

eat, drink, BE LOCAL

Less-traveled fare with world-class taste.

PLOW TO PLATE, farm to table, field to fork. Whatever you call it, the push to consume local food and educate consumers about the benefits of buying and eating locally is a movement with a multitude of monikers and mothers, so to speak. Some give credit to food pioneer Alice Waters. Her restaurant Chez Panisse in Berkeley, Calif., began in the 1970s with this radical notion: The shorter the distance between the earth and the plate, the more flavorful the food. That culinary revolution dovetailed nicely with worries about pesticides, questions about grapes that arrive from Chile in blustery February, and alarm that prepackaged kids' food contains more chemicals than the periodic table. People began to calculate food miles, the distance food travels from its source to where it's consumed, and noted the drain that journey put on local economies. Organics boomed (Whole Foods, the organics darling superstore, recorded \$4.7 billion in sales last year).

The latest incarnation of that philosophy resides in Portland, Ore., where a group of young foodies decided to create an "eat local" challenge. Interested residents committed to three things: spending 10 percent of their grocery budget on food grown within a 100-mile radius of where they lived, trying one new fruit or vegetable each day, and preserving food to enjoy later in the year.

We'll skip the calculator and the canning commitment. We simply invite you to reconnect with the origins of what you eat and explore the bounty of our region. We hope those adventures inspire you to remember not all tomatoes lack color and taste, and the best produce is surrounded by dirt (not plastic and paperboard). We're lucky: Eat-local opportunities abound in this area. Family farms remain a vital component of the region's identity. Farmers' markets and roadside stands dot the countryside. And a host of chefs and self-proclaimed foodies support the "eat local" philosophy and devote their culinary efforts to showcasing the best of this region's produce and food products. In the following pages, we chronicle the region's superlative eating experiences: a garden with community roots, a hike and some berries, the best loaf and its saucy partner, a Middle Eastern sweet, an award-winning organic wine, a fresh-produce "subscription," and a meal fit for a foodie. Dig in. —KHRIS DODSON



WANDALAU

WANDALAU

a carrot grows in rochester

—SUZY CHHIM

YOUNG AND OLD tend to a fertile acre of land on the grounds of Rochester's Clara Barton School #2. Toddlers and teens pull weeds and water the 4-by-50-foot rows of vegetables and flowers. Adults harvest the produce, turn the soil, and push wheelbarrows. Once an empty lot, the garden serves as a place of beauty and activity in this neighborhood.

Rochester Roots Inc., a not-for-profit grassroots organization committed to "creating a locally sustainable food system that ensures food security," helped start this community garden. "We believe in food less traveled," says Janet McDonald, Rochester Roots' program director. "If the food is grown in your community, and it's harvested on the same day that you were going to eat it, it has higher nutritional content."

"If the food is grown in your community, and it's harvested on the same day that you were going to eat it, it has higher nutritional content."

The organization picked three schools from low-income neighborhoods for the Rochester Roots School-Community Garden Project: Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. School #9 in 1998, Franklin Montessori School in 2005, and Clara Barton in 2006. A USDA Community Food Project three-year grant funds the gardens. The program's mission is to transform barren spaces into projects that teach children about growing food. "All youth should grow up to understand what a healthy local food system is," McDonald says.

McDonald and Patrick Keeler, who serves as the School Garden and Farm Manager, work with the children. In 30-minute sessions, classes receive educational information about eating organic foods. During the summer, the community takes care of the garden. Although not certified organic, Rochester Roots follows the Northeast Organic Farming Association standards and has taken the farmer's pledge to grow their food without chemicals.

"Since the project has become a large-scale project, it definitely has beautified a certain block of the neighborhood," Keeler says. He also feels community gardens boost morale. "Hopefully what we do will spread to backyards in the neighborhood." To date, the program has produced 11 gardens, grown 70 different varieties of vegetables, herbs, and flowers, and boasts more than 500 members, including teachers, students, and volunteers.

Rochester Roots
121 North Fitzhugh St., Rochester
585-232-1463 www.rochesterroots.org

bread winner

— STACEY GENTLES

AT LUNCHTIME, lines form down the sidewalk outside Pasta's Daily Bread, a bakery in downtown Syracuse. People place large orders for the holidays and even pay to ship the goods overnight. In fact, the bread and its culinary companion, the restaurant's signature spicy tomato oil, even earned rock-star status: One customer sent packages of the pair to Paul McCartney and Eric Clapton as a thank-you gesture.

"When people think of us, they think of our stretch bread and our spicy tomato oil," says bakery owner Karyn Korteling. "It's like a marriage." The bakery offers an assortment of other breads, including raisin pecan and cheddar oregano, but Korteling says the best-sellers remain the stretch bread and the spicy tomato oil. Each day, the bakery sells about 500 loaves of Italian stretch and about 5 to 8 gallons of the oil.

The bakery began in 1997 as a small operation occupying half the dining room in Pastabilities. Demand for the bread outgrew the space, and in 2000 Korteling opened Pasta's Daily Bread across the street from the restaurant, which she also owns. She says she created both the bakery and the restaurant with the same mission: "An unwavering commitment to serve food from scratch."



Several bakers make the bread fresh over a 24-hour period by a process that differs from ordinary loaves. The baking process goes on around the clock, and prepping for the next day begins just hours after the shop closes each evening. "It's like a good wine that ferments well," Korteling says. The bakery has tweaked its original recipe to make it their own. "Our customers taste the difference and become addicted," Korteling says.

In Syracuse, most people equate the idea of great bread with Pasta's Daily Bread. Diners at Pastabilities enjoy Italian stretch as part of their meal, and the bakery's primary focus remains to cater to the restaurant's needs. But many restaurants in the downtown area serve the bread, including Blue Tusk and Ambrosia. The Syracuse Real Food Cooperative and the Central New York Regional Market do, too. The bakery's wholesale and retail business are blossoming, with sales up 30 percent from 2006, Korteling says. She credits this growth to the Italian stretch bread and its spicy partner.

The bakery, located at 308 South Franklin St., opens daily at 8:30 a.m. The price of a 20-ounce loaf is \$2.75. The tomato oil costs between \$2.75 and \$8.50, depending on size. For more details, call the shop at 315-701-0224.

Pasta's Daily Bread
308 S. Franklin St., Syracuse
315-701-0224 www.pastabilities.com

sweet talk

— JESSICA DERUBBO

AT THE HEART of the eat local movement is the wish to close the gap between person and produce and to encourage consumers to participate in the process of what ends up on their forks or spoons. Along those lines, Baldwinsville's Beaver Lake offers the perfect opportunity for some much needed ice cream education. For \$5, you can hike through a series of trails guided by a naturalist and pick either raspberries (at the beginning of July) or blackberries (at the end of July). After your forage, take the berries back to the lodge and make a fresh batch of ice cream with your juicy loot, suggests Heidi Kortright, a Beaver Lake naturalist.

Blackberry hot spots abound in this region, and picking enthusiasts praise Highland Forest and Pratt's Falls for their beautiful backdrops and their berry abundance. Minus the cream, sugar, and hours of churning, berries make a sweet trail snack. With only about 62 calories per cup, blackberries also contain anti-inflammatory properties and may even improve blood pressure and night vision. For more delicious berry details and to participate in the hike-and-eat experiences, contact Beaver Lake Nature Center at 315-638-2519 for more information.



Beaver Lake
8477 E. Mud Lake Rd., Baldwinsville
315-638-2519 www.onondagaparks.com/parks/beaver



SUBSCRIPTION SERVICE: Nancy Grove (left) and Abby Youngblood (right) prepare the week's offering.

a trip to the bountiful

— LAURA OCHOA

OLD PATH FARM in Sauquoit has no website and does not advertise. Like many Community Supported Agriculture programs, Old Path relies on word of mouth to attract its satisfied customers. Owners Nancy Grove and Abby Youngblood, who live in a solar-powered trailer on the property, accepted 60 members to their season this year. About 100 remain on the wait-list.

Think of CSA memberships as a fresh produce "subscription," where members receive fresh food directly from the farm. The customer pays a share up front to the farmers, and the farmers package a certain combination of fresh vegetables and fruits based on seasonal availability, says Greg Swartz, interim executive director of the New York chapter of the Northeastern Organic Farmers Association. Customers then pick up their weekly batch of produce. CSA annual memberships range in price from \$300 to \$1,000, depending on a farm's output (some offer meat and dairy in their batches) and length of season (half year or full year). As more and more people seek out quality fruits and vegetables, CSAs are growing in popularity, Swartz says. New York State currently boasts more than 100 CSAs.

Grove credits Old Path's success to its location. Their CSA subscribers pick up their shares at one of three convenient locations – a health food store in Clinton, at Grove's family bakery in Utica, or at her parents' house in Sauquoit. Having her family involved adds to the experience for her and her customers.

Old Path Farm
9148 Butler Rd., Sauquoit

"Each batch from Old Path — which could be made up of any combination of 100 varieties of vegetables grown there includes a newsletter with recipes and food preservation tips."

"We're both so happy. We love our life," Grove says.

Grove and Youngblood put together "palatable mixes" of produce that varies weekly but could include cabbage, tomatoes, summer squash, basil, onions, kale, and potatoes. Each batch from Old Path – which could be made up of any combination of 100 varieties – includes a newsletter with recipes and food-preservation tips. "I think that's convenient for people in this busy world," Grove says.

While CSA programs make supporting local farmers easier, shareholders in some CSAs must maintain a commitment to the farm, agreeing to work a few hours every month. At Old Path, subscribers are not required to work. Because consumers pay some of the farmer's costs up front, the farmer is less vulnerable fiscally. Consumers also share "the risk of farming. In a bad year, maybe you'll get a little less, but likewise, in a bountiful year, you get more," Swartz explains.

To join a CSA, NOFA's website has a searchable database for finding a CSA near you at www.nofany.org.

FROM TOP: SARA ROBERTSON/ISTOCKPHOTO

WANDA LAU

grape expectations

— CLAIRE NAPIER-GALOFARO

THE SPARKLING BLUE BACKDROP of Seneca Lake's western shore and the quaint Victorian Estate prompted *National Geographic* magazine to pronounce Four Chimneys Organic Winery "the most picturesque winery in the Finger Lakes." But the winery possesses more distinctions than just a lovely place to sip wine on a summer afternoon. In 1977, it became the first organic winery in the United States, committed to producing wines with no toxic or synthetic chemicals in the vineyard and the cellar.

Back then, winemaker Scott Smith and some friends decided to begin an organic winery. "Coming out of the late '60s and early '70s, everyone was asking, 'Hey, what's going on here? What's that natural approach to things?'" he says. "A lot of organic wine started up in Europe. Just people with a vision, people who like wine and who said, 'I think this is a better way of farming.' And

it's continuing to grow."

They vinified wine in a basement, made plenty of mistakes, and finally got it right, he says. In 1980, they opened the winery with 2,000 gallons of organic wine. Since then,

they developed a range of techniques to maintain that status. Instead of using pesticides, they keep a healthy balance of beneficial and predator bugs, sometimes spreading ladybugs and lacewings. Rather than fungicides, they cultivate the plants' natural ability to fend off harmful fungi. To avoid chemical herbicides, they use laborious hand and tractor mulching and weeding. They also refuse to add any unnatural or synthetic sulfites, a chemical compound thought to trigger headaches in wine drinkers. Timothy Barr, professor of a popular wine appreciation course at Syracuse University, says he often recommends organic wine to those prone to wine-induced headaches. The lower number of unnatural sulfites is rumored to reduce the infamous red-wine hangover.

Even with the health benefits, winemakers and drinkers alike debate whether it is possible to make a fine wine without added chemicals to enhance the aging process. David G. Male, com-

Four Chimneys Organic Winery
211 Hall Rd. Himrod
607-243-7502 www.fourchimneysorganicwines.com



petition chairman of the 2007 Finger Lakes International Wine Competition, says that organically grown wines often taste better than more conventional ones; they just require more work for the makers. "Four Chimneys has two or three wines that are ranked highly among the wineries," Male says. "They do pretty well against other wines that both are and are not organic."

In fact, six of their 20 wines won medals at the Finger Lakes International Wine Competition. Their Raspberry Sunrise won the silver medal at the International Eastern Wine Competition. Despite the accolades, Smith downplays his achievements. "There's so many different kinds of grapes and so many different winemaking styles, all you can be sure of is that you're not getting conventional chemicals sprayed on your grapes."

The tasting room is open Monday through Saturday from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m., and Sunday noon to 5 p.m.



SARA ROBERTSON

a meal less traveled

— COURTNEY POTTS



GOURMANDS LOVE THE RESTAURANT at Elderberry Pond for its fresh ingredients, support of local agriculture, and superlative food experiences. But the region's most celebrated farm-to-table restaurant, which features ingredients selected from its 100-acre organic farm, expanded its commitment to support local eating this year by introducing food workshops. The Sunday afternoon sessions include kitchen and garden demonstrations and information on growing techniques and food preparation. Each \$10 class provides a two-and-a-half hour lesson in sustainable agriculture and seasonal cooking. The best part: Participants who stay for dinner can apply that \$10 fee toward the cost of their meals.

"Our specialty is really just using our fresh produce," explains executive chef Chris Lego, pointing at a salad that he serves in place of more standard side dishes. "You can get fries and a burger anywhere. You're not going to see greens like that [at other restaurants]."

All of the pork products and about 80 percent of the produce served at Elderberry Pond come directly from the farm, which is owned by Chef Lego's parents, Lou and Merby Lego. The Legos have raised a va-

Elderberry Pond
3728 Center Street Rd., Auburn
315-252-3977 www.elderberrypond.com

riety of crops — including more than 100 types of apples — for almost 25 years and place an emphasis on using organic and sustainable farming techniques. Merby, a retired dietician, says there are many benefits to eating locally grown products.

"It tastes better. That's why we have the restaurant, to show people how good it can taste," Merby says.

Beyond taste, eating locally also saves gas. According to a USDA Agricultural Marketing Service report, fruits travel an average of 2,146 miles, while vegetables are transported an average distance of 1,596 miles before reaching the market. At Elderberry Pond, that distance is only a few hundred feet.

Running a restaurant with a focus on serving local foods is challenging. Chef Lego and Chef de Cuisine Bekah Roppel change their menu every few months to reflect what's in season and base their specials around the most abundant ingredients on any given day. Some of their year-long specialties include vegetable linguine and crab cakes. For those ingredients not grown on their farm, they rely on other local growers as much as possible. They purchase ground beef, for example, from Spring Brook Farm, just six miles away.

"We keep trying to find local things. But the thing is they have to be really good too," Merby Lego says. "This is a fine dining restaurant, and there's a certain quality that people are expecting."

just desserts

— STACEY GENTLES

May's Middle Eastern Pastries
www.mayspastries.com

THE BOOTH SITS ACROSS from a fish truck, but most people navigating the 600 stalls of fresh produce, flowers, and wooden yard furniture at Syracuse's Regional Market ignore the fishy odor in favor of the nearby delectable goodies at May's Middle Eastern Pastries. The table displays a number of treats in different sizes, some covered with assorted nuts and others in chocolate. Owner May Morris, a small, bubbly Lebanese woman with curly, blond hair and glasses, stands beside the enticing fare with an inviting smile. Her mantra — "Life is short, eat dessert first" — hangs on a sign in her stall, and it's a philosophy she shares with most customers.

Her assortment includes baklava, a phyllo-dough pastry cut into little cubes. Baked with pistachios or walnuts, sugar, and honey, the sweet has a light, croissant-like texture. Tameralla, a glazed, date- or fig-filled pastry that looks like a bagel, serves as Morris' specialty. Her mother-in-law passed down the recipe to her, which she copyrighted to ensure sole ownership.

Morris bakes all the desserts in her DeWitt home. Other goodies include haresee, a cake-like treat with an

almond topping; fingers, stick-shaped baklava topped with almonds; and frosting-topped custard phyllo. She sells her treats in half-dozen, dozen, 20-piece sampler sizes, and offers special orders at varying prices. One dozen pistachio baklava cost \$13.99; one dozen haresee cost \$10.99.

Morris developed her infatuation with baking as a child in Lebanon. She watched her sister and mother baking, started herself, and perfected her craft. She refuses to reveal her age but admits being in the United States for almost three decades. "It doesn't matter how old I am," she says. "What matters is that you'll love my pastries because I've been doing [it] for a long time."

She will, however, offer the number of years her stall has stood in the same spot: seven. Amid all the booths at the Regional Market, stopping at May's Middle Eastern Pastries is easy. Deciding between her sweets? Not so easy. Morris lays out samples for passers-by. If you aren't mindful, though, you'll stand at her stall chatting away and noshing treat after treat. The best part is that she won't stop you. 🍪



WANDA LAU