

A photograph of a woman's hand reaching into a basket of produce at a farmers market. The woman is wearing an orange sweater and a green apron. The produce includes various types of tomatoes, green onions, and leafy greens. The background is blurred, showing other people and market stalls.

Three Women Shining Stars at Marin's Farmers Markets

Spotlighting three Marin-based women who own and operate thriving food businesses at our local farmers markets.

BY LYNDA BALSLEV

MM: What inspired you to start your business and sell soups and baby food at the farmers market?

Aryan: I am an accidental business owner. I graduated from law school and worked in corporate firms for over 20 years before I left law and attended culinary school. I then worked in San Francisco restaurants for eight years, learning from some of their top chefs.

After I stopped working in restaurants, an unfortunate experience in my life became the bridge to my soup business, which is now one of the best things in my life: I was extremely sick with a cold and couldn't find a single soup in a Marin store that was nutritious, let alone delicious. All the soups I found in Marin had cream, flours, sugars or other fillers. I am Iranian and grew up with my mom's and grandmothers' soups that were made with the most beautiful fresh ingredients. Our culture has eaten farm-to-table for centuries, well before it became a fad. I decided then to make my own nutrient-dense soups with restaurant-quality ingredients and finesse. As my business grew, and due to customer requests, I now provide freshly made entrees and organic baby food. Many of my customers feed my soups to their infants as their first food. My soups are also suitable for seniors and people going through medical treatments, who need nutrient-rich food that is free of oils, alliums, salt and spice.

MM: What are your most popular soups?



Aryan: Many! A few include Thai coconut chicken curry, wild mushroom, summer gazpacho, vegan Moroccan harira, split pea and smoked ham. Popular entrees include Moroccan lamb tagine, French cassoulet with duck confit and



Southwest chili with cornbread.

MM: Do you have seasonal specialties for spring?

Aryan: Yes. Persian New Year is at the beginning of the Spring Equinox, so Persian pomegranate soup is a specialty. Also, matzo ball soup for Passover, a vegan English pea and mint soup and spring lamb entrees.

MM: Who is your typical client?

Aryan: My customers are 90% women. The remaining 10% are men who usually come to shop at the direction of their significant others. People who have dietary restrictions also buy my soup, as well as parents who seek healthy food for their children and family dinners, lunches and parties.

MM: What is the most rewarding part of selling at the farmers market?

Aryan: I love my customers, and my fellow vendors. The most rewarding part is my interaction with each customer and the love, inspiration and support they bring to me each week. After nine years, many of them are like family.

MM: Do you have any advice you would give to other women wanting to start a food business?

Aryan: Owning a food business, even a very small one, is not for the faint of heart. There are many ups and downs, trials and errors and financial highs and lows, not to mention the physical strain — and the increase in the price of goods that makes my visa bill look like it was the victim of identity theft each month!