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Posted March 18, 2007



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Local foods get closer look

By Rhea Martinez*For Central Wisconsin Sunday*

There are many benefits to eating locally produced food.

To name a few, local food strengthens the local economy. Local produce is fresher, and therefore tastes better and is more nutritious. Local food eliminates pollution by reducing the number of miles that food travels and the amount of packaging needed. It preserves open space, makes us more aware of the changing seasons and gives us the assurance of knowing where our food is coming from.

There is an emerging effort right here in central Wisconsin that is working toward strengthening the local food chain in our community.

What started off as a small group of concerned citizens getting together Friday mornings to discuss local food issues over breakfast has evolved into www.farmshed.org, a growing movement whose goal is to build and strengthen relationships between local farmers, restaurants, retailers and consumers.

Its first event, the Local Food Forum, was held Feb. 28 at the Goerke Park Recreation Center and drew 50 area residents.

The event commenced with presentations from three members of the local community: Jasia Steinmetz, a home gardener and educator, Jason Sharp, a chef, and Chris Malek, a farmer, who discussed their perspectives as consumer, restaurant chef and farmer.

Participants then broke into small groups to discuss the challenges, opportunities and assets that we have for developing a local food culture in ventral Wisconsin. Finally, the group as a whole brainstormed on what a local food organization could do for our community.

Some of the local food opportunities discussed included providing locally produced food at area events, educating children on the costs and benefits of different food choices and informing the community about local Community Supported Agriculture, farmers, restaurants and caterers that use local food.

Some of the challenges discussed included a need to create more awareness among consumers about the advantages of buying local food, a need to create connections between consumers and producers, and a lack of profitability in growing local foods that is illustrated by the fact that most farmers need to supplement their income with other work.

Despite these obstacles, www.farmshed.org is determined to make local food more available in our community.

A second event, Speed Dating for Farmers, was held at the Schmeckle Reserve Visitor Center on Wednesday. It was an opportunity for local farmers to connect with chefs and retailers to discuss business opportunities in the local food economy and for consumers to brainstorm ideas about how to get more

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people involved in the local food movement. The event attracted a diverse mix of about 40 farmers, retailers, restaurant owners/chefs and consumers.

You can get involved, too. Local Community Supported Agriculture farmers will present information from 8 p.m. to 9 p.m. April 30 in the Pinery Room at the Portage County Library, Stevens Point. It will be a great opportunity to learn about CSAs and how they operate.

For more information, visit www.farmshed.org.






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