

This article, first published in the crafts department of Barbara Brabec's World in 2007, has now been updated by the author. Copyright © 2010 by Joan Bleakly.

# The Combination Farmer's Market & Craft Market

The Direction of the New Craft Fair

by [Joan Bleakly](#)



For the past nine years, Joan Bleakly has had a permanent shop in an old historic horse barn in a small rural community named Vail about seven miles south of Tucson. The [Rincon Valley Farmers Market](#) is a combination produce/craft market that has become a real attraction in the Tucson area rather than just a weekend event. At the end of 2010, she said there were 19 Farmers Markets in Tucson, but this is the only market with a barn, and one of only two markets that allow artists and crafters to sell their goods. Joan, an advisory board member of this operation, sent this updated report to illustrate how the market for art/craft products has changed through the years. - Editor

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**THE CRAFT BUSINESS IN TUCSON** is sketchy at best these days, but since this is one of the few local venues for artisans to market their wares, we continue to draw many artists and crafters to sell along with the many farmers who bring their produce to the weekly market. Up to 90 sellers may be found on any given weekend.

People must make an effort to drive out to see us each week-end, and they do—in large numbers. I have many "regulars" who come each week and also look forward to meeting visitors who discover us for the first time.

There are considerably more craft items for sale now than when I first began setting up there, and the combination of produce, fruits and handcrafted items has been a very good one. There are 22 16' x 16' stalls in the barn and they are occupied by a variety of artisans selling their work. They occupy stall shops inside the barn and along the sides of the long corridor that runs down the center of the barn. More crafters display their wares under outside canopies at one end of the barn.

The produce is sold under a big white tent adjacent to the barn. My permanent shop, which features both country and southwest items, is in one of the 16' x 16' horse stalls. I love it! I put an 8" x 10" sign at the door of my shop saying that I finish quilts and also repair antique quilts, and that little sign has brought me almost more business than I can handle. Many people inherit quilt tops, or have one they've made that they want finished into a hand-quilted quilt, and I love assembling and hand-quilting them. This has been a fabulous moneymaker for me.

## How the Market Operates



The barn is only open on Saturdays, and we draw very large crowds for being way out in the country. Produce growers bring wonderful vegetables in each weekend and others sell fresh flowers and plants, gourds, jams, jellies and breads. The winter visitors, as well as the locals, seem to love coming to the barn. I think all are really surprised, especially the Midwesterners, to find a genuine BARN in Arizona. There are cows roaming along the fences surrounding the barn, and several vendors who live in the immediate vicinity of the barn brought their pet goats, sheep, a pig, and a bunch of rabbits last week. Nice "color" for the day, and kids and parents seem to get a kick out of the animals.

We have a very promotion-minded director at the barn, Molly Eglin. She was the one who had the vision for this entire project and was responsible for getting the whole project underway. She's still very involved in the operation, but she concentrates on the promotion end now and a barn manager handles the day-to-day activities. All of our slogans and advertising refer simply to "shopping at the barn," and we have had several live remote TV telecasts originating there—even for the very early morning 5 a.m.–8 a.m. shows (we get there at 4 a.m. to get ready). One summer we filmed a 30-second and 60-second TV commercial at

the barn that ran all summer on two local channels. (Since we operate as a nonprofit organization, we did the commercial for a fraction of full cost.) We also do a lot of print advertising around town, and have done quite a bit of radio.

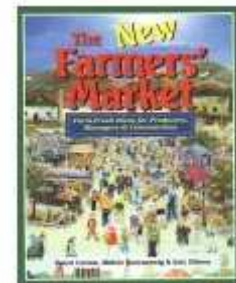
This concept of the Farmers Market/Craft Market has become so popular all over the west, but the markets that happen to have a REAL BARN to draw people, are the ones that are enjoying the greatest success. We have five other urban markets in the city, but they don't come close to enjoying the same response we get . . . out in the country . . . in a barn. People love it!

Personally, I think this is the direction of the "new craft show," at least in our area. Fortunately for us, we happen to have one of the most unique locations for this type of event. Based on my experience, I know that people still like to go to places where local handcrafted work is being sold. Today's show promoters doing shows in the Tucson area seem to shy away from advertising their events saying it "costs too much to advertise today." As a result, attendance has been very sketchy and the overall show sales poor. Promotion is vital . . . and those who don't recognize this will not draw business.

**In conclusion . . . craft shows may be cycling out for awhile, but the creative crafter will seek other avenues to market their wares. The opportunities are there . . . you just have to find the ones that are right for you.**

A resource available on Amazon:

[The New Farmers' Market: Farm-Fresh Ideas for Producers, Managers & Communities](#), by Vance Corum, Marcie Rosenzweig, Eric Gibson (New World Publishing, 2001)



*Barbara Brabec*

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