

Ohio State Fair features fresh produce at Celebrate Local

by William McNutt

The 2012 Ohio State Fair was unique in several respects: there was a small net profit, daily crowds were up significantly and 25 direct market vendors sold grown and processed in-Ohio products ranging from small fruits and vegetables to jams, jellies, salsas, and sauces made from locally grown produce. Vendors were associated with Celebrate Local, a non-profit offshoot of the three month Summer Easton Market situated in a

seasonal fresh and local vendors make deliveries of their processed product to Celebrate Local, where it is sold on consignment, providing another source of income to direct marketers.

With the advent of high tunnel growing, along with plastic culture that allows planting of specialty crops up to a month earlier, there may be an opportunity to double the seasonal exposure of fresh produce to Easton Mall patrons. Even though

streets surrounding what is usually a parking lot, now full of direct marketing vendors who are there one day a week. More dedicated patrons might go to produce auctions, where wholesale grocery buyers and restaurant chefs often gather, as well as more conventional customers seeking bulk purchases for canning or freezing.

But these auctions are just that: prospective customers bidding, though prices are pretty well predetermined by grocery proprietors or farm stand operators who come here to replenish or add to their own supplies. You might see customers here who are buying large quantities to supply stall space at Easton or other locations of the approximately 200 direct market vendors in Central Ohio. While there are one or two organic growers at the Summer market, along with several offerings at Celebrate Local that have been processed from organically cultured original product (baked goods, salsa, sauces, jams and jellies), this is not as big an issue as the assurance of environmentally friendly cultural methods, such as sustainable farming that use as few chemicals as possible, and especially the concept of having the specialty produce crops grown near where it will be sold and consumed. These are the most important items considered by direct market consumers.

Without question the number of organic users has grown rapidly; in the last 15 years, U.S. sales went

from just under \$4 billion to nearly \$25 billion in sales volume. But organic rules forbidding synthetic pesticides or fertilizers, or routine use of growth hormones or antibiotics mean that organically produced food products yield less, cost more to buy and seldom look as good in the showcase as those subject to the forbidden applications. A recent study completed by Stanford University researchers has caused a great deal of controversy in the organic camp by finding that there is little or no difference in the nutritional value of organic vs. non-organic cultural methods. Pesticide levels of all foods fall within acceptable safety limits, as set by U.S. Food and Drug Administration.

No consistent differences were found in health benefits such as vitamin content, specifically in milk no difference was found in protein or fat content. Researchers pointed out there are plenty of reasons to continue "eating organic," such as taste preference or concern about the effect of chemicals on the environment, or worries about animal welfare. Environmental friendly cultural practices are certainly emphasized in production of local fresh food, where customers often visit specialty crop growers to see for themselves what goes on in the growing of food they will eventually buy. There seems little question that direct marketing of locally grown food crops, sold soon after harvesting, will continue and expand in the future.



Interior of Celebrate Local with volunteer Lyn Stan proudly demonstrating the supply of year-long local products.

high-end shopping center. This was the idea of Heidi Maybruck, who is market manager of the weekly seasonal sale, in order to extend the range of product sold year round in a permanent location in Easton Mall. Celebrate Local was asked to represent Ohio Proud, the marketing arm of Ohio Department of Agriculture, at the state fair by setting up a market location for the 12 day run at the fair. Many vendors reported sold out days for their fresh produce.

Celebrate Local site in the mall is provided rent free by Steiner and Associates, marketing agency for Easton Mall, in partnership with the Easton Community Foundation, plus Columbus Economic and Community Development Institute. They are open and staffed by volunteer leadership during Mall shopping hours, usually from 10-9 daily.

Currently, fresh produce is limited to the seasonal outdoor market, with the interior location confined to processed goods and crafts such as Ohio wines, maple syrup, jams, handcrafted candles, and bakery goods. Many of the

sweet corn and tomatoes could be available in November, they would arrive more protected from the elements, which means the sales location must be protected from the elements. Local Matters in Wooster sells produce in their similar site location as long as it can be made available, on the same type of consignment mechanism, easily done through computerized labels assigned to both produce and growers. Wooster is also helped to stay open year round by a limited service restaurant, which will

not be offered by Celebrate Local, what with 4-5 full scale restaurants located in the immediate area.

Heidi Maybruck says Easton has purveyors coming from all over Ohio: Toledo, Akron, Cleveland and Cincinnati, up to 150 miles away for the Northeast quadrant of the state, where

produce harvest takes place mostly less than 24 hours prior to selling. This type of location brings customers whose shopping is usually an incidental part of the trip — perhaps an afterthought when they note taped off

Without question the number of organic users has grown rapidly; in the last 15 years, U.S. sales went from just under \$4 billion to nearly \$25 billion in sales volume.



Final sales of the season for Easton Market still saw crowds gathering to shop for fresh, local produce. Many of the vendors will be providing processed products from their summer sales to the winter location.

Photos by William McNutt

Apple Holler

by Kelly Gates

From more than 30 varieties of apples to a Golden Goat Bridge, hayrides and an all-American restaurant in a barn, Apple Holler of Sturtevant, WI has it all. The agri-tainment business has been around for over 25 years.

According to founder, David Flannery, it all began with an old barn and an abandoned orchard.

"I was giving a talk at church when an older gentleman approached me and asked if I would be interested in buying his property," said Flannery. "I had a background in the restaurant industry and the man thought I could turn

attending growing association meetings and frequenting Wisconsin State extension seminars to learn more about what to grow and how to grow it.

They talked with other growers about the most popular varieties of apples. They also picked up on the on-farm activities that drew the most attention from other farmers' guests.

"We took a lot away from these networking events," noted Flannery. "We now have a farm park with goats that can walk the Golden Goat Bridge, plus pigs, rabbits, chickens, ducks, pony rides, a straw mountain, several

vegetables from the kids' garden also make it into the restaurant's vegetable of the day offerings, like zucchini and squash. We also make our own smoked meats, including ribs, pulled pork, prime rib and even smoked meatloaf for the menu on Wednesdays."

In the fall, visitors can also purchase food from the farm's outdoor grill service. Standard items like hot dogs, brats and corn on the cob are staples there. People can make their own caramel apples. U-pick pumpkins are available at this time of year too.

There are also events scheduled throughout the year to keep 'em coming back time and time again. Easter is the first annual event to take place. It involves a costumed Easter Bunny, an Easter egg hunt, story telling with Peter Cottontail, a hayride through the "Enchanted Forest" and cookies and cider for all who attend.

"We have a Christmas program called 'Mrs. Claus and the Littlest Reindeer' as well," said Flannery. "We bring in live reindeer for people to take pictures with at no cost. The kids get cookies and cider, a hayride through the orchard-if the weather allows-and a little gift, like a holiday pencil."

Apple Holler is such a locally renowned place, American national VP candidate Paul Ryan stopped by with his family recently while on the campaign trail. According to Flannery, the political figure was searching for a much-needed family outing with his wife and children when he was told about Apple Holler and its full menu of activities.

The farm's security was alerted of Ryan's arrival and within minutes, an entourage of Secret Servicemen and a caravan of other related individuals arrived at the farm for a day filled with family-focused, farm experiences.

The focus is certainly on family at Apple Holler. David and Vicki not only established the agritainment operation back in 1987, four of their five children are actively involved in the endeavor as well.

"One of our daughters helps with bookkeeping and accounting and one of our sons helps supervise the farm park activities," explained Flannery. "Another son coordinates parking and security and our other son is the evening manager at the restaurant."

Vicki spends much of her time overseeing the bakery and retail sales. In the fall, the



These twin girls are customers who are happy to show how much they love Apple Holler apples!

Photos by Kelly Gates

main task at hand is making around 500 pies per weekend. The recipes have been handed down from her grandmother and are every bit the real deal. The crust is made from scratch and includes lard, not butter. It is rolled by hand. Then, an assortment of apples are added as filling, with the mix changing from day to day, depending on what is ripe.

Apple Holler sells jams, jellies, syrups and other products produced by a private label manufacturer. The Apple Holler Restaurant's salad dressings and barbeque sauce are also on the list of offerings sold there.

With so many products and activities, the Flannery family has always had something to offer everyone who visits the

farm. At times, there is more to see and do than one can possibly take in.

Consequently, David has decided to scale back slightly in upcoming years.

Apple Holler is such a locally renowned place, American national VP candidate Paul Ryan stopped by with his family recently while on the campaign trail.

"We've done a lot of expanding over the last five to 10 years and over the next five to 10, we plan to consolidate a little, just enough so we

can focus on what we do best," he said. "Our focus has always been growing apples and running a restaurant that features apples on the menu. Anything you can do to an apple, we do, which is what will always be the core of our business."



Apple Holler hired a local actor to be Jack Frost for a day as part of their winter festival.

his cow barn into a unique eatery. The idea intrigued me and after my wife Vicki and I talked it over, we decided that it was the perfect fit for our family."

Shortly after purchasing the property from the purveyor, the Flannerys began planting roughly 1,000 trees per year, steadily replacing the old orchard plot by plot. The barn was transformed into Apple Holler Restaurant, which boasts the tagline "as American as Apple Pie." Various activities were added to the mix to further fortify the foundation of the new business.

"We wanted to create an entertainment farm. We chose to strictly have pick-your-own apples, not apples by the pound, and everything here has and will always be about the total experience for our guests," Flannery told Country Folks Grower. "Our byline is, 'where you can pick your own memories.'"

Before the fields were planted each year, David and Vicki spent much of their time

mazes and lots of children's playground equipment."

Apple Holler extended its pick-your-own experience to include a couple of other fruit and vegetables. Along with 30 kinds of apples, people can pick peaches and pears. A small organic garden also enables summertime school groups to pick super sugar snap peas, cherry tomatoes and a host of other vegetables for an all around on-the-farm experience.

The farm allows the kids to pick their own produce. They also sample homemade salsa and other fresh and healthy foods as they learn about growing.

Many of these same garden vegetables make their way into meals at Apple Holler Restaurant.

"We run specials on pancakes throughout the year, with strawberry pancakes in June, peach pancakes in August and pumpkin pancakes in October, using ingredients straight from the farm," said Flannery. "Some of the



Employee Shawn Flannery, who is also Dave's nephew, cheerily displays an assortment of caramel popcorn.

FSR welcomes new OSU Ag VP, reports latest research

by William McNutt

Farm Bill 2013 will not be in effect till well into next year, according to the panel of Ohio State experts charged with explaining it to attendees at the annual Farm Science Review. More often than not the current Farm Bill will be expiring as the new one comes to fruition; this year was no exception, except that Congress went home to campaign with no new bill in sight. Ideological differences in both major parties are primarily responsible, with more conservative elements insisting on cuts in food stamp aid, now 80 percent of the current bill's expenditures, plus more reliance on crop insurance, perhaps made mandatory for most crops — including specialty crop growers — along with much less reliance on direct payments to farmers. A bill has already passed the Senate with \$23 billion in cuts, the House version — now stalled — calls for \$36 billion expenditure reduction, spread over 10

years. It is expected that major provisions of the 2008 Bill establishing federal organic standards, along with supporting grants for direct marketing of locally produced foods, will be continued, though in reduced form.

Attending his first Ohio FSR was the new Executive VP of the OSU College of Agriculture, Bruce McPherson. McPherson left a similar position at Penn State University, where he had been active in research and teaching since 1988, to return to his native Ohio, where he assumed his new position on Nov. 1. McPherson is known world wide for research in insect genetics, while developing new genetic tools for monitoring fruit fly infestation. Speaking at the annual VP luncheon for Ohio agricultural leaders, he reiterated that OSU extension is a front door to the university in every Ohio community; that the importance of agriculture to the states economy requires OSU to provide the cutting edge science to



Discussion panel presenting information on 2013 Farm Bill. They included Matt Roberts, Ian Shelton, and Carl Zulauf, members of OSU's Agricultural Economics faculty, specializing in agricultural policy and international trade, joined by Katharine Ferguson, legislative aide to Senator Sherrod Brown.

Photo by William McNutt

solve ever ongoing problems of food security, human health and food safety.

Governor John Kasich and OSU President Gordon Gee stressed the importance of agriculture to Ohio; a \$100 billion industry employing one out of seven in wholesaling, retailing, marketing, processing or producing food. Kasich pointed out that in the past year, food processors located in Ohio created almost 2000 jobs while investing \$730 million dollars. Secretary of Agriculture Tom Vilsack urged the luncheon crowd to contact their Congressional representative and urge House passage of the Farm Bill.

The additional funding comes with a continuation of emphasis on cooperation in submitting grant requests from three to four universities at one time, plus in many instances assurances of corporate support. To help meet this mandate, OSU has joined forces with Purdue and Michigan State for this very purpose. Areas of multiple concentration will include such current issues as food safety, bio energy, water quality, waste management and animal welfare. For several years state funding for such needs as education and local government has been in decline, with scientific research closely behind, and federal funding in the drying-up stage, forcing universities to coordinate with each other in order to get "more bang for the buck." Emphasis is on more urban farming to provide local foods sold directly to consumers was incorporated in the last Farm Bill, and will certainly continue to be updated in university sponsored research. A 26 acre plot in Cleveland is currently the nation's largest urban farm district supplying fresh produce to local inhabitants, with surplus production going to local food banks. Two educational meetings at FSR lent further emphasis to supplying local food for restaurant chefs, plus a report from the Food Service Director of Sandusky City Schools, who are feeding 1300 students each day.

Tom Freitas is able to obtain needed fresh produce from three local growers for a good part of the school year. Thanks to the use of high tunnel culture, tomatoes are available for six months of the year, while the school can switch to root crops, such as potatoes, beets and turnips during the winter months, with other raw material bought as needed at Amish auctions. He stressed that food service directors who want to take this route have to get out in the community to make contacts with growers, not sit in their office behind a computer check-

ing bids to see what they can have delivered from a wholesale source. High schoolers pay \$2.50 for each cafeteria meal, elementary pupils get by for 25 cents less.

At present about 40 percent of food-service directors in Ohio buy from local growers, nearly all said they would if more sources were more accessible. Selling to schools means meeting local sanitation standards with city and county inspection, a reason many do not buy more perishable items. The same precautions are necessary if local produce is sold to restaurants, a primary reason Ohio growers are instituting a voluntary program through Ohio Produce Growers Marketing Association to assure food safety standards are met when selling to retailers plus directly marketing to consumers. The Ohio Produce Marketing Agreement has been incorporated into legislation recently signed by Governor Kasich and will enable growers to organize voluntary marketing initiatives for fruits, vegetables and other commodities, which will subject improper food safety handling practices to mandatory inspection, especially important to commercial food preparers — such as chefs — who must meet strict sanitation standards to offset the threat of their kitchens being shut down until unsafe practices are corrected.

Chefs want year round guaranteed supply, but will compromise on seasonality, are willing to use, and even looking for, new types of ethnic produce. They do not want too much pre-packaging, in order to keep their emphasis on "green." Growers looking for this type of buyer must become familiar with food labeling laws, being very careful with claims such as natural, organic, or gluten free. Mark Mechling, Muskingum County Extension Educator, who moderated this session, reported that Ohio is among the top ten states in number of direct marketers, with approximately 600. Breakfast trade is expanding, the X and Y segment of the younger generation are attracted by casual, spur-of-the-moment dining with emphasis on naturally grown, environmentally sustainable cultural methods, and especially by increasing their consumption of locally grown fruits and vegetables. That, coupled with the fact their baby boomer parents, 76 million strong, will control over half of the \$706 million dollars spent on groceries in the next few years, assures continued support for "fresh and local" even as their parents, with their meat and potatoes philosophy, fade out of the picture.

Photo courtesy of Sugargrove Tree Farm
Don Behrenson, with Blake's brothers Fred Rafeld and Marvin Rafeld, and Blake's son Jason Rafeld help during the Christmas season.

Country Folks

GROWER

The Monthly Newspaper for Greenhouses, Nurseries, Fruit & Vegetable Growers

(518) 673-3237 • Fax # (518) 673-2381
(ISSN# 1065-1756) U.S.P.S. 008885

Country Folks Grower is published monthly by Lee Publications, P.O. Box 121, 6113 St. Hwy. 5, Palatine Bridge, NY 13428.

Periodical postage paid at Palatine Bridge, NY 13428.

Subscription Price: \$20 per year. Canada \$55 per year.

POSTMASTER: Send address change to Country Folks Grower, P.O. Box 121, Subscription Dept., Palatine Bridge, NY 13428-0121.

Publisher, President.....Frederick W. Lee
Vice-President Production.....Mark W. Lee, ext. 132.....mlee@leepub.com
Vice-President & General Manager.....Bruce Button, ext. 104.....bbutton@leepub.com
Comptroller.....Robert Moyer, ext. 148.....bmoyer@leepub.com
Production Coordinator.....Jessica Mackay, ext. 137.....jmackay@leepub.com
Editor.....Joan Kark-Wren, ext. 141.....jkarkwren@leepub.com
Page Composition.....Allison Swartz, ext. 139.....aswartz@leepub.com
Classified Ad Manager.....Peggy Patrei, ext. 111.....classified@leepub.com

Palatine Bridge, Main Office.....518-673-3237

Accounting/Billing Office.....518-673-2269.....amoyer@leepub.com

Subscriptions.....518-673-2448.....subscriptions@leepub.com

Web Site:.....www.leepub.com

Send all correspondence to:

PO Box 121, Palatine Bridge, NY 13428

Fax (518) 673-2699

Editorial Email: jkarkwren@leepub.com

Advertising Email: jmackay@leepub.com

AD SALES REPRESENTATIVES

Bruce Button, Ad Sales Manager....bbutton@leepub.com.....800-218-5586, ext. 104
Dan Wren, Grower Sales Manager...dwren@leepub.com.....800-218-5586, ext. 117
Jan Andrews.....jandrews@leepub.com.....800-218-5586, ext. 110
Richard Barrett.....rbarrett@leepub.com.....800-218-5586, ext. 118
Dave Dornburgh.....ddornburgh@leepub.com.....800-218-5586, ext. 109
Steve Heiser.....sheiser@leepub.com.....800-218-5586, ext. 119
Ian Hitchener.....ihitchener@leepub.com.....518-210-2066
Tina Krieger.....tkrieger@leepub.com.....800-218-5586, ext. 262
Kegley Baumgardner.....kegleyb@va.net.....540-255-9112
Wanda Luck / North Carolina.....wwluck5@gmail.com.....336-416-6198 (cell)
Mark Sheldon.....msheldon@gotsky.com.....814-587-2519
Sue Thomas.....suethomas1@cox.net.....949-599-6800

Lee Publications

6113 State Hwy. 5, PO Box 121, Palatine Bridge, NY 13428

We cannot GUARANTEE the return of photographs. Publisher not responsible for typographical errors. Size, style of type and locations of advertisements are left to the discretion of the publisher. The opinions expressed in this publication are not necessarily those of the publisher. We will not knowingly accept or publish advertising which is fraudulent or misleading in nature. The publisher reserves the sole right to edit, revise or reject any and all advertising with or without cause being assigned which in his judgement is unwholesome or contrary to the interest of this publication. We assume no financial responsibility for typographical errors in advertisement, but if at fault, will reprint that portion of the ad in which the error appears.

***For complete weekly ag news for the
Mid-Atlantic and New England areas***

***Subscribe to
Country Folks***

Phone: 800-218-5586

E-mail: subscriptions@leepub.com

One year \$47

Two years \$78

Digital and print versions available.