

Area/State

Once a niche, local foods becoming big business

By MARY CLARE JALONICK
Associated Press

PHILADELPHIA — Once a niche business, locally grown foods aren't just for farmers markets anymore.

A growing network of companies and organizations is delivering food directly from local farms to major institutions like Thomas Jefferson University Hospital in downtown Philadelphia, eliminating scores of middlemen from farm to fork. Along the way, they're increasing profits and recognition for smaller farms and bringing consumers healthier, fresher foods.

Over the past five years, with more than \$25 million in federal aid, these so-called food hubs have helped transform locally grown foods into a bigger business, supplying hospitals, schools, restaurant chains and grocery stores as consumer demand grows.

Major institutions like Jefferson have long relied on whatever giant food service companies provide, often processed foods that are delivered efficiently and are easy to heat and serve. But with a steady supply of locally grown food from the Common Market food hub, Jefferson now serves vegetables like bok choy and asparagus, creamy yogurts from Amish country and omelets with locally sourced cage-free eggs and spinach.

The model is simple: Common Market, a nonprofit, picks up food from 75 regional farmers and small food companies and quickly turns it around in its Philadelphia warehouse. The food — everything from vegetables to turkey to tofu — is then sent to 220 city customers along with detailed information about where it was grown or produced. There are about 300 other similar food hubs around the country.

Shelley Chamberlain of Jefferson's dining services says the hospital hopes to eventually source 10 percent of its food from Common Market. The items can be a bit more expensive and take more labor and training to cook, but Chamberlain says it's worth it to serve healthier foods.

"We can't go out to farms and say, 'I'd like to buy your cucumbers,' 'I'd like to buy your bok choy,' 'I'd like to buy your carrots,'" she says. "They provide an infrastructure for us to trust what is coming in the door."

Dawn Buzby of A.T. Buzby Farm in Woodstown, New Jersey, says it's a movement toward "farm to institution." Three times a week, Common Market picks up tomatoes, sweet corn, eggplant, cantaloupes and other produce from her farm and sells the food in Philadelphia, 35 miles away.

She says Common Market is helping her business get urban name recognition. And her farm sets the price of sales, something that isn't an option at the auction down the road.

"People are just becoming so interested in their food and where it comes from," Buzby says. "I only see it getting better."

It's a cultural transformation for the agriculture industry — and the Agriculture Department — which has long been focused on the biggest farms and staple crops like corn and soybeans. Most fruits and vegetables are shut out of major subsidy programs as billions of federal dollars flow to large growers.

USDA has upped its commitment to building small farms and locally grown food with a program started in 2009 called "Know Your Farmer, Know Your Food." Boosting food hubs like Common Market has been one of its priorities. There isn't good data yet on locally grown food sales, but USDA says it has touched almost 3,000 separate projects.

Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack says it's a part of a government effort to revitalize rural areas, which have been losing population — and important political clout.

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Haile Johnston says he co-founded

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Common Market in 2008 after seeing how little farmers were making at wholesale and how much customers were paying for the same foods in the city.

"The two anchors of the chain, the producers and consumers, are really the most marginalized in this system," he said.

Johnston says hospitals like Jefferson, along with schools, were a part of their model from the start because they could be a steady source of business and serve a large number of low-income people who may not have much access to produce.

In 2008, Common Market generated \$125,000 in sales. This year, the organization is set to surpass \$2.5 million — all money reinvested into the nonprofit. Last year, Common Market received a \$300,000 USDA grant designed to improve access to healthier foods in low-income communities.

New York City's Greenmarket Co. and Detroit's Eastern Market are running similar models, both with help from USDA. Like Common Market's, their customers are varied, from large institutions to grocery stores, restaurants and farmers markets in low-income areas.

USDA has helped these hubs and farmers that supply them with research dollars, technical support, microloans, infrastructure such as hoop houses for winter growth and help buying equipment. USDA also facilitates farm-to-school programs and has heavily invested in promoting farmers markets.

In Mississippi, Wal-Mart has started buying purple hull peas — similar to black-eyed peas — directly from farmers in the Mississippi Delta, a deal cemented with USDA help. One of the farmers, Charles Houston, says the checks from Wal-Mart have helped many of his area's small farms survive, paying for new irrigation and infrastructure.

Ron McCormick, Wal-Mart's senior director of sustainable agriculture, says many of the company's distributors are getting into the local game. The company, the nation's largest retailer, pledged to double its share of locally grown foods between 2009 and 2015.

Consumers are continuing to want more of it. Consumer and market research company Hartman Group found that nearly a third of consumers bought more local products than in the previous year.

Dan Carmody of Detroit's Eastern Market says he compares local foods to the craft brew industry — once on the sidelines, it's now making a dent in the country's beer sales.

"You see the same thing happening in food," he says. "It's really changing the narrative."

Police and fire calls

Police: Teen sexually abused Mountain Lake staff member

LAKE PLACID — A teenager from Albany County was arrested Monday for allegedly sexually abusing a staff member at the Mountain Lake Children's Residence on River Road.

Ray Brook-based state police charged the 17-year-old male from Altamont with third-degree assault, forcible touching and second-degree unlawful imprisonment at 9:13 p.m.

Police said the teenager forcibly restrained, physically assaulted and sexually abused a female staff member of the facility. Another student heard what was happening and contacted another staff member who came to the woman's aid and contacted police.

Police wouldn't provide any other information as the investigation into the incident is ongoing.

The 17-year-old was arraigned in North Elba town court and remanded to the Essex County Jail in Lewis in lieu of \$2,000 cash bail or \$4,000 bond.

LAKE PLACID — The Lake Placid Volunteer Fire Department responded to an alarm activation at the Whiteface Lodge, 7 Whiteface Inn Lane, at 12:41 p.m. Tuesday with two trucks 11 members. Burnt food had triggered the alarm. Firefighters were back in service at 1:04 p.m.

Point Positive to hold Inaugural Pitch Event

TUPPER LAKE — Point Positive is set to hold its Inaugural Pitch Event from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. Monday at The Wild Center.

Four teams of entrepreneurs will have the chance to pitch their start-up and early stage ventures to Point Positive's member investors, while others will attend a hands-on workshop designed to give developing entrepreneurs the tools they need to make future pitches.

The morning will begin with a session featuring seasoned angel and venture capital investor Charlie Kireker, co-founder of North Country Angels and Fresh Tracks Capital in Shelburne, Vermont. Kireker will give an overview of the angel investor process, using case studies drawn from his extensive background. This will be followed by a closed-door pitch session open only to Point Positive members and prospective members.

Other attendees are invited to attend a workshop led by Mark Cornett and John Liddy.

For more information, call 518-354-0202.

'The Legacy of James Britt Donovan'



John and Nancy Donovan with former President of Poland Lech Walesa

(Photo provided)

LAKE PLACID — The Lake Placid Institute for the Arts & Humanities features John Donovan, son of Cold War attorney and diplomatic negotiator James Britt Donovan, at the Adirondack Roundtable Saturday in the Mountain View Room of the Visitors Bureau and Conference Center on Main Street.

Donovan was a prominent attorney who negotiated two very important diplomatic exchanges at the height of the Cold War: one with the Soviet Union and another with Fidel Castro in Cuba.

His son John will speak about those exchanges, as well as his overall career, life, and legacy as it relates to present-day international relations, and his commitment to ethics, the law, education, arts, and the humanities.

Breakfast will be served at 8:30 a.m., followed by a 9 a.m. presentation.

Tickets are \$30 in advance and can be obtained at info@lakeplacidinstitute.org, 518-523-1312, and will also be sold for \$35 at the door.

All proceeds will benefit the institute's programs, and contributions are partially tax-deductible.

It has been recently reported that James Donovan is to be portrayed by Tom Hanks in a film directed by Steven Spielberg, slated for release in October 2015.

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Man, 90, dies in collision with truck

TICONDEROGA (AP) — A 90-year-old man has died and his wife is in the hospital after the SUV he was driving collided with a tractor-trailer in northeastern New York.

Police say Tobia Secone of Ticonderoga had pulled into the intersection of Route 74 and Harris Point Way in Ticonderoga around 9:30

Tuesday morning when his vehicle collided with the truck. Route 74 was closed for nearly five hours.

Ticonderoga police say the truck driver, 36-year-old Chad Fleury of Malone, wasn't hurt. Secone's wife, Margaret Secone, was listed in serious condition at Fletcher-Allen Health Care.

Railroads say up to 44 oil trains weekly cross N.Y.

ALBANY (AP) — As many as 44 trains a week, each loaded with at least a million gallons of volatile crude oil from North Dakota's Bakken region, move through upstate New York, according to documents released Tuesday by the state.

CSX Transportation said it hauls an average of 20 to 35 trains a week across 17 upstate New

York counties from the west to Albany and then south along the Hudson River. Canadian Pacific said it hauls an average of five to nine crude oil trains a week through five counties from the Canadian border to Schoharie County, according to the documents released to The Associated Press by the state Division of Homeland Security and Emergency Services.

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FRI., JULY 11TH THRU THURS., JULY 17TH
PLEASE PAY CLOSE ATTENTION TO SHOWTIMES

Dawn of the Planet of the Apes (PG-13)
1:00, 4:00, 7:00 & 9:30

Tammy (R)
1:00, 4:00, 7:00 & 9:30

Transformers: Age of Extinction (PG-13)
3:00 & 7:00

How To Train Your Dragon 2 (PG)
4:00 & 7:00

Jersey Boys (R)
1:00 & 9:30

Founder's
Saturday & Sunday, July 19 & 20

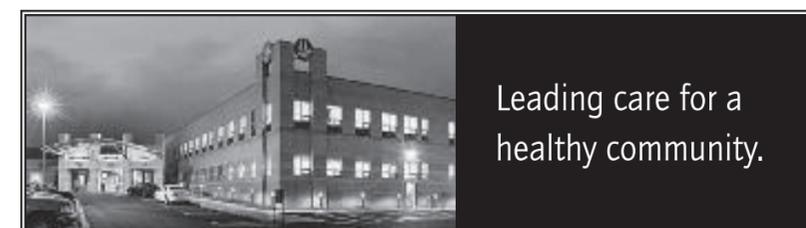
Gates Open 10 am each day
\$7 adults, \$2 children 7-17

VanRensselaer Point (formerly Lighthouse Point), Ogdensburg

Mock Battles • Tall Ship Tour • Children's Activities
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Weekend



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The Adirondack Health Foundation congratulates Adirondack Health for being named to Becker's Hospital Review 2014 list of

"100 Great Community Hospitals in America."

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