

Support Local Agriculture

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Farm stands in Berrien County sell everything from locally-produced fruits and vegetables to homegrown flowers and fibers. (Photo by Bill Hurst)

Published 9:45am Thursday, June 26, 2014

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Farm stand map makes it simple to shop local

BARODA — It's always great to be travelling down a country road in the middle of summer and spy a farm stand selling fresh, local produce. It's even better if one of these farm stands is on a route you commonly travel.

But what if there were a better way, a way where you could frequent the farm stands in the area with the same regularity you frequent your local supermarket—a way that you could plan out and do the bulk of your food shopping from local farmers?

Well, thanks to Support Local Agriculture, there is.

Originally started as a nonprofit in 2008, Bill and Greta Hurst, owners of Tabula Rasa Gallery, took over the administration of Support Local Agriculture in 2011.

The mission of Support Local Agriculture is "To support Agri-Tourism in Southwest Michigan through art, education and food."

As both a website—www.supportlocalagriculture.com—and as a hard-copy guide that can be kept in a glove box, Support Local Agriculture (SLA) provides local consumers with a map of 32 farm stands in Berrien County.

Farmers pay a small annual fee to be included in the guide that is distributed to consumers for free. With a yearly circulation of between 5,000 and 7,000 copies, the guide is updated each May.

Now in its fourth edition, SLA includes contact information for the different farms, as well as information about the crops they sell and the seasons when those crops are available. Many listings also include web addresses or Facebook pages that customers can visit to learn more about the farms and their products.

Noting that “Berrien County is a magical place for agriculture,” Support Local Agriculture seeks to promote the fact that “Southwest Michigan leads the world in non-citrus fruit production and 70% of the crop diversity in the United States grows in Berrien County.”

The Hursts hope “that many folks will see our map and try new farm stands with exciting fresh produce, grass-fed meats, flowers, fiber, and eggs.”

Beyond simply providing a way for local consumers to access fresh food, farm stands provide a way for customers to reconnect with the folks who are actually growing their food—an uncommon opportunity in a nation that has become so shaped by giant agribusinesses.

“I just love visiting farm stands,” said Susan K. Johnston, who specializes in nature photography. “The people are always so nice and excited that you are there.”

If you’d like to have your own copy of the guide, you can download it from the website or pick up a copy at Tabula Rasa, located at 8918 First St. in Baroda.

Guides can also be found at local farmers markets and participating fruit stands, as well as at hotels and restaurants throughout Harbor Country. The Visitors Center at Exit 1 on I-94 also has copies.

As Greta noted, “We’re so blessed here with the fruit belt and all of the agriculture here, so why wouldn’t we want to take advantage of what we have in our own back yard? It just makes sense.”

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