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DETROIT — I can think of one thing better than drinking Mountain Dew.

That would be eating Mountain Dew. The yahoo lasts longer.

A few times over the last several years, I've hit the road to see family farmers Laura and Paul Fuhr at the historic Eastern Market near downtown Detroit. In terms of its six-acre size, the Eastern Market is the largest farmers market in the United States. The Fuhrs make Mountain Dew jelly and sell it at \$4.25 for an 8-ounce jar, or three jars for \$12.

Mountain Dew and jelly?

That's as sweet as the Grateful Dead and jams.

Laura Fuhr made her first batch of Mountain Dew jelly about 10 years ago.

"Actually, I don't like Mountain Dew," she said of the highly caffeinated soft drink during an interview at their booth. "When I worked in fast food, I was amazed how many people had pop for breakfast. And a friend had a bunch of guys in her office who drank Mountain Dew instead of coffee. I was sitting in the dentist's office and saw a poster about how pop was bad for your teeth. I put it all together and thought, 'Mountain Dew should work for jelly if it does that to your teeth!' I started working on getting the right formula to get it set."

Just like a tooth implant.

She explained, "I use a two-liter [bottle] of Mountain Dew to a 12-jar batch, extra sugar, some fruit pectin, just like I would use in any other jellies, to get the balance right. Only thing that happens is the fizz cooks out of it when you boil it."

Laura, Paul and their five children are fourth-generation family farmers at Fuhr's Valley View Fruit Farm in Inlay City in the lower part of the Michigan thumb. They commute 90 miles each way to sell their goods between 6 a.m. and 2:30 p.m. Saturdays at the Eastern Market. The Fuhrs farm apples, raspberries and a few vegetables. They offer 22 varieties of jams and jellies, depending on season. The Fuhrs first rolled out with raspberry jelly 15 years ago, followed by strawberry and Mountain Dew. Raspberry and blueberry jellies are their most popular products.

Mountain Dew jelly is an acquired taste, but ranks in their top five sellers.

The 47-year-old Laura said, "It sells well at Christmas. It's the gag gift for the stockings."

The Eastern Market has seen a lot in its 120 years of operation at the same location, but not much Mountain Dew jelly. Vendors operate from many of the same Victorian buildings and five gigantic open-air sheds from when the year-round market opened. Two buildings are devoted to plants and flowers.

Located in a food desert a mile northeast of downtown, the Eastern Market has 216 vendors and 30,000 to 40,000 shoppers at peak season. The market has added 50 vendors and prepared foods over the last few years, according to Daniel Carmody, president of the Eastern Market Corporation.

Carmody, who was born and reared in Oak Park, has been with Eastern Market since 2007.

"The market was run by various public and city entities until 2006," he said. "The non-profit [Eastern Market Corporation] I work for, through a management agreement, operates it for the city."

A market visit is a great way to get to know Detroit.

"This is a special place for people throughout southeast Michigan," Carmody said while walking around one of the sheds.

The 55-year-old Paul Fuhr has seen the changes in Michigan farming through the years.

"The days of the mom-and-pop farms backing their trucks in here are gone," he said. "Nobody took over family-farm businesses because you couldn't make any money [with] the cost of fertilizer, tractors, gas. Now it's a novelty thing with weekend farmers. I have a second job. I'm a custodian at the school district in Warren. My wife just finished up nursing school."

I found the jelly's limey taste to be more predominate than in drinking Mountain Dew. Paul said, "It tasted like lemon-lime to me. I ask

our repeat customers, 'How do you eat this stuff?' They even like it with a bagel and cream cheese."

I wondered if Laura would branch out into Dr. Pepper or Tab jelly.

"I would see if I could get it to set," she answered. "But Mountain Dew has orange juice in it, so it is a good breakfast thing, anyway."

Paul added, "We keep the jellies as fresh as possible. Laura makes small batches to make sure customers get good quality. A relative asked my wife if she had a jam-making machine. She said, 'Yeah — a pot and a spoon.'"

Paul said he's in farming to stay.

"In the last 10 years, Michigan has become hard as a farming state. The weather has been so unpredictable recently. It's 20 degrees hotter in the summer and frost comes in later. But nobody will ever take this away from us. This farm is ours."