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GROWING MOTIVATION

*Residents support local
economy by purchasing
locally grown products*

In case you haven't noticed, local food is a hot topic. Newscasters and talk show hosts have joined the journalists and celebrity chefs who have been extolling the virtues of locally grown food for many years. Farmers markets are booming, as well as Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) programs, where consumers pay in advance of the season for a weekly share of a local farm's harvests. Food is becoming much less anonymous, with grocery store signs, packaging labels and menus often directly identifying local sources.

The reasons for consumers to feel good about food produced close to home are numerous:

Exceptional Taste & Freshness

Local food is fresher and tastes better than food shipped long distances from other states or countries, and local farmers can offer varieties bred for taste and freshness rather than for shipping and long shelf life.

Health & Safety

Knowing where your food comes from and how it is grown or raised enables shoppers to choose safe food from farmers managing their operations responsibly.

Environment

Local food doesn't have to travel far (on average, food consumed in the U.S. travels 1,500 miles before being consumed). Choosing local food reduces carbon dioxide emissions and packing materials.

Support for Family Farms

There's never been a more critical time to support our farming neighbors. Each local purchase means a greater share of the food dollar going to farmers, keeping them in business.

But likely of greatest interest to local government officials are the economic arguments for supporting local agriculture and



A COMMUNITY AFFAIR The Kennett Farmers Market is now in its 10th year and is held every Friday during the growing season on Friday afternoons from 2-6 p.m. in the heart of downtown Kennett Square.

local markets. Pennsylvania farms produce more than \$4 billion in farm products each year and provide more than 140,000 jobs. We're a national leader in production of mushrooms, pumpkins, eggs, milk, apples, peaches, Christmas trees, grapes, pears, trout, tart cherries, strawberries, snap beans and wholesale floriculture crops as well as in direct farm sales to consumers.

In addition to these direct impacts, many other Pennsylvania businesses depend upon farming for their survival. These include food processors, feed stores, equipment

dealers, veterinarians, financial institutions and the tourism industry.

One of the biggest benefits of local foods is that consumers' food dollars stay within a community and are spent locally, rather than going out of the state or country. This economic multiplier effect is recognized by economic development experts as a key benefit for preserving local jobs and overall economic health.

Robust markets for local food help to make farming more profitable and thus selling



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farmland for development less attractive. The open space and other environmental benefits provided by farms to Pennsylvania communities (including wildlife habitat, storm water runoff, carbon sequestration and scenic vistas) have real economic value, which is unfortunately most evident after a local municipality has lost most or all of its farms.

One local government official in Pennsylvania who fully understands the value of local farms is former State Representative Sheila Miller. As Agricultural Coordinator for Berks County, she frequently points out that keeping farmland in production has a clear economic advantage to local governments. She often cites research by Tim Kelsey at Penn State University, which found that Pennsylvania farms generally provide more in tax revenue to local governments and school districts than they require back in public services. For example, for every dollar of

revenue that farmland provides to its municipality and school district, farm land only requires between 4 and 15 cents worth of services. But she also suggests looking at more than budgets: “Promoting a safe and reliable food supply – which includes protecting and advancing our local farms – is part of the government mandate to protect the health and safety of its citizenry,” notes Ms. Miller. “The ability of a municipality – or region, or country – to feed its citizens is clearly a matter of national security.”

Miller is doing a lot to promote her county’s farms and local markets, including updating a guide to local farmers’ markets, bringing a new market to a neighborhood in Reading that currently has limited access to fresh fruits and vegetables, and supporting efforts by local municipalities to develop new markets for local growers. Her advice to local government officials who want to help:

- When considering the development of a new market, consider the possibility of “over saturation” - it seems everyone these days wants a community market, but the reality is that we have fewer farmers available. Perhaps supporting existing markets might be a better strategy than introducing a new one.
- Seek partnerships with other local agencies such as Agricultural Extension to offer public education and demonstrations at markets on cooking and nutrition
- Use municipal newsletters to advertise local markets and other ways to buy directly or indirectly from local producers
- Do what you can to limit onerous zoning and permitting that could translate into unreasonable costs for local food producers and markets (don’t wink at the rules - but be willing to adapt them to the

specific requirements represented by these unique businesses)

- Protect the farms and farmers you do have, keeping in mind that planning decisions can either sustain or discourage existing farm communities. In your planning work, always make sure to evaluate the impact of new rules and regulations on local farms and markets for local food.

Another example of a government commitment to local farmers can be found in Western Pennsylvania. Tom Driscoll works for the City of Pittsburgh, serving as Market Supervisor for their Citiparks Department. The city has actively supported public markets since 1976, and Driscoll has worked in this capacity since 1977. In the coming season, the city will sponsor six or seven markets attended by approximately 50 vendors, 20-30 of which are local farmers. It is clear that the markets are not only great sources of fresh food and local gathering places for the communities they serve, but also boosters of local business. Driscoll reports that businesses in a shopping center located next to one of their long-running markets actually hire extra help on market day because of the extra traffic and sales generated.

But market development for local food doesn’t have to mean only traditional outdoor summer markets. When Gregg Township, Centre County converted an old elementary school building to a community center in early 2007, they saw an opportunity to serve their local community (11 percent of whom work in agriculture) while jumpstarting their new gathering place. Because both consumers and local producers were well-served by existing seasonal outdoor markets, they decided to offer space for a weekend winter-only market, which

Your Local Scene

The Pennsylvania Buy Fresh Buy Local® program has been celebrating the abundance found in our Commonwealth for the past seven years, with the aim of making it easier for Pennsylvania consumers to find, choose and appreciate great local foods...and to support the farmers and lands which produce them. Currently there are 10 active chapters in Pennsylvania. To learn more about what's going on in your region, contact one of the local chapter coordinators listed below.

Western Pennsylvania

(Serving Allegheny, Armstrong, Beaver, Butler, Clarion, Crawford, Elk, Erie, Fayette, Forest, Greene, Indiana, Jefferson, Lawrence, Mercer, Somerset, Venango, Warren, Washington and Westmoreland Counties)

Mia Farber: 412-246-0990 or mia@pasafarming.org

Northern Tier

(Serving Bradford, Potter, Sullivan, Susquehanna, Tioga, and Wyoming Counties)

Ruth Tonachel: 570-268-4093 or tonachel@epix.net

Valleys of the Susquehanna

(Serving Centre, Clinton, Columbia, Lycoming, Mifflin, Montour, Northumberland, Snyder and Union Counties)

Kristin Leitzel: 814-349-9856 or buyfreshcc@pasafarming.org

South Central Pennsylvania

(Serving Adams, Bedford, Blair, Cambria, Cumberland, Dauphin, Franklin, Fulton, Huntingdon, Lebanon, Perry & York Counties)

Susan Richards: 717-724-0009 or susan.richards@rcdnet.net

Northeastern Pennsylvania

(Serving Carbon, Lackawanna, Luzerne, Monroe, Pike, Schuylkill and Wayne Counties)

Elaine Tweedy: 570-941-7588 or elaine.tweedy@scranton.edu

Southeastern Pennsylvania

(Serving Bucks, Delaware and Montgomery Counties, as well as the additional counties below with local chapters)

Marilyn Anthony: 610-458-5700 x305 or marilyn@pasafarming.org

Chester County

Claire Murray: 610-563-3116 or claire@inverbrook.com

Greater Lehigh Valley

(Serving Berks, Lehigh and Northampton Counties)

Lynn Prior: 610-438-3950 or lynnprior@verizon.net

Lancaster County

Linda Aleci: 717-291-4293 or linda.aleci@fandm.edu

Statewide Program Coordination

Chris Fullerton: 412-246-0990 or chris@pasafarming.org

Buy Fresh Buy Local® chapters in Pennsylvania are coordinated by the Pennsylvania Association for Sustainable Agriculture, on behalf of their national partner, FoodRoutes Network (www.foodroutes.org). To explore your region's food system further, hear about upcoming events and find more ways to get involved, please visit the web site — www.buylocalpa.org — or contact one of the folks listed above.



is now wrapping up its second season. Township Supervisor Patrick Leary believes that many other local municipalities probably have buildings with indoor (and parking) space that is underutilized on weekends, and notes that having local residents assemble regularly for shopping provides an opportunity to “sell community as well as produce.” Gregg Township often offers workshops or other outreach activities on market days, to take advantage of the crowds already gathered. The winter market has encouraged local growers to get creative about extending their production seasons (using greenhouses, for example) now that a consistent market exists during the “off season.”

In addition to supporting the

development of markets, local governments may also support local agriculture in other ways. Officials in Lehigh County have taken a unique approach to supporting local farms and markets: they are using 15 acres of county-owned land to host a “farm incubator.” The county administration, proud that they will soon have 20,000 acres of farmland protected but worried that the number of farmers available to work that landscape continues to decline, sees this as a long term investment. Besides considerable staff time invested in developing the incubator program, they are hoping to offer aspiring farmers an affordable lease, access to shared equipment and assistance with marketing and business planning. The eventual payoff will be a new

crop of farmers who can help grow the local food economy and make positive contributions to the quality of life and food security for Lehigh County residents.

These are just a few examples of how local government can make a difference. But there are plenty of other possibilities. A municipal building can serve as a drop off site for a Community Supported Agriculture delivery; agencies can take steps to convert vacant lots for community gardens and borough councils can pass resolutions celebrating “Local Food Weeks.” For more ideas on what can be done, get in touch with a local chapter of the Pennsylvania Buy Fresh Buy Local® program, which is actively engaged in this work throughout the state. (B)