

THE GRAND RAPIDS PRESS

Farmers market debate extends National Punctuation Day into weekend

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National Punctuation Day turned into National Punctuation Weekend, as I responded to a plethora of e-mail about possessive apostrophes after checking out the glorious Flying Steam Pig and other spectacular ArtPrize works.

Some of our expert grammarians recalled some of their pet peeves for a sidebar to Friday's story. **Calvin College professor Jim Vanden Bosch is irked by misplaced apostrophes**, and told me this story.



"I went to the farmers market once and noticed a sign, in crayon, reading 'green bean's.' That's not supposed to be possessive. I thought that was horrible. My wife went and bought two pounds of beans from the guy. Two years later, I'm still upset about it."

First, a reader named Helen fired off this e-mail: "How could you quote Jim Vanden Bosch as going to the farmers market? Isn't it farmers' market? Jim is probably horrified."

Then, a reader identified as CF sent me this: "I enjoyed the punctuation article, but I'm an English teacher and copy editor. Er, shouldn't it be 'farmers' market?'"

I suspect that professor Vanden Bosch is not horrified, but pleased that we knew the proper punctuation for a descriptive phrase.

You see, every veteran reporter in the newsroom has on his or her desk The Associated Press Stylebook, a daily reference tool wedged between my Kent County school directory and fish tank for easy access at my particular workspace. Copy editors have one, too, but it serves mostly as a backup since they have the book memorized.

Let's check out the stylebook listing for this topic.

"DESCRIPTIVE PHRASES: Do not add an apostrophe to a word ending in s when it is used primarily in a descriptive sense: *citizens band radio*, *a Cincinnati Reds infielder*, *a teachers college*, *a Teamsters request*, *a writers guide*.

"Memory Aid: The apostrophe usually is not used if for or by rather than of would be appropriate in the longer form: *a radio band for citizens*, *a college for teachers*, *a guide for writers*, *a request by the Teamsters*."

"Memory Aid: The apostrophe usually is not used if for or by rather than of would be appropriate in the longer form: *a radio band for citizens, a college for teachers, a guide for writers, a request by the Teamsters.*"

Personally, I would add teachers union to the list, since that's one that I type frequently. But AP has more to say.

"An 's is required however, when a term involves a plural word that does not end in s: a children's hospital, a people's republic, the Young Men's Christian Association."

We make mistakes from time to time, but wasn't one of them. And while we have not chatted since National Punctuation Eve, I suspect professor Vanden Bosch will be pleased that we are continuing to discuss and learn about his favorite subject.

For another interesting column about the celebration, I refer you to a column by Roy Peter Clark of the Poynter Institute. **[Give it a read — please.](#)**

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