



# Local Food for Thought



Spring is on it's way!

## News and ideas

### New from Extension Publications:

Direct Marketing in Wisconsin—

Are Farmers' Markets a Good Fit for Your Business? (A3811-20)

Meeting the Challenges of Direct Marketing (A3811-21)

### Employing Farm Workers (A3811-22).

Direct marketing is a good business option for many producers, but there are important things to consider before deciding whether it's right for you. Get answers to your questions from these and other publications in the

Emerging Agricultural Market Team's excellent series on Direct Marketing in Wisconsin: <http://learningstore.uwex.edu/Direct-Marketing-C12.aspx>. To order and to view more publications, visit <http://learningstore.uwex.edu>.

## Education Opportunities

### **DATCP—Wisconsin Farm Center. Managing Risks in the Produce Market. March 11.**

Richland Center, WI

- Record keeping models from area vegetable producers
- Crop insurance info.
- Financing and debt restructuring info.
- Equipment modification to make work easier on your body.

Register through March 7th at 800/942-2474.

### **River Country RC&D Winter Grazing Conference. March 13th.**

Eau Claire, WI

“Controlling Costs in Raising Beef through Proper Genetics and using Practices that are in Sync with Nature.”  
“Research on Pasture Finishing and Grazing Annual Crops.”

Call Lance at 715/834-9672 or Mary C. at 715/538-4396 x33.

### **Wisconsin Aquaculture Conference. March 14-15.**

Manitowoc, WI  
Wisconsin Aquaculture: Meeting Global Challenges – Locally. 715-373-2990, or email [Cindy@WisconsinAquaculture.com](mailto:Cindy@WisconsinAquaculture.com).

### **Chequamegon Organic Conference. March 15.**

Ashland, WI.

Designed to provide you the information you need to operate a successful farm.

715/373-6104

<http://www.uwex.edu/ces/cty/bayfield/documents/2008CORETbrochure.pdf>

### **UWEX Price and Taylor Counties. Organic Crop Production. March 24th.**

Phillips, WI

Organic crop certification requirements, managing soil fertility and local markets.

715/339-2555.

### **Southwest Wisconsin Local Food Summit. April 22.**

Belmont, WI

The community of SW Wisconsin will gather to share information and build efforts to expand the region's local food markets.

608/358-7837.

### **Wisconsin Sustainable Business Conference. April 24-26.**

Ashland, WI

The Alliance for Sustainability is hosting a state wide conference including a bonus Eco-Municipality Day. <http://allianceforsustainability.org/programs/>

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### Special points of interest:

- ♦ Schools may be eager to use local products for their fundraisers.
- ♦ Consumers are becoming much more aware of the benefits of local food.
- ♦ Check out and participate at the new Wisconsin Local Food Network wiki. [wisconsinlocalfood.wetpaint.com](http://wisconsinlocalfood.wetpaint.com).

## Is Organic Really Any Better? (Part 3 of 3: Taste and Quality)

By Mark Kopecky, Agriculture and Natural Resources Agent

In the last newsletter, we talked about the differences in nutritional value between fruits and vegetables that are raised under organic systems compared to those raised conventionally. In this final article of the series, I'd like to discuss the question of taste and quality.

The market for organic foods has increased about 20% a year for more than 15 years. Some people buy organic food because they're unsure about the safety of the pesticides and conventional fertilizers that may be used on these crops, some make the decision because of social values they attach to organic production systems, and some simply prefer the taste and quality of organic foods. As we discussed in the previous articles, there doesn't seem to be as much demand for organic food in our local markets, but people do often want to know what type of management is used in growing these products. Since many local growers use many of the same practices that organic growers use, it's good to know whether this system might actually make a difference in the quality or taste of your foods.

I came across an interesting article on this topic a while ago from an organization called The Organic Center ([www.organic-center.org](http://www.organic-center.org)) that has a mission to generate credible, peer reviewed scientific information and communicate the verifiable benefits of organic farming and products to society. Since the goal of the center is to advocate for organic farming, I was surprised when I read the article, because its conclusion wasn't what I would have expected from an advocacy group.

The article, "Do organic fruits and vegetable taste better than conventional fruits and vegetables?" was published in 2006. Its author, Richard C. Theuer, cited 60 scientific papers and nutrition publications in

his review of this topic. He considered qualitative factors like taste, appearance, color, aroma, size, firmness, and storability to be various indicators of a trait known as *organoleptic quality*. Organoleptic quality simply refers to characteristic of a food that stimulate the senses.

This review was very detailed and I thought it contained some good information. But just as it was in the case of nutritional quality, there doesn't seem to be a clear-cut case for being able to say that organic produce simple has better quality than conventional. There are differences between varieties, harvesting and storage methods, handling, preparation, etc. that can influence the organoleptic quality of food.

In general, organic crops have less nitrate content than conventional, most likely because there are few highly-available nitrogen fertilizers used in organic production. This characteristic may lead to better taste and shelf life. Apples are one crop that shows the most consistent quality advantage in organic over conventional production, but even then the advantages aren't universal. Theuer draws several conclusions from reviewing the literature on this subject:

- Most studies don't show consistent differences in taste or other quality characteristics between organic and conventional produce.
- The vast majority of studies that do show quality differences between organic and conventional produce favor the quality of organic fruits and vegetables over conventional.

It is extremely rare that organic fruits and vegetables are rated poorer than conventional.

In spite of organic produce not having an objective advantage in quality over conventionally grown, many consumers prefer organic and perceive it to be higher quality. The reasons for this seem to go beyond

the characteristics that can be measured through unbiased testing, so this may be due to a "halo effect" of consumers preferring organic food and attributing higher quality to it because they simply like organic production more than conventional. In any case, telling your customers about how you raise your food will help them to make an informed decision about their purchases. They may prefer your locally raised food over commodity food because they prefer your production system and want to support you, and that may be enough for them to consider your food to be of higher quality, whether it can be measured or not.

### Grant Opportunities

#### **AGRICULTURAL DEVELOPMENT AND DIVERSIFICATION** grant.

Proposals must be received by 5 PM, March 15, 2008.

<http://www.datcp.state.wi.us/mktg/business/marketing/val-add/add/index.jsp>

#### **Fiscal Year 2008 FARMERS MARKET PROMOTION PROGRAM**

(FMPP) grants. Application forms and program guidelines are available at the AMS FMPP grant program website at [www.ams.usda.gov/FMPP](http://www.ams.usda.gov/FMPP). FMPP applications must be submitted by express mail and postmarked on or before March 24, 2008. No extensions past the deadline will be considered.

#### **VALUE-ADDED PRODUCER** grants (VAPG) The deadline is March 31, 2008.

<http://www.rurdev.usda.gov/rbs/cops/applicants.htm>

#### **BUY LOCAL, BUY WISCONSIN**

grant program. Proposals must be received by 4 PM, April 14, 2008. <http://www.datcp.state.wi.us/mktg/business/marketing/val-add/directmktg/blbw.jsp>

# North American Farmers' Direct Marketing Convention

By Jane Hansen, NorthAcres Farm.

The North American Farmers' Direct Marketing Convention (NAFDMA) was held in Wisconsin this year at the Kalahari Resort in the Wisconsin Dells from Feb. 15 – 20. I attended the conference portion of the convention on Feb. 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup>. Much of the conference and the majority of the attendees were geared towards on-farm tourism with apple orchards, corn mazes, etc. But, there was a Farmers Market track and I gained some great information and inspiration in those sessions.

The first session – **100 SF, 100 Different Ways: Making the Most of your Farmers Market Booth** was presented by Carol Schroeder of Orange Tree Imports in Madison. She made many excellent points, but some that stood out particularly for me were:

- Good markets have good managers.
- Brand yourself – describe your farm identity and location. Do customers know your story?
- Massing attracts the eye – use height and symmetry to your advantage.
- Shelters define space.
- Seating, such as creating a café area will get customers to stay longer and purchase more.

Another session I attended – **Anatomy of a Successful Seller** had three presenters: Kristin Krokowski, Horticulture Educator with UWEX Waukesha County, John Silveira of Pacific Coast Farmers' Market Association and Steve Smit of Mt. Moriah Farms in Lodi, California.

Kristin asked several questions:

- Who are your customers?  
What is the economy of the area?

What ages are your customers?  
Why are they buying from you?

- What are they looking for at the market (and from you)?

Consistency (being there)

Customer service from knowledgeable staff.

A variety of products.

- What keeps a customer coming back?

Wanting to support local agriculture.

Having environmental concerns.

Looking for unique offerings.

Enjoy the social nature of the market.

Education on your farming practices.

Education on how to use the products you sell.

John and Steve worked together to present a number of key points, including:

- The quality bar must only go up.
- Sell the experience, spending is tied to emotion.
- Improve sales skills for you and any staff you may have.
- Find customers that are looking for local food.

The third Farmers Market session was **Anatomy of a Farmers Market Customer: the Customer's-eye-view** and was presented by Mark Olson and Scott Lynch, both of Madison. This presentation reinforced many of the points learned the day before:

- Create and communicate your brand; shift focus from selling your products to selling your story.

- Identify and satisfy customer's physical or emotional needs; are they foodies, greens, buy-local advocates or just passer's-by?

The final Farmers Market session was a NAFDMA tradition entitled: **What Flew & What Flopped: A Farmers Market Round Table**, moderated by Randii MacNear of Davis Farmers Market in California.

Ideas that flew:

- Gift Basket Central – customers bring purchases to a central booth to have them arranged in baskets and wrapped.
- Signage that puts ideas in to customers' minds – hostess gifts, Father's Day, salsa kit, barbecue kit, etc.
- Music – put a press release in local papers to encourage musicians to set up and play. Establish ground rules.
- Café area with tables and chairs.
- Display of children's projects such as scare crows.
- Incentives to get chefs to shop at the market (priority parking, help carrying produce, notice of what is available at the market, etc.) – other customers are very curious to see what chefs buy.

We didn't spend much time discussing ideas that flopped. Randii cautioned us to avoid ideas that are 'techy' requiring a lot of work and having little payback in meeting the goal of increasing interest in and sales at your Farmers Market.

Made Possible through:

**A USDA Agriculture and  
Entrepreneur Education Grant**

**The UWEX Emerging  
Agricultural Markets Team**



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[www.uwex.edu/ces/cty/price/](http://www.uwex.edu/ces/cty/price/)



PriceDirect promotes direct marketing of locally grown foods in Price County, Wisconsin through a local food atlas, educational programs, scholarships to producers, technical assistance and information sharing.

By Jane Hansen, PriceDirect Marketing Specialist

In October of 2007, a PriceDirect Evaluation was sent out to the 63 participants we have on our PriceDirect mailing list. We received 19 responses.

The following is a summary of those results:

The most important aspect of PriceDirect was considered to be:

Notice of Marketing Opportunities. This was rated at 4.33 on a scale of 1 to 5. The PriceDirect Local Food Atlas was rated 4.06. Also highly valued were Newsletters—3.722, Opportunities to Network—3.67, Notice of Upcoming Conference—3.61 and Educational Meetings 3.60. Less important to the respondents were the Fall Local Food Banquet—2.83 and Scholarships—2.65.

Features considered important include:

Advertising Atlas—14  
Distribution Cooperative—12

## Results from the Fall 2007 PriceDirect Evaluation

Local Retail Outlet—12

Newsletter—10

Less important features include:

Community Kitchen—5

Website—5

Board of Directors—4

Committees—2

In addition to asking generally about the above features, we also asked specifically if anyone would like to help to realize these features. The number of responses in that column were much smaller, but we will be sharing the lists with those who did respond that they would like to help. We hope this will allow those interested to work together to create casual or more formal alliances to pursue their marketing goals.

When asked whether they received inquiries from their listing in the PriceDirect Local Food Atlas, 11 of 14 listers who responded had gotten inquiries. However, the majority (9 out of 14) felt their sales had not improved because of the listing in the PriceDirect Atlas. Many felt that the most important aspect of the PriceDirect Atlas is that it gets information out in to the community about the local food options available.

All respondents were interested in listing in a 2008 PriceDirect Local

Food Atlas if it were available and most would be willing to pay a small

fee for that listing.

All of the respondents are direct marketing at their farms. 10 of the respondents are also marketing their products at a farmers market.

The respondents represent a broad array of local products in the items they are currently direct marketing.

As far as long term goals: Increasing sales—15, Selling at a farmers market—12, and Coordinating with other nearby farmers—9 received the largest responses.

The expenses for the PriceDirect project during the past three seasons have been paid by grant funding from the USDA Agriculture and Entrepreneur Education Grant. The grant money will run out this spring, and you, as project members, must now decide if you'd like the project to continue. If so, the Price County UW-Extension Office can help you through this transition. We can facilitate your meetings to establish a framework for the project, and we'll continue to help with providing educational programs you may desire relating to building your organization, food production, and direct marketing. We can maintain the mailing list, help you with photocopies, etc. We can do these types of things to help you, but the driving force behind the future of PriceDirect will need to be *you*, the membership.