendance has increased each month.

“We have potential in the future to meet the demand and keep up with the outdoor season,” Brooks said.