

## Food With Thought!

### Promoting and Using Locally Grown Foods Submitted by Chef Jack Kaestner

The Town and Country Resource, Conservation and Development –TCRC&D had the opportunity to participate in the Turtle Valley Wildlife Area Celebration by **donating the food and music for the celebration. We agreed to participate, but with one catch.**

That the food and chefs were from Walworth County.

This caveat was therefore putting a focus on the food. Local food! Which we believe is so important! Often the food for an event like this is overlooked or just an after thought. Realizing the full impact and potential of utilizing locally grown food.

Let's restate the mission statement of the TCRC&D and show how it fits with this event.

The mission of the TCRC&D is to enhance the quality of life in our thirteen-county area of SE Wisconsin by promoting healthy communities, a healthy environment and sustainable economic growth.

- We will work on a regional basis with citizens, governments, local business, agencies and organizations, some of whom are already deeply invested in the problems and opportunities of the region.
- Our purpose is to look for ways to initiate and support projects that fill needed gaps, and ensure that efforts are optimized rather than duplicated. We seek especially to fill a niche of service to underserved populations in the cities and in the countryside helping urban and rural citizens work together toward their common goals.

### **Continuing the Farmer-Chef connection.**

This event was seen as an extension of a *farmer-chef connection meeting* in the spring of 2004, through **Slow Food Wisconsin South East** ([www.slowfoodwise.org](http://www.slowfoodwise.org)). At this event farmers and chefs from South East Wisconsin had an opportunity to become connected, open a dialogue, and build relationships. In a world where it is easier to procure food from around the world than it is from just down the street, many chefs just hop on the internet and order their food. The large food companies have made it very easy for them. The next morning it is in their coolers. Little thought or information is communicated as to where or how the food was grown. By encouraging these two groups of people to interact we all win. Buying locally not only helps farmers find markets for their items, it encourages chefs to design menus around seasonal food. It is encouraging to see many menus referencing production methods or specific farms on their menu's, thus helping to rebuild sustainable, greener food sheds and promotes foods with flavor, a place and face.

### **Building Connections**

So, for the Turtle Valley Celebration, we contacted growers and chefs from the original meeting that were from Walworth County. We asked them for any additional sources we could tap. We also contacted the local DNR and NRCS offices for further contacts. There are many hidden treasures just down the road, but unfortunately there is no single map to finding them all.

### **Creating the menu**

Next we asked the growers to provide a list of local foods that would be available for mid June in sufficient quantity. With those lists we ask the chefs to make a seasonal menu using these items. Thought was given to a casual outside atmosphere for approximately 125 people with limited power and physical facilities.

### **The pleasant surprise**

Over 90% of the food served was grown or produced in Walworth County. The chefs were amazed with variety and quality of locally grown food. Many were surprised with what is actually grown right down the street or over the hill. One chef even went to the bakery that stone ground locally grown wheat for his cookies and bread that they "the bakery" made that was served at the lunch. It was great to witness the connections being formed. Many of the farms are multi generational. Some farm land was directly adjacent to the wet lands. Putting a face and a place to the food furthers the long lasting relationships.

## **Other surprises**

Anticipated counts for lunch were 100-125, which is normal for this kind of event. The invitations went out with the mention of locally grown food and chefs.

Reservations were cut off at 200 (luckily for us the tent could only seat 200). Just why did the numbers climb so high? We'll let you decide.

Slicing and eating fresh strawberries within sight of the farm they grew on, was very pleasant! When normal foods that we eat travel 1500 miles, these berries that never saw the inside of a refrigerator traveled a total of 1500 **yards**. After the event I dropped the empty berry flats off at the farm, to be used again. Locally grown lamb (whose farm overlooks the wetlands) was served, with some people eating lamb for the very first time.

## **In summary**

The benefits of putting the focus on locally grown foods:

Developed and strengthened a connection between local farmers, chefs and consumers.

Educated people about what grows around them.

Helped local economies directly (much of the money spent went to Walworth County owned businesses) and indirectly

- The initial money was paid out directly to local owners, farms and restaurants which also support other local businesses.
- Money went towards cost of food, not shipping and transportation. Farmers normally get 10-30% of the retail dollar, if you buy directly, they receive 100%. This also reduces the amount of energy used in getting the food to the table.
- Helped the local and global environment including air and water quality.

Initiated and encouraged dialog between growers and consumers

- Support and encourage farmers to walk lightly on the land, while doing so our selves.
- Agriculture can have a big impact on our environment; if we work together we can help and understand each other.
- Encourage and support farmers through transition if needed.

Buying locally provides a direct connection with our growers, with our food (which, fosters community)

- Puts a face and a place to your food
- Evoked memories as people tasted or saw locally grown food. Some people offered to help us hull strawberries. 'Talked about how it reminded them of their own home gardens or early food experiences. I remember making jam or sitting in the field eating...
- Food memories are one of the strongest!
- Get people cooking again, several people commented that they were going to go home and do some cooking. Seeing this "stuff" brought back great memories.

- Learn to use the whole animal, not just a boneless, skinless breast. We encouraged chefs to use under used meats –chuck roast, pork shoulder etc. Education is very important.

**We challenge all of you to**

- put a focus on food, using locally grown food
- Make a difference through your personal, work and other community involvement activities, insist on locally grown foods
- Realize the impact of your daily food decisions and how they go hand in hand with your other concerns. For example...
  - How many people have spent an afternoon or all day for some environmental concern and then eat some generic snack or lunch?
  - Every time you eat and spend money you are casting a vote
  - What kind of stewardship do you vote for!

Not only support farmers markets and on farm sales, but ask for locally grown, foods at your grocery stores, restaurants and conferences.

As a chef, I understand that there are many barriers to sourcing locally. We've endured 40 plus years towards a standardized and homogenized food system. Thankfully food tastes so much better when it has a place and face to go along with it.

THANK YOU,  
Jack Kaestner, Deb Deacon, Diane Georgetta, JoAnn Pipkorn, TCRC&D  
AGRICULTURE ISSUE TEAM, AND TCRC&D EXECUTIVE BOARD.

### **Why use local food?**

- ✓ *Less time between field and table*
- ✓ *Encourages quality healthy eating with freshly-picked seasonal fruit and vegetables as well as local specialties*
- ✓ *Harvested at the peak of freshness or maturity when highest in nutrition*
- ✓ *Supports your local economy*
- ✓ *Preserves farming heritage*
- ✓ *Creates better understanding between town and country and helps support local farming*
- ✓ *Arrives at your table with a better taste than food trucked a thousand miles or more*
- ✓ *Reduces processing and packaging*
- ✓ *Helps in energy conservation*
- ✓ *Supports organic and low-input agriculture thus enriching biodiversity and wildlife*
- ✓ *A step towards regional self sufficiency*
- ✓ *Develops food culture - food is no longer anonymous but comes with a local story - customer knows where produce came from, what variety/breed it is*

## MENU AND GROWERS

### **Suppliers of Direct Marketed Local Products**

Michael Field's Agricultural Institute  
East Troy, Wisconsin

Altfred and Sue Krusenbaum  
Krusengrass Farm,  
Elkhorn, Wisconsin

Northern Meadows  
Cheese Coop

Wilson Farm Meats  
Elkorn, Wisconsin

Nakomis Bakery  
East Troy, Wisconsin

Steve and Darlene Pinnow  
Pinn Oak Ridge Farm

Steve Jacobson  
The Apple Barn

Menu and Local Chef's

Deb Deacon

Michael Field's Agricultural Institute

Organic garden lettuce salad with calendula petals and violas with classic red wine shallot vinaigrette

3 Year Old White Cheddar Cheese and Flavored Cheese Spreads

Chef Dan Grzenia

Dos Amigos, East Troy

Pork Fajitas

Chef Tim Weddell

Chuck's, Fontana

Braised Beef with Morel Mushrooms

Chef Joe Muench

Big Foot Country Club

Lamb Muffulettas on Farmer Bread

Peanut Butter Cookies

Chef Ken Hnilo

Gilberts, Lake Geneva

Local strawberries with balsamic