



small world

The locavore movement takes hold in the Valley

by **Susan Nye**
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Top: Lobsters from the Yankee Fisherman's Cooperative make their way to many local restaurants and grocers. Middle: LuAnne Bonanno, co-owner of Pleasant Valley Gardens in Methuen, shows off the greenhouse's new blooms. Bottom: Some of the season's first seedlings emerge from the soil, ready to be sold at farmers markets and farm stands.



A new trend in eating has not just arrived – it’s settling in and looks like it will stick around. Forget about food that has been raised clear across the country, or even around the world. There is growing demand for food produced right here in the Merrimack Valley. From gourmet chefs to home cooks, these self-proclaimed “locavores” are choosing locally grown products whenever possible.

So, you might ask, what does it mean to eat locally? And what’s with the funny name? A few years ago, four women in San Francisco pledged to support local farmers by eating only food harvested within a 100-mile radius. These crusaders encouraged friends, family and neighbors to join them. The idea gained attention and admiration, and soon spread throughout the country.

Scientists are studying and debating the impact of eating locally on our carbon footprint. The jury is still out, but one thing is certain: long distance travel does impact taste. Picked early to ripen en route, most fruits and vegetables travel one, two or even three thousand miles. The result? What could be a perfect tomato or strawberry is often close to tasteless by the time it reaches our kitchen.

It’s no surprise that the locavore movement started in California, where locally grown food is abundant year round. Alas, New England is climatically challenged. Sure, the Atlantic offers its bounty throughout most of the year. And with just a little effort, we can usually find fresh butter, milk and eggs as well as New England cheeses, local beef and turkeys (at least at Thanksgiving). When it comes to fresh fruits and vegetables, though, we can’t get around our mercilessly short growing season. Thankfully, summer is almost here: time to indulge in the pure pleasure of perfect strawberries, beautiful beans and heavenly sweet corn.

While it may require a few detours, finding local produce is pretty easy during the summer. Farm stands have dotted this countryside for decades. Farmer Phil Ferdinando and his family own the century-old J&F Farms in Derry. They plant 300 acres of crops – including their locally famous corn – and raise beef cattle. All of their beef and about 40 percent of their produce is sold at their farm stand. The remaining fruits and vegetables

go to area stores and neighboring stands. According to Ferdinando, “The secret to good corn, to any vegetable, is to eat it the same day it is picked.”

Shopping locally can be fun if you spend a morning or afternoon at a farmers market. These markets are filled with a variety of locally grown and often organic produce, as well as artisanal cheeses, baked goods, eggs, meats and even homemade ice cream. Many sell handmade crafts and have entertainment. Farmers markets are scattered throughout the Valley, and are generally open July through October. It is a great way to spend a few hours – shopping



“Farmer Phil,” of J&F Farms in Derry, stands in one of his family’s fields, which will soon boast the town’s most popular crop of local corn.

and visiting with farmers, artisans and your neighbors.

If convenience is your thing, you can receive a steady stream of local vegetables at your doorstep and develop a relationship with a farmer by joining a Community Supported Agriculture group. A CSA membership provides a weekly basket of fresh flowers, fruits and vegetables. Some CSAs add eggs, milk and meats to the bounty. Shareholders generally pay for the entire season up front, and are sometimes asked to help on the farm for a few hours once or twice during the summer.

Pleasant Valley Gardens in Methuen is a CSA. LuAnne and Rich Bonanno own the 100-year-old family farm.





While most of their business is wholesale, the Bonannos are delighted to help their CSA shareholders connect to a local farm. Crowned Mrs. Essex Country at the Topsfield Fair last October, LuAnne is a Fair ambassador and promotes agriculture in Essex County. She encourages everyone to support the county's 500 farms, urging her neighbors to "Shop at local farm stands, buy into a CSA or visit a farmers market. When you buy local you get the best tasting, freshest, most nutritious food and support the local economy."

The Yankee Fisherman's Cooperative represents about 50 New Hampshire fishermen. Historically they have sold their fish, lobster and shrimp to wholesalers in Boston, Gloucester and Portland. The co-op is now exploring avenues to market some of their catch locally.

Co-op Manager Bob Campbell is optimistic about selling close to home. "We are learning a lesson or two from the farmers. The co-op made its first step into the retail business last winter when we joined local farmers, bakers and artisans at two indoor farmers markets. We are now exploring partnerships with CSAs and hope to add fresh fish, lobster and shrimp to their weekly food baskets."



Raspberries Eatery owner and chef Dana Wilson uses as many local products as possible at his restaurant.

Some co-op members, like lobsterman Bobby Nudd, also sell to local restaurants. A portion of Nudd's catch goes to Markey's Lobster Pound in Seabrook. Co-op fishermen would like to expand their relationship with restaurants and see their fish prominently featured on local menus. Whether it's in a restaurant or at home, Nudd urges families to enjoy a lobster feed during the warm weather. "You haven't had enough," he smiles, "until the butter is dripping off your elbows and you can't get out of the chair."

Like many Merrimack Valley chefs, Dana Wilson, chef and owner of Raspberries Eatery in Andover, is a big believer in eating locally. Raspberries Eatery serves lunch in a small, downtown café and caters parties

**Want to give the locavore lifestyle a try?
Treat your taste buds and enjoy these resources:**

Farm Stands

J&F Farms

Phil Ferdinando
Route 102, Derry, NH
(603) 432-5263

Mann Orchards

27 Pleasant Valley Street, Methuen, MA
(978) 683-0361
www.mannorchards.com

Pleasant Valley Gardens

LuAnne and Rich Bonanno
255 Merrimack Street, Methuen, MA
(978) 682-9563

The Topsfield Fair

Topsfield Fair Grounds
Route 1, Topsfield, MA
(978) 887-5000
www.topsfieldfair.org

Farmers Markets in the Merrimack Valley

In Massachusetts:

Andover

Andover Historical Society
Saturday afternoons, July – October

Haverhill - GAR Park

Saturday mornings, July – October

Lawrence - Next to City Hall

Wednesday mornings, July – October

Newburyport - Beside the Bartlet Mall

Saturday mornings, April – October

Topsfield - Topsfield Fair Grounds

Saturday mornings, July – September

West Newbury/Laurel Grange

Grange Hall on Garden Street
Saturday mornings, July – October

In New Hampshire:

Amherst - Village Green
Thursday afternoons, May – October

Bedford - Wallace Road
Tuesday afternoons, June – October

Downtown Manchester
Concord & Pine Streets
Thursday afternoons, June – October

Milford
TD Banknorth on South Street
Saturday mornings,
late June – early October

Nashua - West Hollis Street
Tuesday afternoons, mid July – mid October
Main Street
Sunday mornings, May – October

Pelham - Main Street
Monday late afternoon, July – September

Other resources:

Community Supported Agriculture
<http://afsic.nal.usda.gov>
www.localharvest.org/csa

Yankee Fisherman's Cooperative
Bob Campbell
Ocean Boulevard, Seabrook, NH
(603) 474-9850

Raspberries Eatery
Dana Wilson - Elm Square, Andover, MA
(978) 474-0600
www.raspberrieseatery.com

Kitchen Gardens International
Roger Dorin - 3 Powderhorn Drive
Scarborough, Maine
(207) 883-5341
www.kitchengardeners.org

of two to 800 throughout the region. Wilson is an enthusiastic supporter of local farmers as well as the Yankee Fisherman's Cooperative. "I'm one of those rare males who actually like to shop," he comments. "Most afternoons I am on the road, visiting farmers markets and farm stands. I'm food obsessed. I like finding great products for my customers and supporting local businesses."

Roger Dorin takes local all the way home and encourages people to plant kitchen gardens. Dorin founded Kitchen Gardens International, a nonprofit organization, when he returned to New England after living in Belgium for 10 years. He reflects, "I returned home with a new set of eyes. I found Americans had become disconnected from food and the process of producing food. I want to try to connect people to food production again and encourage them to get their hands in the dirt."

Dorin is currently driving the "Eat the View" campaign. The campaign encourages the Obama family to plant a Victory Garden on the White House lawn. He says, "It might be a small step, but it would be a symbolic

change. A Victory Garden would show that the White House, the people's house, is self-reliant, and the first family supports a healthy lifestyle. The campaign is not about a single garden but inspiring millions of gardens."

As the days grow longer and warmer, think about getting your hands in the dirt, joining a CSA or visiting a nearby farm stand or farmers market. Celebrate summer and support artisans, farmers and fishermen with products from local fields and farms, artisanal kitchens and the sea.

| MVM



Worth The Trip From Anywhere

- Our Own Locally Grown Native Fruit and Vegetables
- Full Selection of Our Own Homemade Pies and Bakery Goods
- Custom Made Fruit Baskets, Pie Towers and Gourmet Gift Baskets for any Occasion

Cafe Open 8am 7 Days a Week
Fresh Farm to Table lunches Monday - Friday 11am-12pm



27 Pleasant Valley Street
Methuen, MA 01844
www.MannOrchards.com | 978.683.0361