

## **Appendix C: A Select History of Local Food Events in Northern NY**

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Today there are “hotbeds” of activity in the local food arena throughout our region. The Adirondacks have summer tourists who support their local farms through their purchases at markets, restaurants, and summer activities. Adirondack Harvest, a regional buy local campaign, has helped make these connections. St. Lawrence County has institutions like SUNY Potsdam and St. Lawrence University interested in buying more local product. Garden Share and North Country Grown Cooperative, two organizations committed to promoting local food initiatives, have helped make that happen. In Lewis County, efforts have increased the area’s reputation for local products such as maple syrup. A fast growing Jefferson County has a lot of untapped potential for local marketing of food with Ft. Drum, 1000 Islands and Tug Hill Plateau as areas that draw a lot of people either seasonally or as permanent residents. Throughout the area there are additional restaurants interested in buying local products.

These activities have been driven by the growing producer and consumer interest as well as the response of agencies and organizations that recognize the positive ways these businesses can and do contribute to the region. Cornell Cooperative Extension, for example, working with partners, has collaborated regionally to provide a series of events designed to strengthen direct market farms, build relationships between producers and consumers in the region, and help communities capitalize on the ways these local food initiatives contribute to the region.

Starting with the “21st Century” conference in 1995, wherein a long range planning process identified the need for these activities to preserve the region’s working landscape; producers, consumers, community service agencies and organizations, and local officials have come together through various forums to support and strengthen our food system, and the local food component in particular. For example, during the winter of 1997 and 1998, Cornell Cooperative Extension Associations in collaboration with local Community Action Agencies across the region hosted Community Food and Economic Security conferences. These conferences utilized a participatory approach to bring together invited community residents representing food, agriculture and human services fields to address issues of sustainability, food insecurity, and a changing agricultural sector. Thirty-four work groups emerged from the six county-based events. The ideas and connections formed through these gatherings were mainly incorporated into ongoing work efforts, though some did result in newly formed initiatives. Growing out of these early events are more recent annual programs designed to further build awareness of opportunities in this arena. Local Foods I, II, III, and IV, described below represent a series of efforts, each progressively broader than the last, in terms of the breadth of its outreach to the entire Adirondack North Country region.

### **September 2005      Local Foods I: Annual Harvest Celebration**

This celebration of the region’s bounty was kicked off with farm tours, where 21 farms opened their space to visitors primarily in the Eastern Adirondack North Country Region. Approximately 85 people then came together to enjoy a sumptuous meal prepared by local chefs from products grown and raised by the area’s farmers. The celebration also included recipe taste-offs held at area farmers’ markets and Adirondack Architectural Heritage and the Boquet River Association held tours during this week. This event formally recognized the local foods market and set the stage for future events designed to build this market.

### **January 2006      Adirondack Harvest’s Farmer to Chef Program 2006**

The Farmer to Chef Program was a tradeshow designed to cultivate relationships between farmers and retail markets, including restaurants and stores interesting in purchasing from local farmers. Another goal was to help farmers interested in diversifying into direct markets explore opportunities. As a result of this event, awareness of local foods availability was raised and farmers established some initial relationships with restaurant and stores.

### **March 2007      Local Foods II: Adirondack Harvest – Connecting Farmers and Consumers**

Similar to the Adirondack Harvest Farmer to Chef Program one year before, this event was targeted at farmers interested in direct wholesale and retail markets, including farm to chef sales, farm tours, and marketing directly to consumers, chefs committed to buying locally, and agencies, organizations, and local governments working to support these connections

and capitalize on the ways they contribute to the local economy. Agriculture Development Specialist, Duncan Hilchey, from Cornell University shared community-based strategies for supporting local food markets. In addition to also increasing awareness of foods produced in the region, this event furthered understanding of the work of Cornell Cooperative Extension and many other organizations and agencies in support of local food producers, consumers and the markets that bring them together. In the words of one participant, “Some great energy was generated from this event that is still resonating.”

**April 2008                    Local Foods III: The Role of Adirondack North Country Foods in Community and Economic Development**

This event, held at the W!LD Center in Tupper Lake, was designed to build on the relationships started through earlier meetings by broadening awareness about the impacts of local foods among local officials and community and economic developers, and strengthening relationships among these individuals, farmers, and institutional representatives. Sponsored by the North Country Regional Foods Initiative, the Initiative represents a first attempt to formalize a regional network drawing together organizations focused on local food issues. By the end of the day, through a ‘policy forum’, a list of specific steps was created to move these efforts forward as a region and strengthen local food initiatives. These recommendations are included as part of the North Country Regional Foods Initiative final report to be shared among participants and other partners within the North Country.

**May 1 – 3, 2008            Local Foods IV: Challenges and Opportunities in the North Country**

Sponsored by New Strategies: Enhancing Profitability on North Country farms, a project of New York State Farm Viability Institute. This project focuses on working with entrepreneurial farmers to develop new agricultural production enterprises either alongside existing enterprises or new business start-ups. This event welcomed New Strategies participants and others to a mini-road show hosted by partners in Lake Clear, Alexandria Bay, and Croghan. The series celebrated the progress of farmers and community members in establishing direct marketing connections across Northern New York. They continued the discussion threads that emerged through each of the earlier Local Foods events with the goal of improving our understanding of the challenges we face in the region and identifying specific possibilities for furthering growth in numbers of direct market farms and markets. These day long events featured guest speakers: Barbara Damrosch, author of *The Garden Primer* and Shannon Hayes, author of *Grass-fed Gourmet*, in addition to a line-up of local farmers, chefs, and businesses working towards local food sustainability.

As a result of these events and the time and energy of various organizations and individuals, we’ve seen the formation of Farm to School Committees, new farmers’ markets, local food events, a new grower cooperative, a Seaway Wine Trail, a regional Maple Weekend, and new local food guides. We’ve also seen the emergence of several recurring themes: (1) consumers want to be able to purchase locally produced foods; (2) growers are working hard to meet an increasing demand for consistent quality and quantity, and (3) communities are benefiting from working together with one another, and with producers and consumers, to capitalize on the positive ways local foods contribute to the region. Together, these themes and collaborations suggest the stage has been set and the time is ripe for institutionalizing regional collaboration in support of local/regional foods and the ways they enhance the economic, ecological and social well-being of the North Country.

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