

Guide highlights Whatcom County food, farms

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Bellingham non-profit Sustainable Connections announced the 2011 release of the free Whatcom Food & Farm Finder, the region's comprehensive guide and map to local food and agriculture that helps connect eaters hungry for fresh food and good grub.

The guide highlights everything locals need to know about the restaurants, cafes, caterers and grocers who support local agriculture, plus the farm stands, farmers markets, u-picks, ranchers and fishers that are the backbone of our Whatcom County food system, said Laura Leigh Ridenour, Sustainable Connections' food and farming program manager.

The guide will be first released at the opening day of the Bellingham Farmers' Market on April 2, then distributed to more than 200 locations county-wide.

"Supporting our local farms and the local grocers and restaurants that support our farms, creates a stronger community for today and for tomorrow," said Dorie Belisle, owner of BelleWood Acres.

Inside, and on the handy fold-out map, are 121 local businesses, offering everything from arugula to pumpkins, locally made wines and beers to heritage turkeys, fine dining to casual fare and one-stop shopping locales.

"As more and more folks look to buy locally grown food, it is vitally important to help build a strong community of local farmers that can meet the demand," said Jim Ashby, general manager at the Community Food Co-op.

For every \$100 spent at a grocery store where local food is purchased, \$52 is re-spent locally, for a total impact of \$152, according to the April 2008 Local Food Economy Study for the Puget Sound Region by the non-profit group Sustainable Seattle.

Additionally, studies have found that locally owned restaurants that use locally grown food create 51 percent more local economic activity per dollar spent than those that don't buy local food.

For more information, visit www.SustainableConnections.org.

