

Farmers, buyers tout benefits of local food

Sarah McCallister

A revolution is beginning. And it's starting with our stomachs.

Yola Bailey, who owns and runs Fox Run Farms in Brainard, Neb., along with her family, has seen the countless benefits of buying and growing local food. While her family has been on this farm since 1899, Bailey and her family have been tweaking their business within the last few years to improve their quality of life, as well as that of their neighbors.

Fox Run Farms grows and sells a large variety of produce – including beets, carrots, turnips and onions among others – herbs, fruits and, more recently, wine to members of its Community Supported Agriculture program, Open Harvest Cooperative Grocery and various Lincoln restaurants, including Pepe's Veggie-Mex Bistro. And last year, Bailey started looking into the idea of growing organically after learning about the process through a beginning farmers workshop.

“I just went to that first Community Crops class and realized we were fools if we weren't doing this,” she said. “Especially since we like gardening and there were some real important things, like the fact that we live in a food desert here in Brainard – there's no grocery store; the closest place to buy food here is David City, which is 15 miles away.

“So a big part of our focus was improving our community, our local community especially.”

From Bailey's point of view, the benefits of growing and buying locally have proven boundless. Through her relationships with customers, she has seen improvements economically, environmentally and nutritionally.

With the economy failing and the United States in a recession, Bailey cites buying locally as one way for the average Joe to pitch in.

“I think what's going on is a revolution in local food, and I think it is tied to the economy,” she said. “In my mind, this is one way we can contribute to restimulating the economy and getting it back on its feet.

“I think it's got to be a grassroots effort; I think it's got to be everyday people doing everyday things, but they're local things. If someone's buying their lettuce from a farmer's market as opposed to buying it from Wal-Mart, your dollar is being spent locally and it's contributing to people that are taking care of the environment right here.”

Owen Stuckey, a senior environmental studies and anthropology major at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, buys locally and organically as often as he can, citing similar benefits.

“You are giving money to people who are trying to protect the environment,” he said. “That’s a big deal to me.”

Bailey also believes consumers benefit by being able to stand face-to-face with the person producing their food.

“I think it helps to put a face to your food, as they say,” she said. “It’s more of an intimate and satisfying experience if you actually look your farmer in the eye while you’re buying the lettuce.”

While both Bailey and Stuckey believe Lincoln has a long way to go before being on par with the local-food industry in bigger cities, both see it growing as more Nebraskans realize the advantages of home-grown food.

“I do see it taking off here in Lincoln, definitely,” Stuckey said. “People are trying a lot harder to jumpstart that kind of movement because they know it’s good for the community; it’s good for the environment.”

Bailey agreed.

“I think it’s a revolution on the Nebraska front, where we all know we’re from a farming state, but we don’t have that much interaction with it. I mean, how much interaction can you have with a field of corn?” she asked. “But once you have a farm that you can go visit and pick an egg and see how the kale grows, you have a lot more people involved in farming, not just the farmers.

“I think this is the wave of the future, and people should be paying attention to their local farms because these are treasures. And once they’re gone ... you’re not ever going to have that kind of experience for your kids or yourself.”