



Buying Directly From a Farmer

Consumers can bypass the corporate food bottleneck

We live in an age when farmers don't know where their food is going, and consumers don't know where it's coming from. This has created an unsustainable food system that serves to reward an inefficient industrialized system of production, processing, packaging and transportation. But more consumers are seeking out farmers on their own and buying food from them directly. This type of food shopping provides the kind of one-on-one, trusting relationship with farmers that no amount of labeling or marketing can provide.

How do you find a farmer?

◆ **Farmers' markets.** These venues often take place once a week during the growing season. They mostly consist of produce farmers, but meat, eggs, dairy products, honey and other items are also often available. These markets offer a great way to meet a farmer and build up a relationship over time. However, don't assume that just because a farmer has a table set up at a farmers' market means he or she is producing food in a manner that fits your needs and desires. Some careful, respectful questioning can help you determine which farmers you would like to build long-term relationships with (see "Questions to ask" section).

◆ **Field days.** Organizations like the Land Stewardship Project and the Sustainable Farming Association of Minnesota often hold field days on farms. These events are designed to showcase innovative production methods and are usually targeted at other farmers. However, they can also be a great way for nonfarmers to see sustainable agriculture in action and to meet farmers who might be direct marketing food.

◆ **Meat lockers, garden stores, elevators and other businesses** that service the farm community are good sources of information.

◆ **Farmer lists.** Various nonprofit organizations and government agencies provide listings of farmers who direct market food (see "Resources" section).



Questions to ask

When contacting the farmers, consider asking these questions when trying to determine if their production methods fit your needs and desires:

- ◆ Are the animals raised on well-managed pastures or deep-bedded straw (hogs) at least part of the time?
- ◆ How are antibiotics and hormones used in animal production? Why are they used? Are they used only to treat illness, or are they used regularly on a subtherapeutic level to boost production?
- ◆ Are vegetables, fruits and grains produced using chemicals? If so, are integrated pest management techniques used to reduce reliance on chemicals as much as possible?
- ◆ Are conservation tillage techniques such as minimum till, no till and ridge till used?
- ◆ Are diverse rotations that involve small grains, forages and perennial grasses used?

A few handy definitions

◆ **Community Supported Agriculture (CSA):** This is a system where consumers buy a "share" in a farm before the growing season begins. In return, they receive a weekly delivery of fresh produce throughout the season.

◆ **Integrated pest management (IPM):** An approach to managing pests that combines biological, cultural, physical and chemical means to reduce environmental risks.

◆ **Grass-based livestock production:** A large part of an animal's nutritional needs are met through grass, in particular via management-intensive grazing systems that rotate livestock through numerous paddocks, spreading manure in a biologically sound manner.

◆ **Certified organic:** A third-party certifying agency has documented that the food has been produced using no insecticides, herbicides, etc.

Before you leave home

Traveling to a farm to buy food is not like stopping at the local convenience store for bread and milk. Farmers

are extremely busy, particularly in the spring and fall, and are usually not set up to do retail selling in the conventional sense. Consumers should also respect the fact that a farmer's place of work is also a home. However, with some planning, making a buying trip to the farm can be a rewarding experience for the whole family:

- ◆ Call to find out when the farm welcomes customers/visitors.
- ◆ Ask whether the product you are seeking is available. Many items are available only on a seasonal basis.
- ◆ If you plan to bring children or pets, make sure they will be welcome.
- ◆ You might want to bring a large bag with handles and a cooler. Bringing small change or bills is helpful too.

LSP resources

The Land Stewardship Project has developed several initiatives for bringing farmers and consumer together:

◆ **Stewardship Food Network.** This lists more than 90 LSP member-farmers who direct-market food. LSP members who retail or process food produced by LSP farmers are also listed. The majority of the listings are from Minnesota, but states like Iowa, Wisconsin and the Dakotas are also represented. Call 651-653-0618 or log onto www.landstewardshipproject.org for a free copy.

◆ **The Pride of the Prairie** initiative, which LSP is leading, has developed a local foods guide for the Upper Minnesota River Valley. The 71-page guide features more than 90 farms in the region that are producing vegetables, fruits, herbs, meats, honey, eggs, dairy products, grains, flour and wool for direct sale to consumers. To get a free copy of the local foods guide, call LSP's western Minnesota office at 320-269-2105, or e-mail lsptest@landstewardshipproject.org. Sometime during the summer of 2003, Pride of the Prairie will have a Web site (www.prideoftheprairie.org). The local foods guide will eventually be available on that site.

◆ **Twin Cities Region Community Supported Agriculture Farms Directory.** This directory, which is updated annually, lists more than two dozen CSA operations that are serving the Twin Cities region. It can be found at www.landstewardshipproject.org, or you can call our Twin Cities office at 651-653-0618 for a free copy.

◆ **The Midwest Food Alliance (MWFA)**, an initiative of LSP and Cooperative Development Services, provides third-party certification of local, sustainably-raised products. For a listing of MWFA-approved farmers and Midwestern retailers that carry MWFA-approved products, call 651-265-3682 or log onto www.landstewardshipproject.org.

Other resources

◆ A national list of CSA farms has been compiled by the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education Program. To access the list, see <http://www.sare.org/san/csa/>. You can search for farms by state. You can also receive the free listing by writing to: CSA/

CSREES, 1400 Independence Ave., SW, Stop 2207, Washington, D.C. 20250-2207 (when writing, please specify whether you want the entire directory or just a list for your state).

◆ The FoodRoutes Web site (www.foodroutes.org) features a nationwide directory of local, sustainable farmers, farmers' markets and Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) farms that sell fresh fruits and vegetables, pastured poultry, hormone-free dairy products, grassfed beef, and more. The site also has a Community Food Market where consumers can use their computers to buy food directly from family farmers. There are also auctions and classifieds where producers can buy and sell equipment, livestock, farm supplies, and more.

◆ Call your state's department of agriculture (usually located in the capital city) and ask whether it provides lists of farmers who direct market. Many departments of agriculture also provide information on farmers' markets in the region.

You've bought food from a farm...now what?

◆ When buying meat direct from a farmer, ask for guidance on how to handle various cuts. Local meat lockers and butchers are also good sources of information.

◆ **From Asparagus to Zucchini: A Guide to Farm-Fresh Seasonal Produce** is a low-cost resource for anyone interested in using seasonal produce. Published by the Madison Area Community Supported Agriculture Coalition (MACSAC), this book contains more than 370 recipes and features 46 different vegetable and herb sections. To order this 200-page book, contact Doug Wubben at 608-226-0300 or log onto www.macsac.org.



This fact sheet is brought to you...

by the members and staff of the Land Stewardship Project, a private, nonprofit organization devoted to fostering an ethic of stewardship for farmland, promoting sustainable agriculture and developing sustainable communities. We need your support to continue this work. For information on how to join the Land Stewardship Project, contact: Cathy Eberhart, 2200 4th St., White Bear Lake, MN 55110; phone: 651-653-0618; fax: 651-653-0589; e-mail: cathy@landstewardshipproject.org; Web site: www.landstewardshipproject.org