

UC SANTA BARBARA

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Eat Fresh, Buy Loco

With a book-stuffed bag on her back, and a produce-packed tote slung over her shoulder, UC Santa Barbara sophomore Danielle Fujino milled happily through a throng of fellow shoppers last week at the campus's first farmers market.

For a native of the locavore's paradise that is Davis, the biopsychology major was thrilled to find fresh, seasonal fare on sale just outside her San Rafael residence hall window. As a student on a stereotypically tight budget, the array of available freebies — bags, smoothies and, of course, samples — made her happier still.

"One of the booths was giving away bok choy," Fujino said. "My roommates and I eat a lot of instant noodles, so this will be a good addition. A lot healthier. This whole thing is awesome. I'll definitely be back."

The inaugural event that drew Fujino and hundreds of others served as something of a public dress rehearsal for the official kickoff of Gaucho Certified Farmers Market. That grand opening — replete with live music, food trucks and a ribbon-cutting ceremony — will take place Wednesday, from 11 a.m. to 3 p.m., in parking lot 23. The market will subsequently be held every week, same day, same time, same place.

Bearing the slogan 'Eat Fresh, Buy Loco,' a riff on the nickname for roaring student crowds at UCSB sporting events, the market was born from a staff initiative known as Gaucho U. The six-month, voluntary learning program is meant to foster innovation, employee engagement and culture change, plus build community and

develop leaders. Participants work in groups, or cohorts, and produce a final project.

Such was the genesis of Gaucho Certified Farmers Market.

“We did a survey last spring and had 6,000 responses, mostly from students, saying absolutely, yes, you need to do this on campus,” said Roane Akchurin, manager of UCSB’s Community Housing Office and co-chair of the farmers market committee. “We’re a volunteer army — we all have other jobs — but we’re doing this on the side because we feel like it serves the campus and, hopefully, the greater community.”

When it begins in full on Wednesday, the market will add five more farmers and a student-run bag campaign, in the vein of “take a penny, leave a penny,” that will encourage shoppers to donate their unwanted bags for fellow foodies who forgot theirs. An educational booth with rotating occupants — UCSB Health & Wellness was on hand at the inaugural affair, inviting visitors to take a spin on its smoothie-producing “blender bike” — will next feature former faculty Katie Falbo on home canning and fermentation.

Akchurin said it’s likely the market will continue to evolve as it settles in and hits its full stride. The food trucks scheduled for Wednesday, for instance, will keep coming back if hungry customers do, too.

If the enthusiasm that prevailed at last week’s soft launch is any indication, that shouldn’t be a problem.

“It was incredible,” Akchurin said that day. “People started showing up at 10:30 before we even opened, and it was packed ever since. I know our vendors are happy. They’re thrilled. I heard quite a few of them say they’re going to bring two tables next week. That’s exactly the response we wanted — that the community would really turn out.

“This market is a collaborative effort of a lot of support on campus, and it’s been a lot of hard work, but it’s been great,” she added. “And this crowd is the fruit of our labor.”

About UC Santa Barbara

The University of California, Santa Barbara is a leading research institution that also provides a comprehensive liberal arts learning experience. Our academic community

of faculty, students, and staff is characterized by a culture of interdisciplinary collaboration that is responsive to the needs of our multicultural and global society. All of this takes place within a living and learning environment like no other, as we draw inspiration from the beauty and resources of our extraordinary location at the edge of the Pacific Ocean.