

## Weaver's Farm Market Marks 5 Years Of Operation With Big Sale

Weaver's Farm Market, at 1272 East Side Road in Morris, is celebrating its fifth year in operation. The store will be marking the occasion with a "Super Sale" on April 26 and 27.

"It's the sale of the year. There will be no other sale where we have as many items marked this low," said store owner Daniel Weaver.

Top-selling items, such as John F. Martin bacon and butter and locally made chicken pot pies will be considerably marked down. Other price-reduced items include cooked shrimp, organic cane sugar, rolled oats, whipping cream, all-purpose white flour and many other products.

Looking back over the past five years, Weaver said that what he has liked most has been his customers.

"The biggest enjoyment has been serving people the way I like to be served and having a relaxed place for people to do their shopping," Weaver said, adding that the four things he focuses on most are "great service, quality products, fair prices, and a clean store."

"But the main thing is to glorify God in all that we do," said Weaver, who is minister of an area Amish church which serves 9-12 households.

Despite being part of a culture which foregoes many modern conveniences, such as cars, computers, and internet, Weaver has a strong desire to relate to the greater community.

"I enjoy being able to be there for the community in times of need, for instance, when the fire department has a chicken barbeque. Even though we're separate, we're still there to support the community," he said.

The 4000 square-foot store offers a large variety of produce, much of it local when in season. According to Weaver, 70 percent of produce sold at the market is organic.

Other locally produced items include meats, cheeses and baked goods. A large section is devoted to bulk foods, such as spices, candy, baking supplies, nuts and seeds. Many locally made crafts, such as candles, soaps and potholders are also available and popular both for personal use or gifts. Newly added to Weaver's offerings are subs, sandwiches and in-store prepared foods.

"We can't have everything everybody needs, but we like to be complete in the lines we have," Weaver said. As an example, he pointed to the newly added cheese island in the center of the store, featuring a variety of domestic and international cheeses.

Before Weaver's opened, area residents had to travel to Oneonta, Sidney or Norwich for grocery shopping. Weaver's offered a welcomed alternative. And, conversely, people travel considerable distances to shop at Weaver's.

"I love traveling there for the inexpensive spices, the excellent plants, and reasonable deli meats. It's nice to have something in our county that offers this," said April Bernhardt of Milford.

Gilbertsville resident Jenny Riffle finds much to like at the Amish-run store.

"It's so nice to have access to fresh produce and all the pantry basics right near home! I love shopping at Weaver's. Everyone there is so friendly. I have also found a great selection of flours that have been fun to experiment with in my bread baking. They seem to have just the right amount of products, which has saved me from driving into Oneonta to a large grocery store. They also have some great gifts and I have been wearing some hand-knit slippers I bought myself at Weaver's all winter," she said.

Weaver spoke of challenges the market has faced since opening, noting that he was previously in the business of clothing distribution, focusing on socks.

"I've learned that socks have a longer shelf-life than bananas," he joked.

Acknowledging a cultural learning curve experienced after opening, Weaver said, "Our customer base is 99 percent non-Amish. Originally, we saw things through Amish eyes. We didn't understand the food cultures of other people."

Weaver's has since added such items as tofu, Thai and Mexican cuisine items.

Being off the grid poses a challenge and offers an advantage.

"We have a diesel motor that supplies power to the whole store, including our cooling system. At the highest fuel price, we were paying \$1,000 a week for diesel fuel. With that and other operating expenses on the rise, it was a challenge to keep prices affordable and still stay in business," he said.

The advantage of having such a system is that it runs full time, allowing the store to continue operating despite local power outages.

Weaver's Farm Market is very much a family-run operation. His four youngest children still live at home and help with running the store.

"They do 95 percent of the ordering," Weaver said.

His daughter Ruth Ann Weaver, 24, is the produce manager. Many people remember her as the pleasant young lady who ran a farmstand before Weaver's opened.

"I enjoy working with fresh produce. It makes me feel like it's spring year-round. I like to offer quality and freshness to our customers," she said.

Her creativity was particularly on display this past fall when shelves were filled with many varieties of apples. For Northern Spy apples, she posted, "Grandma will say the Northern Spy/ Is just what I need for my apple pie." For the Empire apple, she came up with, "Grab me while you stand here looking. / You'll like me for eating, baking or cooking."

Ruth Ann's efforts do not go unappreciated by shoppers.

"What I really like about Weaver's is a good selection of fresh produce. I appreciate knowing I can get that five miles from my door," said Tony Pinotti.

Jason Weaver, 19, does 75 percent of the grocery and bulk orders, and Michael Weaver, 20, oversees the buying of specialty and imported products as well as the frozen foods. Julia Weaver, 17, orders local dairy, bakery, and other items. Ruth Weaver, Daniel's sister, does bookkeeping and works at the register. Weaver's wife Iva manages the home front and helps with the baked goods sold at the market.

"She keeps us going," Weaver said.

Despite belonging to what Weaver himself describes as a "separate community," he shows a keen interest in the outside world – always quick to recognize a new face in the store. This interest is reflected by two maps on a wall at the store's entrance – a map of the world and a map of the United States. Sewing pins mark each location represented by visitors to the store. "We've had people from all the states and 70 countries," Weaver said.

"I like to ask people where they're from and I want to know about their culture. I probably have more interest in food and culture than most Amish men," he said, smiling. ➤