

GREENWorks

Ideas for a Cleaner Environment

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Buy Local, New Hampshire!

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New Hampshire residents are showing unprecedented interest in local foods and agricultural products, which is great for local farmers and good for New Hampshire's economy. The recent census of agriculture, performed in 2007 (the agriculture census is taken every five years), substantiates the increased consumer demand in NH. The census revealed a growing agricultural industry with a 24% increase in the total number of farms in NH since the 2002 census. Further, the Granite State came in first in the country for percent of farms with direct marketing sales (direct to consumer sales).

Why the booming interest in local? Perhaps a number of factors have combined to fuel growth. First, food safety scares involving products produced outside of the region have made some consumers pause and take a closer look at where their food comes from. Buying locally allows a personal relationship to develop between the buyer and the farmer. People are more comfortable knowing where the food came from and who grew it. Along with that, there is also a tremendous desire to support local business, in general, to keep dollars circulating in the immediate community. Environmentally, agricultural businesses, in particular, bring green belts to a community. Open fields and pastures contribute to the living quality and scenic aspects of the community and also support wildlife and related activities.

Finally, in New Hampshire, the NH Dept. of Agriculture, Markets & Food and the NH Division of Travel & Tourism Development have been partnering for several years now on a "Buy Local Agriculture" campaign to encourage the purchase of local foods and agricultural products. The campaign includes multi-media activities to remind consumers of the wonderful products and related family friendly farm activities we have in our state.

Along with the growth of farm numbers, we have seen an increase in farmers' market numbers. There were a dozen markets statewide in the mid-1990's and today there are nearly 80. Winter farmers markets were all the rage last year with about twelve markets operating around the state from January to April and it wasn't unusual for 1500 people to show up at a three hour market.

Restaurants have been looking to increase their purchases of NH foods over recent years. The NH Farm to Restaurant Connection, a program that began in 2004 with support from the NH Dept. of Agriculture, Markets & Food, works to link farmers with chefs. Growers Dinners have been popular promotion events. A NH Growers Dinner is a dinner at a local restaurant where everything on the menu for the meal is from NH—from the appetizer to dessert.

In 2009 the first statewide NH Eat Local Month was held in August to further awareness of local food and agriculture. Festivities celebrated farmers markets, on farm activities, and preserving and sharing the harvest. Governor Lynch kicked off the month-long celebration at the Concord Farmers Market, where he also recognized NH Farmers Market Week, part of a national farmers' market celebration the first week of August. Plans are in the works for a 2010 NH Eat Local Month.

How do you shop locally? Visit a farmers' market, farmstand or pick-your-own farm, or join a CSA (Community Supported Agriculture farm, a membership opportunity where your up-front membership fee gets you fresh produce each week all season long). Go to www.agriculture.nh.gov for directories on all the above. Enjoy restaurants that serve local foods. Go to www.nhfarmtorestaurant.com for a list. See, also a list of NH Growers dinners scheduled for 2010. Check out the NH Virtual Farmers Marketplace online at www.nhfarms.com. Here you can shop online for a variety of foods and arrange to have many delivered right to your door.

Buy Local! For more information, contact Gail McWilliam Jellie at the NH Dept. of Agriculture, Markets & Food, 25 Capitol St., Concord, NH 03302-2042, Tel. 271-3788, email: gmcwilliam@agr.state.nh.us, website: www.agriculture.nh.gov.