

Farmers' market patrons benefit as local food connections thrive

What happens to the local food economy when food producers source their ingredients from other local producers? It grows. That's what's happening with our little corner of northeast Ohio as business relationships continue to develop between vendors at Haymaker Farmers' Market in Kent and with businesses beyond the market, creating a web of food dollars that criss-crosses the region.

At the market alone Breakneck Acres, a certified organic farm in Ravenna, has products being used by five other vendors. Bonny's Bread uses Breakneck Acres whole wheat flour in a specialty loaf, while Shmookie's Cookies makes a pre-baked pizza crust with the flour and a gluten-free black bean chocolate brownie featuring Breakneck's black turtle beans.

Salt of the Earth Farm has highlighted Breakneck's beans in breakfast burritos served to hungry market-goers from their food truck. Out of a Garden makes a vegan veggie burger with their wheat berries, and Ohio City Pasta is now using their whole wheat semolina flour for a variety of fresh handmade pastas, sold at many farmers markets, including Haymaker, and at several area independent grocery stores.

Another market vendor — Pierogies of Cleveland — uses goat and sheep milk chèvre and feta cheese from Kent's Lucky Penny Farm Creamery, apples from Morning DEW Orchards, and grass-fed cows milk cheese from Ohio Farm Direct, all Haymaker vendors.

Now, I can fill my plate with the wonderful raw ingredients available at the market each week. At the same time, I can deepen my support of local producers by purchasing value-added products and know that my dollars impact multiple local bottom lines.

Several other vendors, including Barton Gardens, Black Dog Acres Farm, Chris' Kitchen, and Shari's Berries and Garden, use local fruit in their incredible preserves.

Additionally, every week at the market The Campus Kitchen at Kent State University provides a cooking demonstration of a dish for cus-

GREEN PORTAGE

Kelly Ferry



tomers to sample along with a recipe card with nutrition information so customers can try it for themselves at home. The dish features ingredients from market vendors, and the recipe card includes the farm branding so customers can easily identify where to purchase the ingredients.

Beyond the market, Nexus Cafe in Cleveland regularly features Breakneck Acres whole wheat flour, wheat berries, and black turtle beans on their menu, and Breadsmith of Lakewood created a specialty loaf with their whole wheat flour. Lucky Penny Farm Creamery's products grace the menus of several fine restaurants, including Flying Fig, One Red Door, and Fire.

It takes confidence in a savvy customer base for producers and chefs to choose ingredients that often cost more than those available through mass-market vendors. Many consumers care deeply about where their food comes from and want their food dollars to stay within their community. Farmers' markets and restaurants are the perfect venue to grow the relationship between producers and consumers.

Market vendors who highlight the ingredients that are sourced locally help tell the story of a growing local food economy in our region. It's a thrill to watch that story unfold right here in Kent, Ohio, and I can't wait to see what new chapters these talented and dedicated farmers and producers will write over the coming seasons.

Kelly Ferry is the manager of Haymaker Farmers' Market in Kent, where she also resides with her husband and two children, and is working to help foster the growth of a vibrant local food economy. Green Portage is a monthly feature of the Record-Courier in cooperation with the Portage Park District.

OPINION

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PAGE A4



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