



North Coast Growers' Association

Humboldt County Farmers' Markets

www.northcoastgrowersassociation.org

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Press Release: For Immediate Release

Re: Response to The Redwood Peace and Justice Coalition Statement

Contact: North Coast Growers Association

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The mission of NCGA's farmers markets is to provide opportunities for local farmers to market their goods directly to consumers, as well as free educational opportunities for the community. NCGA offers space to local nonprofits (state or federally recognized) and public service agencies to provide educational information, event promotions and art activities, however our markets are not fundraising opportunities for nonprofits. No donation collection or sales of any kind are allowed. Interested groups apply through our [website](#) and must meet the criteria outlined.

NCGA does not take positions on public demonstrations, but we recognize the significant impact current events are having on our community. We support peace and oppose violence. At NCGA we fully support freedom of speech for all and encourage community members of all opinions to appropriately exercise these freedoms at our farmers' markets, however, *we ask that all individuals respect this Code of Conduct policy that NCGA's members have created.*

- Authorized tabling activities include local non-profits or organizations who have received permission from the market manager in advance to table at that market
- Any signage/speech which has a negative impact on any other individuals or groups is discouraged
- *Unauthorized activities (petitioning, soliciting, demonstrating) should be set back 20' from the outer sidewalk of the Plaza to allow customers to pass freely and form lines and may not use tables*
- No tabler or demonstrator should interfere with vendor sales in any way
- No personal information, photographs, or video should be taken of customers, staff, or vendors without permission of the individual
- Unless granted permission from the market manager by submitting a tabling application as a community organization, *no unauthorized activity should remain stationary anywhere within market boundaries*

In addition, NCGA events have a policy of Zero Tolerance for any Hate Speech. Included in the code of conduct we define Hate Speech as "speech that demeans on the basis of race, ethnicity, gender, religion, age, disability, or any other similar ground is hateful. This includes anti-gay or anti-trans language. Anyone who engages in hateful speech or distributes hateful materials will be asked to leave the event."

The Arcata Plaza Farmers Market is an open-air gathering space without controlled entrances. While we facilitate the operations of the market in that space and do have some level of control under our special event permit within reason, the Plaza is also a public park and the public is welcome to gather. Public demonstrations are not "permitted" by the market - technically they should be permitted by the City, and NCGA does not have the authority or the ability to regulate public demonstrations, we can only respectfully request that demonstrations abide by our code of Conduct. We do call in law enforcement when a need arises due to threats of violence or hate speech.

The public statement recently made by the Redwood Peace and Justice Coalition contains some inaccuracies. We welcome direct dialogue with anyone about this topic. We are making this statement to ensure the community that Meredith Mathews did not engage with NCGA regarding the Redwood Peace and Justice Coalition community group in any way whatsoever, at any time.

On January 18th, Arcata market management approached representatives from the Redwood Peace and Justice Coalition who were set up at a table collecting signatures directly next to a walkway on the Plaza to remind them of our Code of Conduct, and to point out that while NCGA supports free speech at the market, members of the Coalition were not following NCGA's guidelines for unauthorized activities at the market. NCGA staff stated that they were welcome to be at the market, but respectfully asked them to set back in the grass 20 feet as per guidelines, and pointed out that having a stationary table and collecting signatures does not comply with NCGA's time, manner and place guidelines. It was made clear that the *content* of the Coalition's activities was not the issue at hand, but rather the lack of adherence to time, manner and place guidelines. At no point was the Coalition asked to leave the market.

Staff also shared that NCGA has received considerable feedback from community members that they have felt targeted, insulted and unsafe at the market, and that we take this feedback seriously. NCGA staff expressed that they have heard about community complaints regarding this issue, referred through the City of Arcata and directly to NCGA. A staff member also incorrectly stated that the Chamber had shared complaints from the community with us. That was inaccurate. We have reviewed our internal communication and NCGA has confirmed that this is not the case. *NCGA has received no community complaints referred to us through the Chamber of Commerce regarding this issue, nor any direct complaints from the Chamber itself, or Meredith Mathews.* NCGA deeply regrets our staff member's misunderstanding of the source of the feedback NCGA has received from the community regarding this issue, and the gross confusion and injury it has caused.

NCGA has no collaboration with the City or Chamber regarding support for or against any members of the community, community groups or within our farmers' markets. NCGA operates the Arcata Plaza Farmers' Market under a special event permit from the City of Arcata and we must follow the law, but NCGA is in no way directed or influenced by the City or the Chamber in how we uphold our rules, regulations and Community Code of Conduct. It is unfortunate that the Coalition in its recent press release has misrepresented the content of the conversation with staff so publicly, and used this minor incident to inflame the community, unfairly targeting a community leader.

NCGA appreciates the City of Arcata and supports the work of the Arcata Chamber of Commerce, including Executive Director Meredith Mathews. The false statement made by the Redwood Peace and Justice Coalition asserting concerns that Ms. Mathews "may be using her position ... to sow seeds of controversy within the management of the Arcata Farmers Market," is harmful, and such statements contribute to further misinformation, division and animosity in our community.

The accusations against Meredith Mathews are completely unfounded and untruthful, and cause personal harm and further harm to the community. NCGA deeply regrets that this situation has resulted in personal attacks against a strong and trusted community leader who works tirelessly to support this community in so many ways.

NCGA supports peace and stands behind unity and in solidarity with all members of the community. Our farmers' markets will always remain open and inclusive to all.

NCGA is a membership based organization of a diverse group of people with a variety of beliefs. We support free speech and hope that all demonstrators, non-profit tablers, and customers help us cultivate a community event where everyone's voice can be heard in a respectful manner. For questions regarding this incident or our Code of Conduct, please contact info@northcoastgrowersassociation.org.

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