

Press Release

Vermont Celebrates Local Food Day on September 22

Burlington—In celebration of the state’s growth in locally raised and produced foods, Vermonters are encouraged to try two new local foods on September 22.

Local Food Day is an opportunity to celebrate Vermonters as leading the nation in our consumption of local food, based on per capita direct sales from farmers to consumers.

The day is the brainchild of Scout Proft, who owns and operates, with her husband Matt and children, Someday Farm in East Dorset.

“Vermont has been ahead of the curve in establishing innovative ways to support local food,” said Lini Wollenberg, Director of the UVM Center for Sustainable Agriculture.

“From the state-supported farm to school mini grants to schools, Vermont Food Education Every Day’s (FEED) farm-to-school program, Vermont Fresh Network’s farm-to-restaurant program, community-supported agriculture, Localvore challenges, the Intervale’s work on developing a local urban food hub, Buy-Local campaigns, farmers’ markets and UVM’s interest in local food systems—never before have I seen such a convergence of state, grassroots, school, university and private sector interests. The movement has really taken off.”

The state’s leadership has been vital. “Our schools and our farmers are forming great partnerships--making farms more viable and putting more local fresh food on the lunch menu” according to Anson Tebbetts, Deputy Secretary of the Agency of Agriculture.

From a recent VT FEED survey of school food service, Abbie Nelson, VT FEED Co-director noted, “About 120 schools reported purchasing some local foods—from apples, vegetables, and cheese, to occasionally purchasing local meat. The questions we are getting now are not ‘What is this farm to school movement?’, but ‘How soon can my school get local foods?’ The best part of farm-to-school, besides supporting local agriculture, is that local food in schools is not just for those who can afford it. Local food in schools means every school child can eat it!”

Educating the next generation

On September 21, Rumney Memorial School in Middlesex, a participant in the FEED program will prepare students for Local Food Day by using at least one new food ingredient in its Friday snack to provide an example of how Vermonters can incorporate new, local ingredients into their lifestyle and alert children.

Snack preparation will begin at 8:30. The snacks will be served by 10:45, and the snack period ends at 11:15. *Photographers and media reporters are welcome to join this event.*

Students will go home with a flyer including some suggestions for seasonally available foods that their families can purchase and try on Sept. 21. The flyer will also include the recipe from Friday's snack.

The Rumney School's focus has been to provide students with nourishment, give them ideas for adopting healthy eating habits, and help them develop a better appreciation of the foods they can grow, prepare and enjoy. Since the 2006-2007 school year, the school has been offering a special snack on Fridays that is based on local, fresh, nutritious, ingredients. Each Friday, one class helps prepare the snack. It is served in every classroom, and the nutrition committee records how many children tried it, how many liked it, and how many would eat it again.

Renaissance of Local Food

Interest in local food has skyrocketed in recent years. People are choosing local food for freshness, quality, sense of community and connections to farmers, or as an economic necessity to support local farmers' livelihoods, longer-term food security and a post-peak oil future.

"Vermont is at the center of a renaissance of farmers' markets, farm stands, and other forms of direct sales from farmers to consumers," according to Dave Timmons, a UVM alumnus, whose graduate work quantified local food use. According to Timmons, direct sales of Vermont products more than doubled between 1992 and 2002.

The grassroots Localvore movement in Vermont is huge and growing. Coinciding with Local Food Day will be at least five "Localvore Challenges:" in Addison County, Bennington, Burlington, MadRiver and Southwest Vermont. Localvores will be challenging themselves to eat food that is grown and produced within a 100-mile radius of home. "It would be great if groups all around the state sponsored local food pot-lucks on Local Food day," said Norwich Localvore Barbara Duncan, director of the Vermont Earth Institute, one of the early promoters of the Localvore movement.

Restaurants, co-ops and grocery stores may wish to plan for and announce Local Food Day on their premises to encourage greater consumer awareness.

Local Food Day also coincides with farmers' markets throughout the state and several Vermont harvest festivals.

Vermont law requires that items claimed to be "local" originate within 30 miles of the point of sale, while the term "native" can be used to describe products originating anywhere within the state (9 V.S.A. § 245). Other states have definitions that vary from Vermont's, for example New Hampshire defines local as grown or produced in NH.

Vermonters may expect to find customary local foods like apples, squashes, cider, and cheese at this time of year. Local Food Day challenges consumers to find local foods they might not have tried before.

Some of the more unusual products grown in Vermont include: Goat's milk butter and cheeses, water buffalo yogurt, cranberries, venison jerky, sunflower oil, currant preserves, mushrooms, emu and elk meat, honeycomb, specialty greens, cornmeal, dried beans, wheat, heirloom tomatoes, culinary herbs, sprouts, and edible flowers.

People interested in finding these and other products are encouraged to visit <http://www.vsjf.org/resources/index.Maps.shtml> for a list of farmers' markets, and other local food purveyors.

Local Food Day is being made possible by a collaborative effort of the University of Vermont (UVM) Center for Sustainable Agriculture; the Vermont Council for Sustainable Agriculture; Vermont Agency of Agriculture, Food and Markets; Vermont Food Education Every Day (VT FEED), and the Vermont Localvores. FEED is a collaboration of three non-profits: Food Works, Northeast Organic Farming Association of VT, and Shelburne Farms.

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