

Roots & Sprouts

News and Ideas from the Belmont Farmers' Market

May 2007

www.belmontfarmersmarket.org



Opens June 14th!

**Thursday afternoons
2:00 to 6:30 pm**

**BELMONT CENTER
In the municipal parking lot
behind the Leonard St. stores
off Cross St. & Channing Rd.**

In this issue . . .

**Eat Local: why and how
Know what you buy
Food for thought
A recipe for spring**

Roots & Sprouts, a publication of the Belmont Farmers' Market Committee, greets its second market season with a mission that is growing across the country: support for fresh, locally produced food and for sustainable agriculture. Consumers recognize that the way we choose to shop and eat influences the ways in which our food is grown and sold. In each issue during the coming season, we will offer our readers ways we can all become more involved with the food we eat, the farmers who produce it, and the land on which it grows.

Eat Local!

*From the Berkshires to your back yard,
how to find fresh food grown in New England*

Our New England farmers and communities make an enormous, yet unrecognized, contribution to our meals and our lives in a number of ways. In supporting local farmers, we help keep more local land open and green. These farmers can work to help preserve heirloom plant varieties and animal breeds and to decrease our exposure to pesticides and other chemicals. Local farmers encourage diversification of food sources and lessen our reliance on centralized processing facilities with their inherent safety risks. With local food distribution, greenhouse gases are decreased and energy is saved because of the shorter distance to move food to market.

Sources for local food

- You can bring home locally grown, fresh, flavorful, healthful, organic fruits, vegetables, and meats by shopping each Thursday at the Belmont Farmers' Market.
- You can garden at home. The most local source for food is your own back yard or even your kitchen window sill. All you need is a sunny spot where, for example, you can grow, herbs, tomatoes, zucchini, etc. If you don't have enough space or sun, contact Mary Trudeau at Belmont's

Conservation Commission at (617) 993-2667 or email her at mtrudeau@town.belmont.ma.us for details on obtaining a plot at the Victory Gardens in Belmont's Rock Meadow.

- You can find local produce every day of the week from June through October at Sergi's Farm off Glenn Road between Bright and Blanchard Roads. Known for its corn and flowers, Belmont's last working farm is located on land privately owned by the Ogilby family. You can also find the location and days of operation of farmers' markets in neighboring towns at http://www.mass.gov/agr/massgrown/farmers_markets.htm
- A short drive from Belmont, many farms sell fresh vegetables, fruit, and fresh eggs, while others offer grass-fed pork, lamb, poultry, and beef. These farms include Codman Farm and Blue Heron Farm in Lincoln, Waltham Fields Community Farm in Waltham, Butterbrook Farm in Acton, Hutchins Farm in Concord, Busa Farm in Lexington, and Natick Community Organic Farm in Natick.
- Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) is a system in which consumers support

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Know What You Buy

Deciphering PLUs – and other tidbits for savvy shoppers

Have you ever noticed the little sticker on most fruits and vegetables in the supermarket and wondered what the numbers mean?

These codes are used to identify fruits and vegetables at the check-out, but they can also tell you all you need to know about the produce you buy. These four or five digits on each sticker are called Produce Look-Up (PLU) numbers. They are applied to items sold loose or by bunch, by weight or per item (i.e. an apple or a bunch of greens). At the register the PLUs are key entered to obtain the price.

However, as a savvy shopper, you can use these numbers to tell you how this produce was grown. Check out whether there are four or five digits and what the first digit is in the sequence. Four digits not only identify the particular kind of produce (for example, 3112 is a papaya or 4225 is a grapefruit), but also signifies it is conventionally grown.

Farmers who raise conventionally grown meat and produce may use fertilizers, pesticides, antibiotics, hormones, or anything else legally available regardless of the nutritional content, welfare of animals, pollution, or environmental costs. Conventional methods maximize the shelf life and profitability for the producer, distributor, and retailer. The food may cost less at the grocery store, but the retail price does not reflect the many hidden costs to our environment, labor force, and long-term health.

When there are five numbers and the leading number is 8, the 8 indicates that this product has been genetically modified (GM). Thus, a product numbered 84225 is a genetically modified grapefruit. The FDA has yet to thoroughly test these genetically modified products, which may harbor potential problems to plants, animals, and possibly human consumers.

When the leading number in a PLU code is 9, the 9 indicates that the product is an organic product. Thus, 94225, for example, is an organic grapefruit.

The term “organic” describes growing food with attention to following natural processes, including avoidance of chemicals, in order to protect the health of the environment, farm workers, and consumers. Unfortunately, the term has been victim of its own success. Lobbied by industrial food producers, the USDA has diluted the National Standards on Organic Agriculture Production and Handling Act to allow a long list of previously prohibited substances to producers requesting to be certified as organic, with more added every year. Today, “organic” means much less than it once did.

As an alternative to “organic,” shoppers can seek out foods grown in the following ways:

- *Integrated Pest Management (IPM)* – A system of monitoring pests and spraying only when conditions dictate. IPM uses four different techniques to prevent pest damage: modifying habitats, protecting natural predators of pests, monitoring pest levels, and using controlled pesticides selectively. There is, however, no official IPM certification process; it is just a description of what the farmer is trying to do. Some IPM farmers may use fewer chemicals while others may use more.
- *Biodynamic* – Farmers committed to sustainable agriculture have begun using this term to describe their farming practices as a comprehensive system that treats their land, plants, and animals as a single, healthy organism. All parts work together to keep each healthy. Food grown with this approach is just as flavorful, nutritious, and free of chemicals.

–Andres Aquirre



www.belmontfarmersmarket.org

Belmont Farmers' Market Committee

Heli Tomford, Coordinator

Andres Aquirre
Ann Celi
Sandra Curro
Tom Dorsey
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Carlha Vickers
Leslie Wolf
Pam Young

We need volunteers! Contact us at belmontfarmersmarket@gmail.com

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PO Box 387
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Editors: Gale Pryor and Laurie Levy
Designer: Dee Ippen
Logo designer: Trey Klein
Printer: Belmont Printing Co.

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Food for Thought

Residents share their passion for fresh food, farmers' markets, and good living

How much of your family budget is spent on food?

In 1950, a family of five in the U.S. typically spent 21% of their budget on food, including eating out. By 2002, the percentage had fallen to 6.2%, of which 62% was spent eating out. North Americans spend less than the citizens of almost any other country in the world on food, due to our industrialized agriculture system.

What is the real cost of food?

Through homogenization, cheap labor costs, and the use of pesticides and fertilizers, the cost of food to consumers has been reduced to historic lows. What you don't see on the supermarket aisle are the hidden costs of providing consumers with such cheap food.

Conventional crops may be cheaper in the short run, but they are very expensive in the long run. The widespread use of antibiotics in livestock—to keep animals alive until they reach the slaughterhouses—contributes to the increasing problem of drug-resistant pathogens in humans. Factory farming relies on vast quantities of pesticides, chemical fertilizers, and diesel fuel, poisoning land, water, and air.

How can we keep the cost of food affordable without shifting the real cost to our land, water, and health?

Following the recommendations of the USDA Food Guide Pyramid would double the amount of fruits, vegetables, and grains consumed by the average American. Increasing the proportion of these foods in our diets, and decreasing the amount of meat we consume, would substantially reduce the dollars we spend on food. Consumers can meet the recommendation of three servings of fruits and four servings of vegetables for just 64 cents a day.

Eating less meat is good for your health, and it also helps to reduce the hidden costs of industrialized food. When you do eat meat, select grass-fed, pasture-raised meat and poultry, rather than corn-fed, factory-farmed livestock, to support sustainable agriculture that does not rely on pesticides, chemical fertilizers, and huge amounts of water. Higher in Omega-3 and other nutrients, pasture-produced protein is also far healthier.

Eating locally, as you do by shopping at farmers' markets, removes the cost of transporting food from the grower to your table. Less time in transportation means healthier and tastier food. So today start making informed choices and determine how you spend your hard earned dollars: buy local.

—Carlha Vickers

Source: <http://www.ers.usda.gov/Briefing/Consumption/>

Exciting Season Ahead!

The Belmont Farmers' Market Committee looks forward to welcoming our returning vendors as well as several new vendors with an enticing range of additional offerings. Among them are: grass-fed meats, such as beef, lamb, and pork; dessert sauces; more organic produce offerings, including some grown right here in Belmont; handcrafted soaps and candles. The list promises to grow as we configure the market site plan for the season.

We hope we'll see you at the market this summer and fall – both as a shopper and as a volunteer. Yes, we still need volunteers to help at the market and behind the scenes in various ways. Email belmontfarmersmarket@gmail.com to find out how you can get involved.

Performers wanted!

Calling all of Belmont's talented young performers. Come and serenade shoppers and vendors at the market. Practice your performance skills and earn community service hours. Email us to set up your day on stage at the market.

—The Belmont Farmers' Market Committee

Pesticide Levels in Produce

Some kinds of produce repeatedly test high in pesticides. You may wish to avoid these kinds unless purchasing directly from biodynamic (see definition on page 2) farmers.

The Cleanest Dozen

onions
avocados
sweet corn (frozen)
pineapples
mangos
asparagus
sweet peas (frozen)
kiwi fruit
bananas
cabbage
broccoli
papaya

The Dirty Dozen

peaches
apples
sweet bell peppers
celery
nectarines
strawberries
cherries
pears
grapes (imported)
spinach
lettuce
potatoes

Source: The Environmental Working Group, www.foodnews.org

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a local farm by paying in advance for a share of their agricultural products. This reduces the financial risks for the farmer because consumers cover the costs of seeds and planting crops in advance. Throughout the growing season, CSA members receive a box of the farm's harvest each week. CSA shares go on sale in January or February, generally range from \$100 to \$500 or more per share for the season, and often sell out quickly. Now in its second year, Belmont's CSA at Sergi's Farm is run by Gretta Anderson. For a complete list of CSAs, see <http://www.nofamass.org/programs/csa.php>

- Sometimes local chains or the corner store have in stock local, fresh produce and grass-fed meat. Lionette's Market in the South End, 577 Tremont Street, Boston, is devoted only to produce and meat from independent organic New England farmers and is an excellent source for information about local food.

- Get to know the places and the people at some of New England's wonderful farms. One example is Many Hands Organic Farm in Barre. For a comprehensive list, see <http://www.nofamass.org/programs/ofg/farmlist.php>

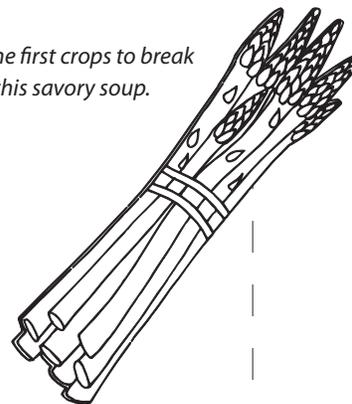
The Belmont Farmers' Market Committee would like to share your ideas for ways in which we can eat and grow our food sustainably. Send those ideas to the Belmont Farmers' Market Committee, P.O. Box 387, Belmont, MA 02478, and we will include them in future issues of *Roots & Sprouts*.

—Andres Aquirre

Asparagus and Chervil Soup

The bright green spears of asparagus are fragile and crisp, yet still among the first crops to break through the ground after the snow has melted. Celebrate their arrival with this savory soup.

2 leeks, trimmed
3 tablespoons olive oil
6 cups chicken stock
2 baking potatoes, peeled and finely chopped
2-1/4 pounds asparagus, trimmed
A handful of fresh chervil, leaves and stems separated
1-2/3 cups of heavy cream
Salt and freshly ground black pepper



Remove the outer leaves of the leeks and slice finely. Wash thoroughly and drain. Heat the oil over medium heat in a large pan and fry the leeks until very soft. Add the stock and potatoes and bring to a boil. Cook for 10 minutes.

Meanwhile, remove the tips from 20 pieces of asparagus and set aside for another dish. Slice the remaining asparagus stems and tips into 1-inch pieces, discarding any tough ends. Add to the potatoes and boil for an additional 7 minutes or until tender.

Strip the chervil leaves from their stems and set aside. Add the chervil stems to the soup and liquidize in a blender or food processor. Strain the mixture into a bowl or saucepan depending upon whether the soup will be served hot or cold. Heat in a saucepan if serving hot soup. Finely chop the chervil leaves, reserving a few for garnish, and stir into the soup with the cream. Season to taste; thin with water if desired. Garnish with the remaining leaves.

Serves 6

—Carlha Vickers