

Demand growing for organic produce

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Full Circle Farm CSA program coming to Woodinville, Duvall

Plump and bright red, the tomatoes call to you in the produce dept. at the supermarket. "I'm perfect, buy me," they seem to suggest. They look deliciously sweet and sun-ripened. Yes, you say, these tomatoes will make a great addition to my salad. But wait a minute. Have you considered how they will taste?

Many of the tomatoes commercially available today are bred for cosmetic appearance, pest resistance, uniform ripening and toughness for cross-country shipping.

Those red, round tomatoes are genetically engineered to "look" perfect. They were bred for mass-production and to withstand a 1,500-mile truck ride.

Also, consider this. Conventional tomatoes are picked green nearly two weeks ahead of full ripeness and gassed with a synthetic ripening agent called ethylene, which turns the fruit a bright red. The tomatoes might look luscious, but tomato enthusiasts will tell you that modern science has bred the taste right out of today's tomato. That said, more and more consumers have turned to organic produce believing that it not only has flavorful taste, but that it's also better for you. Since organic farmers grow fruits and vegetables without the use of pesticides, synthetic fertilizers or drugs, consumers choose organic for their own health and for the ecology of the land.

These are just a few reasons organically grown foods have increased in popularity in recent years. In Washington state alone, organic farms have doubled since 1995 to over 500 today with more than 40,000 acres certified organic or in transition to organic.

King County has 23 certified organic farms to call their own. Not only that, sales for Washington's organic farmers jumped \$175 million to \$230 million from 2002 to 2003.

Full Circle Farm, a certified organic farm in Carnation, has been supplying organic produce to the Greater Seattle area since 1995.

Through a Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) program, the farm delivers fresh organic produce to drop-off sites throughout the Puget Sound region.

"We have 25 different pickup sites, which include one at Fred Hutch Cancer Research Center and one at Country Village Day Care School on Mercer Island," said Matt Ewer, general manager at Full Circle Farm. The 25 pickup sites haven't included one in Woodinville, however, and Ewer is currently setting up a site for community members interested in being a part of their CSA program. "We're looking to expand into Woodinville and Duvall," he said. "And, we're hoping to start in Woodinville in November (2004)."

The CSA program is a relatively new approach that brings the consumer and the farmers together. Ewer explained, "CSA is basically a way for farmers to connect with individual members of our community. People subscribe to a farm, have a membership and get a vegetable/fruit box weekly or every other week."

He added, "At our farm, each box has 13 or 14 different items based on seasonality. Most of the food tends to come from the farm and in peak season." He named some of the typical items in a box delivered to sites during the month of October. "This week, we have a carrot bunch, red curry squash, chanterelle mushrooms, mixed cherry tomatoes, salad mix, Asian pears, and Gala apples."

Owned by Andrew Stout and his wife Wendy Monroe, Full Circle Farm began on a 15 acre plot at the foot of Mt. Si in North Bend, Washington.

After a few years, the farm moved to a 140-acre spread along the banks of the Snoqualmie River in Carnation. The farm works on several community projects and with community service organizations. In addition, Full Circle has farm tours, whole foods cooking classes, organic farming seminars and education

outreach programs available to their CSA members as well as members of the community.

"We just had a 'Harvest for Humanity' event where people volunteered to harvest produce and it all went to Hopelink," said Ewer. "It was a great success and we harvested winter squash, beets, chard and potatoes for Hopelink. We're also working with schools and school cafeterias to get children to eat healthier produce and we bring in donations of fruit. And we work with underprivileged youth that live in the city and never get to see the countryside. We bring the kids out to see a real working farm."

Continuing, he explained, "We want to give back to the community. They've supported us and it's our way to contribute to society. We don't just grow to sell. We want to grow produce to make our community a better place and so people will feel better. CSA members are the heart of our farm and their contribution enables us to help others in the community."

If you're interested in knowing more about organic foods or being a part of Full Circle's CSA program, contact Matt Ewer at (425) 333-4677 or e-mail csa@fullcirclefarm.com.