

A JOURNAL OF WESTERN OKLAHOMA

WESTVIEW



Volume 24
Issue 2 *Spring/Summer*

Article 19

6-15-2005

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Recommended Citation

Stoffers, Joyce (2005) "Farmers' Market, Weatherford, Oklahoma," *Westview*: Vol. 24 : Iss. 2 , Article 19.
Available at: <https://dc.swosu.edu/westview/vol24/iss2/19>

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SWOSUTM

Farmers' Market, Weatherford, Oklahoma

by Joyce Stoffers

They usually leave before I even get up,
so I wander the parking lot
disappointed and alone,
studying the blacktop:
a dark collage
punctuated with tomatoes,
flattened and drying wrinkled
beside a pod or two of okra,
seeds strewn futilely.

If the wind is strong, and it usually is,
corn shucks and silk
escape the cartons
stacked to the side,
whirling,
until thrown against the clainlinks
they join plastic lids and straws,
beer cans and burger wraps.

But today I'd set the alarm
and walk as the sun rises,
backpack limp against my spine,
passing a man cradling butternut squash,
and knowing where he'd been,
I go there.

Surveying the pickups
mounded with melons,
striped and speckled with green,
I continue walking,
until tomatoes sprawling on card tables,
splitting at their stems and
barely able to contain their juice,
entice me.
I place two on a scale made for babies,
figuring they'll come in close to a pound,
but a tanned hand adds another,
and with a broad smile,
its owner watches the needle dip beyond the "one"
and asserts with a wink, "Now that's a *good* pound,"
leaning against the tailgate,
stuffing my dollar into his pocket.

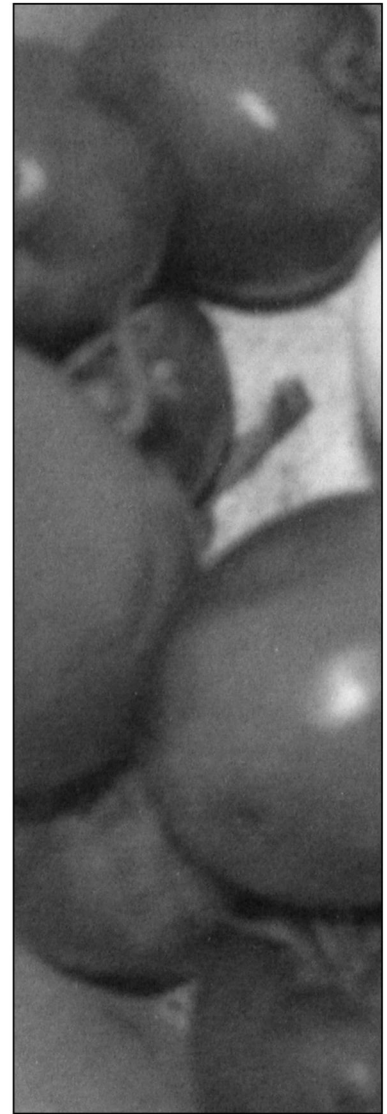


“Nope. Don’t wax my vegetables,”
the aproned woman proclaims louder than necessary
in response to my question,
then lowering her voice, she adds,
“not like them over there,”
nodding her head to the side and with squinting disapproval
at the Dodge Ram loaded with shiny cucumbers
I now eye suspiciously.
“I sell these by the piece, not the pound,
so take what you need, four for a dollar,
mix the cukes with the zucchini if you want,”
she suggests encouragingly,
and I do.

“How many do I need for a pie?”
a grandmotherly woman asks while fingering the peaches.
“Deep dish or regular?” the farmer replies,
but she’s already loaded five pounds on the scale,
unable to resist, and explaining she might also make a cobbler.
I too fill up the scale,
thinking of mornings made more civil
by rosy slivers peeking through oatmeal,
and the promise of peaches with cream
at twilight.

Across the lot
three butternut squash sit in a dusty wagon.
“How much for one?” I ask the brushcut boy on a lawn chair.
“Just fifty cents,” he answers with a scratch to his ear.
He sees me glance at the scale and adds,
“I’m not weighing them today. They’re all about the same anyways.”
I claim one and the boy remarks,
“Like squash, huh?”
“Especially with butter and nutmeg,” I reply with enthusiasm
and as he smacks his lips and “mmms,”
we smile almost conspiratorially
as quarters and squash exchange hands.

I thought I’d escape without a cantaloupe
but the red-faced man in yardstick-patterned suspenders
looks up at me and declares,
“They’re mighty sweet this year,”
so I pull out a dollar
and try to coax space
between cucumbers and squash.
The tomatoes and peaches
give no argument
as they’re lifted to the top
for the bumpy ride home,
massaging my back
with their warmth.



Photograph by Joel Kendall

