

July 2006

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Going
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Going organic in Ann Arbor

Knowing the legacy of your lettuce

by Jessica Schrader

For Ann Arbor resident Edward Vielmett, trips to the Ann Arbor Farmers Market are more than just a chance to buy wholesome, organic foods for his family — they're an educational outing for his kids.

His son Saul, 5, loves shopping at the market and is becoming an organic food connoisseur.

"He is really fond of the farmer's market, and a few of the farmers know him by name," Vielmett said. "When he wore sunglasses to market every day for a year there was a farmer who called him 'Hollywood.' When you show up every single week, people get to know you."

The Vielmetts are one of many Ann Arbor area families who appreciate living in an area that's rich in resources for locally grown organic foods.

"It seems wasteful to fly food in from all over the world when it's grown nearby," Vielmett said. "I love talking to the farmers and knowing where the food I eat is grown."

They get local milk delivered from Calder Dairy in Carleton and buy local and organic produce from area farmer's markets and co-ops. In the off-season, they buy organic foods from chain stores like Whole Foods and Trader Joe's.

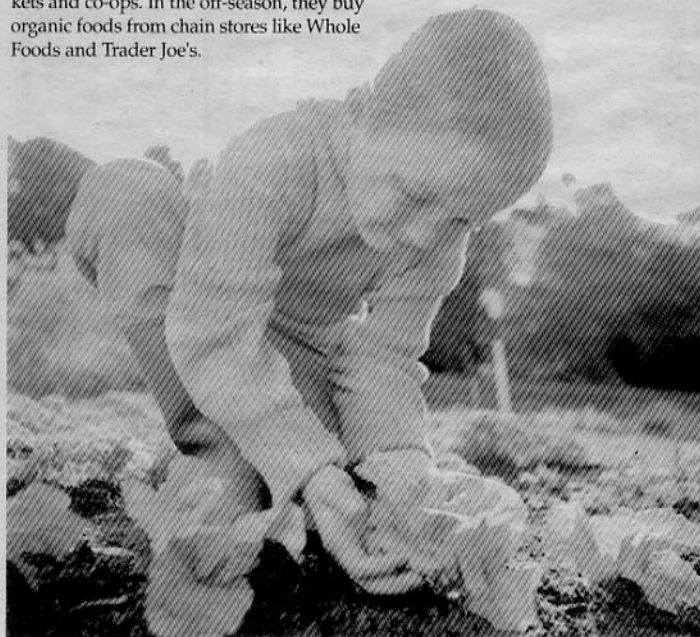
"We'd rather pay a little more to get milk from a local farm where we've visited and know what's going on, than to buy store-brand milk which could come from anywhere," he said.

Longtime Ann Arbor resident Julie Ritter also sees the value in buying organic foods locally. She and her twin girls, 11, have enjoyed shopping at the Farmer's Market and People's Food Co-op for years.

"We live close enough that we can walk and bring a wagon or ride bikes," said Ritter, a member of the co-op and a volunteer with the Michigan nonprofit Food System Economic Partnership.

Small, family operated Brines Farm in Dexter has been growing naturally harvested fruits and vegetables since 1980, and they recently started selling at farmers markets.

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Find organic food near you:

Brines Farm

Dexter
www.brines.org
734-913-8058

Small family farm where everything is organically/naturally grown. Visits to the farm to see its operation can be scheduled.

People's Food Co-op

Ann Arbor
www.peoplesfood.coop
734-994-9174

Full-service grocery store, fair-trade coffee shop and food bar provide services and natural products that promote nutritional awareness, environmental responsibility, and a sustainable community for all.

Ypsilanti Food Co-op

Ypsilanti
www.comnet.org/ypsifoodcoop
734-483-1520

A nonprofit community grocery store that specializes in wholesome and natural foods at the lowest possible price.

Garden Works

Ann Arbor
734-995-5130

A certified organic 4.5 acre truck garden and greenhouse farm that offers seasonal produce subscription to the community, on-farm sales of wheatgrass, sunflower and buckwheat sprouts and sells garden seedlings and produce at the Ann Arbor Farmer's Market April-November.

Boxelder Acres

Ypsilanti
734-483-7752

Organic farm that grows fresh-picked vegetables for area families who pick up weekly at the farm or in Ann Arbor.

Chelsea Farmers Market

Chelsea
734-433-1150
Available May-October in the municipal parking lot Saturdays from 8 a.m.-1 p.m.

Westside Farmers' Market Ann Arbor

Ann Arbor
734-904-6044

Located in the Zingerman's Roadhouse parking lot at Jackson and Maple Roads in Ann Arbor. Held every Thursday from 3 p.m. to 7 p.m., featuring local produce, meat, plants and artisan foods from a wide variety of local growers and producers.

Community Farm of Ann Arbor

Chelsea
www.communityfarmofaa.org
734-433-0261

Member-owned CSA farm using organic growing practices that grows vegetables, herbs and some fruits, which are shared among members weekly from late May/early June through November.

Ann Arbor Farmers Market

Ann Arbor
734-994-3276

Located at 315 Detroit St. and open on Saturday, 8 a.m.-3 p.m. May-December Wednesday and Saturday, 7 a.m.-3 p.m.

Tantre Farm

Chelsea
734-475-4323

A 40-acre certified organic farm since 1993 that sells its produce through CSA shares, at various local stores, restaurants and also at the Ann Arbor and Chelsea Farmers' Markets.

For more information, visit
www.localharvest.org.

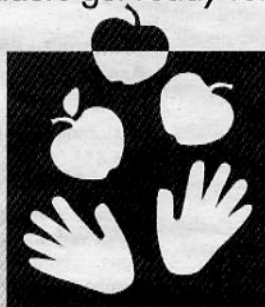
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Organic *continued from page 5*

"Since I harvest year-round, it varies from tender greens and salads in the winter to juicy summer veggies," said owner Shannon Brines. "For the most part I grow things that I like and think people should try ... I aim for variety and diversity as well as niches that aren't being met well enough at the farmers markets."

Arugula, spinach and salad mixes have been the most popular foods, and certain unique varieties like the hakurei turnips and tatsoi have small, but devoted followings, Brines said.

"My main policy is to offer the best tasting, most nutritious, and freshest produce as possible to families in the Ann Arbor area and to be completely open with those customers," he said. "To that end a great deal of thought and care is put into the way the produce is planted, grown, and harvested."

That involves choosing the best seed varieties, growing in healthy compost soil and selling most everything within 24 hours of harvesting it. More people are seeking foods grown in such a manner, Brines said.

"More people are becoming increasingly interested in what they are putting into their bodies," he said. "They are seeking higher quality alternatives to the conventional foods they find at the supermarkets."

Even though more grocery stores are selling organic foods, Brines said the word "organic" has been somewhat "hijacked" by larger entities in the food system and the United States Department of Agriculture has watered down the rules for certified organic foods. Farms like his have to make clear the difference between store-bought organic foods and those grown through what has been called "authentic farming."

Still, he said, "if you are buying local organic food you are just about all of the time buying a better value-added product."

An abundance of fresh produce is available at the Ann Arbor Farmer's Market.



Clean eating

Pesticides pose health and environmental dangers because of the chemicals they contain. According to the Children's Health Environmental Coalition, a nonprofit organization dedicated to educating the public about environmental toxins that affect children's health, more than 80 percent of adults and 90 percent of children in the United States have residues of one or more harmful pesticides in their bodies.

Despite the dangers that pesticides pose to health and the environment, they continue to be an important tool in many farmers' repertoire. Water, alone, cannot wash away their residue.

If buying organic food is not an option; here are a few ways to limit your exposure to pesticides:

1 Mix equal parts vinegar and water in a large bowl. Soak produce briefly yet thoroughly, and rinse well with water.

"The dollars you spend stay in your community, and you are helping encourage a more sustainable food system, as well as the preservation of valuable farmland," Brines said.

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Tips for reducing pesticide residue exposure

2 Use produce cleaners developed specifically to break down and remove waxes and other sealants holding pesticides on the food. Canadian company Tersano Inc. has introduced an appliance purported to rid pesticides from produce, eliminating the need for chemical cleaners in the home. The system super-oxygenates tap water by infusing it with ozone to create a sanitizing agent for cooking and cleaning that destroys 99.9 percent of toxins, germs and bacteria found on food and household surfaces, according to company representatives.

3 Cut your risk of exposure in half by using caution when consuming the 12 crops determined to have the most toxic residues. In order, they are: strawberries, bell peppers, spinach, cherries, peaches, cantaloupe from Mexico, celery, apples, apricots, green beans, grapes from Chile and cucumbers.

4 Fill up on foods that tend to have lower levels of detected residues. These include, in order: avocados, corn, onions, sweet potatoes, cauliflower, Brussels sprouts, grapes from the United States, bananas, plums, scallions, watermelon and broccoli.

5 Eat a wide variety of all fruits and vegetables to limit your exposure to any one pesticide.

6 Wash all produce carefully. Pesticides are intentionally applied to stay on during wet weather and do not rinse off easily. Conventional farmers go as far as using bleach to rid lettuce and other leafy crops of dangerous residues.

Sources: Information provided by www.choa.com contributed to this piece.

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Organic *continued from page 6*

Helaine Hunscher, an Ann Arbor resident and program coordinator for the University of Michigan's Center for Sustainable Systems, takes home a share each week from the Community Farm of Ann Arbor in Chelsea, and she also purchases greens from Brines Farm. Her two grown daughters used to have fun working in the fields and checking out the animals at the farms.

"Compared to many communities in Michigan, I do believe there are more choices for organic food sources here," she said.

Hunscher said her decision to eat locally grown organic food is driven by many things, including the taste and quality of the products and knowing the source of her food.

Ypsilanti Food Coop, said the co-op buys from smaller farms as often as possible. They don't sell only organic foods, but they stay away from products with preservatives in the processing, food coloring, additives, and hydrogenated fats.

Many people visit the co-op when they're making diet changes, and customers appreciate a staff that's knowledgeable about its products.

"We stand behind what we carry, and most of my staff eats the kind of food that we sell," she said. "It's what we believe in."

Jessica Schuder is a freelance health and parenting writer from Royal Oak. She can be reached in c/o editor@toledoparent.com



Erin LaRusso with sons Braden, 2, and Blake, 4, at the Ann Arbor's Farmer's Market

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