

Local Foods Plymouth Farmer/Grower Information 2007

LFP is back! Local Foods Plymouth is an effort to combine the products of local farmers and growers, and make those products readily available to the Plymouth area market.

The program came about when members of the Plymouth Area Renewable Energy Initiative (PAREI) began talking about ways to increase local food buying in order to decrease their household's overall energy use. Many had just recently learned that the average piece of food on one's dinner plate traveled 1500 miles! The staff at D Acres Organic Farm suggested a format for making it easier for people to buy local foods – **an on-line ordering and purchasing website**. The two organizations, along with a few volunteers, worked together to turn this idea into a reality.

The program allows local food buyers to purchase products online. Each week farmers let LFP know what they have available for sale. Each item is posted on the website where local food buyers have two days at the beginning of the week to buy anything they like from any or all of the participating farmers. At midweek, the farmers and growers are notified of what has been purchased. Farmers deliver the pre-sold products to a central location in Plymouth (the Farmers Market), where the buyer picks it up.

Benefits for the local food buyer

Many farmers grow a small number of specialty crops. This makes it difficult for the customer to buy local products, because they have to travel to one farm after the next just to get the variety of produce they need in any given week. By consolidating everything that farmers grow into one on-line marketplace, the buyer can get more of what they need from one place, while supporting local farmers.

Benefits for farmers

Consolidating products means that farmers get more of the food shopping market share. Buyers that are willing to go to the farmers market or farm stands for onsite sales are already committed to taking extra steps to support local farms. But farmers can increase their share of the market (reaching the folks that currently use large supermarkets for convenience), by pooling the harvest, and making it available all in one place.

In addition:

- All goods are already sold prior to delivery – so there is no waste and farmers know exactly how much to harvest that day. The buyer has already paid by the time the farmer gets the order!
- Farmers sell directly to the local product buyer, building customer loyalty and encouraging farmers and buyers to develop relationships that will further increase sales.
- New market for products – online shopping is an enormous industry these days. Local farmers benefit by taking advantage of this technology. To compete with large superstores for produce sales, farmers must utilize avenues available to them that are responsive to today's market trends. This program will help farmers do just that. For example, the Plymouth State

community (faculty and students) is an extremely compatible market for online purchasing of local products.

- Grant funding – The startup of this project – including website design, administration and marketing are subsidized through a grant from the NH Dept of Agriculture and USDA Rural Development. In 2007, we have already received grants from the NH Department of Ag, USDA Rural Development, the Lavoie Foundation and the Byrne Foundation. **These funds help us to organize the project for 2007, but we must also use this time to design ways that LFP can continue without grant funding in subsequent years.**
- Volunteer supported – In the first year of the project, more than 20 folks volunteered to supervise the drop-off and pick-up. Volunteers enable farmers to drop off their goods and head right back to the farm if they so choose! Farmers that want to get to know their LFP buyers better are welcome to volunteer once or regularly throughout the season.
- Plymouth Farmers Market space – Local Foods Plymouth pays for one table at the Farmers Market. Although the Plymouth market is already extremely affordable, free to the farmer is even better! (This project is not meant to dissuade farmers from participating in the Plymouth Farmers Market. However, for those that do not ordinarily take part, it is a great way to do so. For those that are already vendors at Plymouth, participating in the Local Foods Plymouth project is that much easier, and offers two sales opportunities in one place!) **The Plymouth Farmers Market is looking at ways to make the market environment even better** – by adding live music, being even more proactive with signs and promotion, and looking into options for shuttling folks from downtown Plymouth using the transportation infrastructure of PSU and the Senior Center.
- Restaurant Connection – LFP has great potential to work with local restaurants interested in offering a “local foods night” or similarly themed meal. We are excited to encourage local restaurants to purchase from LFP and take advantage of the locally available foods in order to facilitate local cuisine offerings at restaurants in our region.

How it works – A PROGRAM DESIGNED TO BE SIMPLE & EASY

Initial visit (½ hour) – **In early June, 2007, a member of the Local Foods Plymouth project will make a visit to each interested farm or chat on the phone if that is easier.** The member will ask for the following information:

- what foods the farmer would like to have listed on the website - farmers can list as few or as many products as they like, though all must be **food**.
- price per unit, and the unit size (ie ¼ lb, ½ lb, 1lb, etc.) for each product.
- a paragraph bio about the farm
- confirm best method of reaching the farmer for the weekly availability check in.

Weekly check in (15 minutes) – **By Monday at noon each week, farmers will must check in with LFP**, letting them know what products are available, how much, and confirming the price per unit. Farmers can participate during the weeks that work for them – they are not required to participate every week. If they have nothing available or simply do not have time to participate that week, they let LFP know at the weekly check in. The check-in can happen by phone or e-mail. This year, we are encouraging our farmers that use e-mail to submit the information on a form to cut down on admin time – and thus cost of the program. Don't worry - we'll make sure that everyone is comfortable with the process. If farmers aren't comfortable with the e-mail form, a phone call will still be ok. The form can be sent in anytime on Sunday or Monday morning, but for your convenience, Melissa will be available from 9am-noon every Monday if you need assistance.

Behind the scenes work – This part is done by technical wizards and marketing gurus. The administrators will put what products farmers have available on the Local Foods Plymouth website on Monday at noon. On Monday afternoon and Tuesday the site is live for online purchasing. An e-mail goes out to a list of local food conscious customers (Currently over 250 people), letting them know that this week's online shopping can begin – with exciting information about what's available, food tips, recipes, and the profile of any new farmer/growers. The site closes first thing in the morning on Wednesday. By noon, farmers get a report of all the products that have been pre-ordered by e-mail or via another arrangement. Farmers will need to package what has been sold and put their farm's contact information on each package.

Weekly Dropoff – **On Thursday afternoon, farmers drop off the food that was pre-purchased** at the Plymouth Farmers Market Local Foods Plymouth table at 2:30pm. The table is run by LFP staff and volunteers. When the market opens at 3pm, all of the food is there, ready for buyers to pick it up. At the same time, buyers can browse through the market. The increased traffic to the market will help boost sales there. Farmers that are already vendors at the market will arrive at the same time as always, drop off products at the Local Foods Plymouth table, and set up their own.

Payment – Buyers pay for the food products online, so the money is almost immediately available. However, to limit the amount of paperwork, **farmers receive a check the first week of the month for the previous month's sales.** The amount received by our farmers represents 100% of sales minus the fees that Paypal takes for processing payments online. Paypal's fees range from 4-5%. For ease of bookkeeping, we round to 5%, returning 95% of income from sales to the farmer.

Season – The Local Foods Plymouth dropoff/pickup table is located at the Plymouth Farmers Market. This year's farmer's market runs on Thursdays 3-6pm, from June 21 through September 27, 2007. If

you are interested in signing up as a vendor at the Plymouth Farmers Market (aside from LFP) please contact Carol Perkins directly at 603.536.3823. LFP encourages farmers to participate as vendors at the market, as well as through our online marketplace.

Evaluation – Evaluation continues to be an important aspect of the project. Farmers are encouraged to give feedback on how the project is working for them at any time throughout the year. The local food buyers will also be asked to evaluate the project throughout the summer when they come to pick up their food and at the end of the growing season. Recommendations strengthen the program.

Contact – Farmers’ primary contact for this year will be Melissa Greenawalt-Yelle. She is taking over the role that Abby Holm played in managing the website and communicating with farmers each week. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact Melissa. Abby is still available for inquiries at her new phone number (see below), but will not be working as intensively on the local project as she has left the Plymouth area. She is now the Regional Outreach Coordinator, responsible for sharing the LFP project with other communities.

If you have not yet seen the Local Foods Plymouth website, be sure to visit it online at <http://lfp.dacres.org>. Until the season begins with the first Plymouth Farmers’ Market on June 21, 2007, all items will remain “out of stock,” for viewing purposes only.

Enclosed is an application form for farmers interested in participating in Local Foods Plymouth in 2007. Our goal is to have 20 farmers/growers. In addition to all farmers that participated in 2006, we have invited another couple dozen farms within a thirty mile radius of Plymouth and a few more New Hampshire farms from further away whose products were not available within a thirty mile radius. To participate please return this form by May 1. We will be launching the website and announcing the details of the project to local food buyers in early June. If you have any questions, please give us a call.

Primary Farmer Contact:

Melissa Greenawalt-Yelle (LFP Local Tech. Coordinator) – 603-536-5030 (Ext. 1) - lfp@together.net

Other Staff:

Sandra Jones (Co-Director PAREI, LFP Administrator) – 603-536-5030 - sandra@plymouthenergy.org

Abby Holm (LFP Regional Outreach Coordinator) – 603-525-9481 - abigailholm@gmail.com