

## Beth Casper's public resignation email to the Salem Saturday Market board

Subject: Future of the Zero Waste Zone at the Salem Saturday Market

Date: Sun, 12 Aug 2012 09:42:17

To Salem Saturday Market Board:

I was disappointed to receive your letter explaining that you would not be financially supporting the Zero Waste Zone project at the market anymore this season. Without updating the current signage this year, the program will continue to decline: the public will be frustrated with not knowing where to throw their waste and the vendors will be frustrated with the fact that they are purchasing materials that are not being composted. **New signs now are essential to the success of this program.**

Zero Waste Zones are quickly becoming standard at all kinds of events as people realize the true costs of continuing to trash items that are easily composted or recycled. Hundreds of farmers markets across the country have implemented Zero Waste Zones because they understand that market-goers are exactly the kind of customers who want to support sustainable programs since they are already supporting sustainable agriculture, local businesses and the local economy.

These Zero Waste Zones at farmers markets are functioning well with clear, easy-to-read signage—such as the newly designed signs I just worked on with a volunteer. It is a false premise to assume that you need volunteers to staff these stations full time. In addition, full-time staffing of 3 Zero Waste stations every Saturday for the 30+ weeks of the market is not possible (as evidenced by the hundreds of hours I spent last year to staff the booths and still was unable to fill them consistently every week). It is not a sustainable way to educate the public or keep the bins from being contaminated.

I recognize that our first signs were too wordy and did not have enough photos. That was a result of a program that was too complicated, i.e. some cups were compostable, others were recyclable. You remedied that this year by requiring food vendors to use all compostable items.

But your signage does not tell the public where items belong. Signs that simply say “Compost” “Garbage” “Recycle” are neither specific nor educational enough to be of any help to the public. Your other attempt of posting corresponding items to each of the signs is an idea that the Friends group tried in the past and didn't work. I communicated that to you in a board meeting.

The newly designed signs are very simple and easy to follow.

But instead of either spending the market's money or allowing me to find a sponsor to buy the signs for you, you've ensured the project's failure.

I offered to find sponsors for the Zero Waste Zone. But instead you negotiated a contract with MAPS Credit Union that did not even come close to covering the cost of the program or even new signs, and then you asked me to design signs before going back to MAPS to negotiate for more money. I worked with a graphic designer who *volunteered* her time to get those signs complete. Now the signs are designed and you still don't want to go back to MAPS Credit Union to discuss another contract or, at the very least, a contract for next year. I believe MAPS Credit Union would be willing to be a sponsor again—at a higher dollar amount—particularly if there was adequate signage around the market to explain the Zero Waste Zone program. Or, another sponsor could be brought in to cover signage, supplies and even part of the garbage bills. I would not be surprised if you could find one or two sponsors specifically for the Zero Waste Zone that were willing to pay several thousand dollars a year.

But I do not believe that you are looking for solutions to make this program successful. It seems to me that you are looking for excuses to show that this program failed, as evidenced by:

- At the beginning of the season, food vendors were not called to ensure that they knew the Zero Waste Zone rules and instead the market manager and staff had to do the enforcement at the market.

- You have not backed up your market manager when she was prepared to enforce the rules regarding the Zero Waste Zone.
- Nor would you help her out when she asked board members to talk to a food vendor about an item that was not in compliance.
- No one has asked me to work on any solutions to specific problems, except when you asked me to design new signs—and now you don't want to put those up.
- Your letter suggests that one problem is that the Friends group is no longer active in this project and the grant dollars are exhausted. Garbage service has always been an integral part of the duties of the Salem Saturday Market. The Friends of Salem Saturday Market received a Marion County grant to start the Zero Waste Zone, but the project was never intended to be a program run by the Friends group. This information was communicated by the Friends board to the Salem Saturday Market board before the Friends group ever applied for a Marion County grant.

Other farmers market boards recognize that a Zero Waste Zone improves the market because it is consistent with other values of the farmers market. I know that Salem is ready to support a Zero Waste Zone and your actions just perpetuate the misconception that people in Salem don't care.

In short, the Zero Waste Zone can be seen as a burden or a financial and marketing boon to the Salem Saturday Market. I see it as a boon. You have seen it as a burden.

As much as I want to see the Zero Waste Zone project continue at the Salem Saturday Market, I, personally, cannot continue to work on a project that is seen as a burden. I cannot sit on a committee to determine the future of a program that you have designed to fail.

Please accept this letter as my resignation of my volunteer role as Zero Waste consultant for the Salem Saturday Market.

Sincerely,

Beth Casper