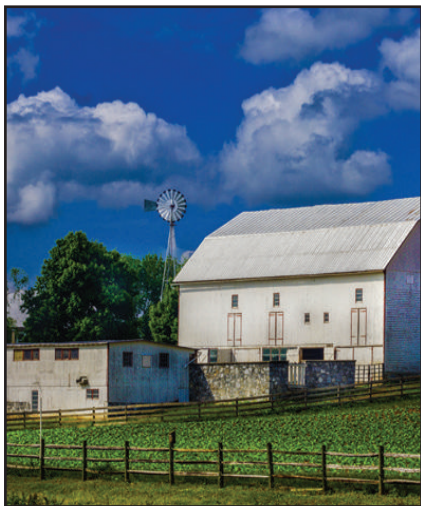


Farm to table businesses booming

Consumers' appetites for local foods are growing, and restaurants have taken notice. Today, many local businesses, including farms and restaurants, have mutually exclusive relationships that make it possible for local residents to enjoy nutritious, locally produced meals.

According to the market research firm Packaged Facts, local foods generated \$11.7 billion in sales in 2014 and will climb to \$20.2 billion by 2019. Farm-to-table remains a growing trend that benefits farmers, restaurateurs and consumers. This is evidenced by the rising number of farmers markets cropping up in neighborhoods all across the country, as well as the niche offerings by regional food purveyors. The U.S. Department of Agriculture says that, in the last 20 years, the number of farmers markets has grown by more than 350



percent. Many consumers are now choosing "local" for dining at home and when dining out, and this is making a major impact on the nation's food systems.

Foodies as well as industry experts predict that the local foods movement is a permanent and mainstream trend. In 2014, the National Restaurant Association found the desire for local foods dominated its "Top Food Trends."

The most in-demand foods include locally sourced meats and seafood as well as locally sourced produce. Consumers also are interested in farm/estate-branded foods. Some restaurants are even

producing "hyper-local" food, or herbs and produce grown right on the property.

As the demand for local foods has evolved, so has the term "local foods." "Local" can be a wide-ranging term that refers to foods

produced in a particular town, state or even region. The 2008 Farm Act defines a "locally or regionally produced agricultural food product" as one that is marketed less than 400 miles from its origin. However, a few states have established more stringent rules that indicate "local" constitutes food produced within the borders of a state or within a small perimeter of the state.

The growing preference for locally produced foods is great news for the farmers and small food producers that have long fought for footing among the mega-importers. According to the trade publication Produce Business, even though "local" does not place limits on the size of the farm, the growing desire among consumers to go local is benefitting many small and midsized farms, as consumers are increasingly buying foods grown closer to where they live.

In addition to meats, fruits and vegetables, consumers can find many locally made items that expand the potential for farm-to-table. These include, but are not limited to, artisanal cheeses, wines, beer, baked goods, milk and other dairy, and honey.

Local, sustainable foods are in demand, helping not only local restaurants and mer-

chants, but also the small and medium farms that service these establishments.



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