

## *Ferndale Record Journal*

### Countywide campaign, tour directs consumers to Ferndale farms



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FERNDALE — Consumers will come face to face with the farmers who produce their food when a tour of Whatcom County farms brings visitors to several Ferndale area farms this September.

The tour will be a central part of “Eat Local Month,” a promotion by nonprofit network Sustainable Connections (SC) to launch its new Eat Local First, a campaign to connect eaters and food buyers with local staples and the farms that produce them.

During the 2010 Whatcom Farm Tour, a young visitor harvests her own carrot at Half Acre Farm, a U-pick no-spray vegetable farm located at Boxx Berry Farm on Northwest Drive. The 2011 tour will take place Sept. 10 from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. — Courtesy Photo

The September celebration marks the first annual Eat Local Month, beginning with an official campaign launch ceremony on Sept. 3 from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. at the Bellingham Farmers Market, and continuing with events including cooking demonstrations, book signings, talks with food activists, an “incognito dinner,” a barbecue, potato digging, a sustainable business leadership course and a bicycle garden tour. It will culminate with a “Taste Washington Day” celebration of locally grown foods served in school meals, on Sept. 28.

The highlight of Eat Local Month will be the fourth annual Whatcom County Farm Tour, according to SC’s food and farming outreach coordinator, Sara Southerland.

“It’s the biggest hurrah in Eat Local Month,” she said.

From 10 a.m. until 5 p.m. on Saturday, Sept. 10, visitors will drive or ride bicycles on a free, self-guided tour with 13 stops at farms around the county. Ferndale area stops will include the Twisted S Buffalo Ranch on Douglas Road just east of downtown, Boxx

Berry Farm and Half Acre Farm on Northwest Avenue, Camelot Ranch Alpacas on Bay Road, BelleWood Acres on Ten Mile Road, and Dakota Creek Winery near Blaine.

Each stop along a driving route and three bicycle routes will feature educational and interactive activities, as well as products for sale at farm stands. Maps for the routes are available on the Eat Local First website, along with an interactive Google map for plotting individual itineraries.

Visitors on the tour who want to get more involved in the festivities can participate in a “Local Food in Action” photo contest, entering their photos or videos of local foods in the competition anytime during September. Foods can be depicted in a variety of settings – whether on the Farm Tour, at a featured restaurant, farmers market or grocery store, with the farmers that grew it, or being prepared for a meal and enjoyed at the home table. Entries are accepted throughout September and will be posted on the Eat Local First Facebook web page. Prizes, supplied by local restaurants and food producers, will be awarded to winners to be determined by total number of “likes” the photo receives. Winning photos will be featured on the SC website and in SC publications.

Farm tour sponsors include Peoples Bank, Curt Maberry Farm, Bellingham Cold Storage, Organic Valley, and media sponsors KVOS TV and Adventures NW Magazine.

When the month-long celebration is over, the Eat Local First campaign will continue as a year-round venue for connecting farmers with their local consumer market.

“Our goal is to motivate people to buy more nutritious, locally raised, caught and grown food and to promote the farmers who grow it, and the stores, restaurants and farmers’ markets that sell it,” said SC food and farming manager Laura Ridenour.

One of the primary features of the campaign will be a new food label, which identifies local food for shoppers at grocery stores, restaurants and farmers markets. The Eat Local First label, to be launched at the Sept. 3 opening ceremony, will signify that an item contains at least 50 percent locally sourced agricultural ingredients from farmers in Whatcom County and the areas surrounding, including Skagit, Island, San Juan and Okanogan counties.

Currently, direct sales from farmers amount to less than 3 percent of food purchased annually in Whatcom County and in the Puget Sound region, according to the USDA 2007 Agricultural Census.

“Grocery stores are where people get most of their food, so we are starting to reach toward this dream by creating an easily recognizable label for farmer-sourced and local products that have a majority of agricultural ingredients in them,” said Ridenour.

The Eat Local First campaign is a part of the SC Food and Farming program, which works with over 200 independently owned food and farming businesses in Whatcom and Skagit counties. The program aims to be a resource for building a sustainable local food economy. The new campaign is funded in part with multi-year grants from the

Sustainable Whatcom Fund of the Whatcom Community Foundation and the WSDA Specialty Crops Block Grant.

Sustainable Connections is a local nonprofit membership organization of more than 600 Northwest Washington business and community leaders working to transform and model an economy built on sustainable practices including green building, food and farming, energy efficiency, buying local, and sustainable business development.

Farm Tour maps and the September Eat Local Month Guide can be found at the Cordata Community Food Co-op, Bellingham Saturday Farmers Market, Village Books, Haggen stores throughout Whatcom County, at the Ferndale, Bellingham and Lynden visitors centers, or online at Sustainable Connections' website (<http://www.sustainableconnections.org>).

For more information online, visit Eat Local First at <http://www.eatlocalfirst.org> or search for "Eat Local First" on Facebook.

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