

Area/State

Once a niche, local foods becoming big business

By MARY CLARE JALONICK

Associated Press

PHILADELPHIA — Once a niche business, locally grown foods aren't just for farmers markets anymore.

A growing network of companies and organizations is delivering food directly from local farms to major institutions like Thomas Jefferson University Hospital in downtown Philadelphia, eliminating scores of middlemen from farm to fork. Along the way, they're increasing profits and recognition for smaller farms and bringing consumers healthier, fresher foods.

Over the past five years, with more than \$25 million in federal aid, these so-called food hubs have helped transform locally grown foods into a bigger business, supplying hospitals, schools, restaurant chains and grocery stores as consumer demand grows.

Major institutions like Jefferson have long relied on whatever giant food service companies provide, often processed foods that are delivered efficiently and are easy to heat and serve. But with a steady supply of locally grown food from the Common Market food hub, Jefferson now serves vegetables like bok choy and asparagus, creamy yogurts from Amish country and omelets with locally sourced cage-free eggs and spinach.

The model is simple: Common Market, a nonprofit, picks up food from 75 regional farmers and small food companies and quickly turns it around in its Philadelphia warehouse. The food — everything from vegetables to turkey to tofu — is then sent to 220 city customers along with detailed information about where it was grown or produced. There are about 300 other similar food hubs around the country.

Shelley Chamberlain of Jefferson's dining services says the hospital hopes to eventually source 10 percent of its food from Common Market. The items can be a bit more expensive and take more labor and training to cook, but Chamberlain says it's worth it to serve healthier foods.

"We can't go out to farms and say, 'I'd like to buy your cucumbers,' 'I'd like to buy your bok choy,' 'I'd like to buy your carrots,'" she says. "They provide an infrastructure for us to trust what is coming in the door."

Dawn Buzby of A.T. Buzby Farm in Woodstown, New Jersey, says it's a movement toward "farm to institution." Three times a week, Common Market picks up tomatoes, sweet corn, eggplant, cantaloupes and other produce from her farm and sells the food in Philadelphia, 35 miles away.

'It's all designed to reconnect people with the food that they consume so that there is a better appreciation, a greater appreciation, for the amazing story of American agriculture regardless of what production system you favor, or what sized operation you have.'

*Agriculture Secretary
Tom Vilsack*

Common Market in 2008 after seeing how little farmers were making at wholesale and how much customers were paying for the same foods in the city.

"The two anchors of the chain, the producers and consumers, are really the most marginalized in this system," he said.

Johnston says hospitals like Jefferson, along with schools, were a part of their model from the start because they could be a steady source of business and serve a large number of low-income people who may not have much access to produce.

In 2008, Common Market generated \$125,000 in sales. This year, the organization is set to surpass \$2.5 million — all money reinvested into the nonprofit. Last year, Common Market received a \$300,000 USDA grant designed to improve access to healthier foods in low-income communities.

New York City's Greenmarket Co. and Detroit's Eastern Market are running similar models, both with help from USDA. Like Common Market's, their customers are varied, from large institutions to grocery stores, restaurants and farmers markets in low-

Police and fire calls

Police: Teen sexually abused Mountain Lake staff member

LAKE PLACID — A teenager from Albany County was arrested Monday for allegedly sexually abusing a staff member at the Mountain Lake Children's Residence on River Road.

Ray Brook-based state police charged the 17-year-old male from Altamont with third-degree assault, forcible touching and second-degree unlawful imprisonment at 9:13 p.m.

Police said the teenager forcibly restrained, physically assaulted and sexually abused a female staff member of the facility. Another student heard what was happening and contacted another staff member who came to the woman's aid and contacted police.

Police wouldn't provide any other information as the investigation into the incident is ongoing.

The 17-year-old was arraigned in North Elba town court and remanded to the Essex County Jail in Lewis in lieu of \$2,000 cash bail or \$4,000 bond.

LAKE PLACID — The Lake Placid Volunteer Fire Department responded to an alarm activation at the Whiteface Lodge, 7 Whiteface Inn Lane, at 12:41 p.m. Tuesday with two trucks 11 members. Burnt food had triggered the alarm. Firefighters were back in service at 1:04 p.m.

'The Legacy of James Britt Donovan'



John and Nancy Donovan with former President of Poland Lech Walesa

(Photo provided)

LAKE PLACID — The Lake Placid Institute for the Arts & Humanities features John Donovan, son of Cold War attorney and diplomatic negotiator James Britt Donovan, at the Adirondack Roundtable Saturday in the Mountain View Room of the Visitors Bureau and Conference Center on Main Street.

Donovan was a prominent attorney who negotiated two very important diplomatic exchanges at the height of the Cold War: one with the Soviet Union and another with Fidel Castro in Cuba.

His son John will speak about those exchanges, as well as his overall career, life, and legacy as it relates to present-day international relations, and his commitment to ethics, the law, education, arts, and the humanities.

Breakfast will be served at 8:30 a.m., followed by a 9 a.m. presentation.

Tickets are \$30 in advance and can be obtained at info@lakeplacidinstitute.org, 518-523-1312, and will also be sold for \$35 at the door.

All proceeds will benefit the institute's programs, and contributions are partially tax-deductible.

It has been recently reported that James Donovan is to be portrayed by Tom Hanks in a film directed by Steven Spielberg, slated for release in October 2015.

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