

Farmers market gets winterized

January 2008

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FAIRFIELD — Fairfield County residents longing for fresh food from summer farmers markets can now buy locally-cultivated goods at a weekly indoor winter market.

Winter markets are a relatively new trend in Connecticut and only four winter markets currently exist in the state, according to Rick Macsuga, the Connecticut Department of Agriculture's agricultural marketing representative.

City Seed in New Haven started the winter market trend last year, holding an outdoor market every third Saturday of the month.

Wholesome Wave Foundation, a Westport-based nonprofit that also holds farmers markets in the summer, hosts Fairfield's gathering of local farmers and artisans each Saturday beginning at 10 a.m. until the end of April at Fairfield Theater Company in Fairfield.

"We have a lot of customers who made a commitment to buy food from local sustainable sources over the summer and this enables them to continue that commitment," said Katherine Dyer, market manager for Wholesome Wave Foundation's farmers markets.

The foundation held its first winter market on Jan. 26 and farmers and artisans from around the state flocked to the market including Sono Baking Company from Norwalk, Wave Hill Breads from Wilton and Sankow's Beaver Brook Farm from Lyme.

Vendors at the winter market sell fish, meat, greenhouse vegetables, maple syrup and other products available in the winter.

Dyer said many people in the county do not realize farmers still have products in the winter.

Residents flooded the theater building in search of fresh food at the winter market on Saturday, according to Dyer.

Jeff Northrop, whose company Westport Aquaculture rented a table at the market sold 200 oysters and 400 clams within 90 minutes after the market opened and said he spent the next two-and-a-half hours apologizing to customers for selling out of his stock.

"It was extraordinary," he said. "It was like locusts. I don't know whether it was just so much pent up desire from people being inside for the winter or something."

Northrop said he generally brings the same amount of stock to the summer farmers markets and he usually fails to sell as much as he sold at the winter market.

Farmers markets provide a boon for local food producers, as the markets lend sellers a direct link to the consumer, according to

"Economically, the best thing they can do is to cut out the middle man," said Macsuga. "They're getting a retail price for their product, which is what you want to do, especially as a small farmer."

The popularity of the market marks a growing health and environmental consciousness sprouting up in mainstream American culture, according to Dyer. As consumers search for organic foods, more of them are turning to locally produced foods because of their freshness.

Farmers markets in Connecticut have grown from 22 in 1986 to over 100, according to Macsuga. The agricultural marketing representative believed the growth of farmers markets would top out at around 40 but the markets have spiked in popularity.

"Every year, we're adding a few on but the last couple of years have just been unbelievable," he said. "Last year, 14 came on board and we're looking at nine new ones for this year."

Stimulus for the local economy also attracts business, as customers are becoming more cognizant of the plight of small farms, according to Dyer.

"It supports the local economy because these farmers spend money in their communities, which is much closer to home than the corporate offices of Whole Foods," she said.

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