



Oliver's Market, Santa Rosa, Calif.

Oliver's Market, with four stores in Sonoma County, Calif., has found its niche. The hybrid store is completely focused on giving the community a choice in how it eats. The crossover concept allows the stores to offer 50 percent conventional products and 50 percent organic and natural products, and sales fall along those lines.

"Our approach to product assortment is to provide the largest amount of choice we can. We don't make choices for our customers; we just try to provide choices," says Tom Scott, who retired last September as CEO of the company, after 26 years. Scott Gross, formerly store director of the Windsor store, was promoted to general manager, and Eric Meuse, formerly the Stony Point store director, was named operations manager.

Perhaps the biggest commitment to offering choices to the community is Oliver's reliance on local suppliers and producers; the stores currently source from about 400 area companies. "Local for us is just this county. It's not anywhere but Sonoma County," stresses Steve Maass, founder and president. "It's not Napa, it's not Marin, it's just Sonoma. We're a Sonoma County store; we're not located anywhere else."

The bottoms of the stores' receipts feature the dollar amount spent on local products, so customers can be aware of their support of local producers and suppliers.

When customers buy a locally sourced product from



locally owned Oliver's Market, the financial benefit to Sonoma County is 2½ times greater than when they purchase a national brand from a national chain, according to a report conducted by Sonoma State University and commissioned by Oliver's Market (the original study was conducted in 2011 and updated in 2016). In addition, the report found that Oliver's current operations generate more than \$184 million, with \$19.3 million in state and local taxes, while creating or sustaining more than 700 jobs in the county.

"It dawned on us about 20 years ago that that's our competitive advantage, that we're local, too. We understand this place better than any chain stores," Scott says.

The company's newest location, in Windsor, even gave the community a place to gather with its Tavern Off the Green taproom, which offers 24 local beers, wines and ciders on tap. The grocerant concept offers a pub-style menu, or customers can bring in items from the prepared food department located next to the taproom. The tavern hosts local musicians on Saturday nights (all stores often feature live local music talent outside the main doors as well), and wine and beer tastings on Thursday and Friday evenings.

Oliver's Market also allows its customers to help their neighbors with its community card, which provides a 3 percent rebate to a school or nonprofit of the shopper's choice. More than 500 Sonoma County nonprofits are registered with the cards, and 2015 donations totaled more than \$240,000, with more than \$1.8 million raised since the inception of the program. The stores also provide a lot of in-kind donations and support local food banks. During the most recent holiday season, Oliver's partnered with Redwood Empire Food Bank to sell \$1 bell necklaces at the checkstands; each purchase supplied two meals to food-insecure Sonoma County residents. The One Bell Saves Supper campaign raised nearly \$9,000 for the local food bank.

"We're known as a community store," Maass notes, "and we participate in the community."

