



The Hoosier Harvest Market debuts a new pick-up site: Rita's Backyard Garden Center and Tea Room in Fishers. Customer Shelley Brown (left) looks forward to planting oregano and sage in the family garden. Market manager Michael Morrow introduces her to farmers Larry and Debbie Peters.

ADVANTAGES FOR ALL

Online Market Grows Local Food Chain

By Symone C. Skrzycki

Crisp, colorful vegetables. Creamy dairy products. Mouth-watering meat, poultry and more. Pique your palate – and support local farmers and producers – by visiting the online Hoosier Harvest Market (HHM).

“We’re classified as a non-for-profit co-op. One of the things we try to do is increase the profitability of small and mid-size farmers in Indiana,” shares market manager Michael Morrow.

The market is open from Friday at noon until Tuesday at midnight. The next morning, sellers receive an email containing order details. On Thursday, they deliver goods to the Purdue Extension office in Greenfield where HHM is housed. From there, HHM transports items in thermal, insulated bags (to maximize freshness) to more than a dozen customer pick-up locations throughout Hancock, Henry and Marion counties.

“We know people like to do as much shopping as they can in one place. We want to make the experience as much like a grocery store as possible, but really support fresh, locally-grown products,” Morrow comments.

“We have a lot of value-added producers – they make something out of raw products like baked goods and breads. We want to make it a well-rounded market.”

When HHM launched in May 2013, it had 15 farmer and producer members. Today, that number has more than doubled to 38.

“Consumers have the opportunity to support the local economy and keep the food dollars circulating within Central Indiana,” asserts Ray Easley, who helped form HHM and runs Heritage Summit Farm in Greenfield. “Economically it’s very, very significant.”

He served approximately 25 HHM consumer members, which include families and businesses, last season.

Joe McDaniel, who has operated O’McDaniel Farm for more than 30 years with his wife Vickie, calls HHM a big time-saver.

“The thing that attracted me was the Internet online sale. Instead of picking 14 bushels of green beans (for example) to take to a traditional farmer’s market, I could advertise (that quantity) without picking them. Let’s say I sell five bushels – that’s all I have to pick instead of picking 14, going to market and coming home with nine more bushels that I have to do something with.

“I’m really pleased so far.”

A new HHM initiative involves managing two community supported agriculture (CSA) programs.

“Being successful at that is first and foremost in my mind,” Morrow declares. “The HHM has 550 registered customer members. The CSAs have the potential to bring 300 new members into the



Rain or shine, customers can shop for fresh produce via the Hoosier Harvest Market.

market with those orders.”

Morrow eagerly describes an upcoming partnership with the Statehouse Market, which currently runs May through October.

“HHM will become the vendor for the Statehouse in the winter months. We’re really excited to be in downtown Indy, especially in Marion County. We’re really hoping to break into that county and start delivering more products.”

Crops in the cafeteria

HHM will play a key role in connecting youth with local food producers through the U.S. Department of Agriculture’s Farm to School Program.

As part of a two-year grant awarded to the Indiana State Department of Health, HHM will be the sole distributor of locally-produced foods for 38 schools (K-12) in Hancock and surrounding counties starting this fall.

“It’s a holistic program,” Morrow notes. “It includes an education portion: Where is your food grown? How do you store it? How do you prepare it?”

“(It’s about) bringing in HHM to show



Morrow says a new effort involving community supported agriculture (CSA) programs will boost sales: “We typically have 30 to 50 orders per week. I see that growing exponentially with the CSAs this season.”

kids the time it takes to grow something like asparagus, which takes four years. Showing them the timelines and requirements to get food on their plate might make them more appreciative of different types of eating.”

The program will emphasize collaboration with food service employees, principals and

other staff members at participating schools.

The goal, he says, is to “help them realize that it’s not that difficult to get fresh, nutritious food for their students.” He adds that healthy eating habits can help improve students’ attentiveness and potentially their academic performance.

RESOURCES: Michael Morrow, Hoosier Harvest Market, at www.hoosierharvestmarket.com | Ray Easley, Heritage Summit Farm, at www.heritagesummitfarm.com | Joe McDaniel, O’McDaniel Farm



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