



Cascadia Weekly

Farm to Fork

Getting an edible education

By Amy Kepferle · Wednesday, September 8, 2010

Although they've yet to produce a single egg between them, having a small flock of chickens roaming around my backyard on a daily basis has made me much more aware of the energy it takes to produce the breakfast items I scramble, fry or boil on a regular basis.

By the time the protein-rich orbs do make an appearance—hopefully by the end of this month or the beginning of next—I'll know a whole lot more about both chickens and eggs than I did last spring, when I brought home the three-day-old Rhode Island Reds from a small family farm in Everson.

For example, I'll be savvy to the fact that hens don't need a squawking rooster around to produce eggs on a daily basis. I'll also be aware that, given free range of my sizeable lot, the feathered creatures will spend most of the day snacking on any bugs, weeds, fruits and vegetables available to them. Best of all, I'll know precisely where the eggs I'm putting in my mouth came from.

If you've been paying attention to the much-ballyhooed "Eat Local" movement, you're likely already aware there's a multitude of produce, protein, milk and more grown and cultivated throughout both Whatcom and Skagit counties. Knowing that is one thing, but seeing the action that happens on the farms that provide the bounty is, well, an entirely different animal.

As part of Sustainable Connections' 3rd annual Whatcom County Farm Tour, 11 local farms have been gracious enough to open their barn doors—and fields, naturally—to the general public. The free event aims to add a component of education to the edible interactions you're sure to encounter, as well as hearing firsthand the stories those who put food on the table, year after year, are sure to have.

Grab the handy guide that's included within the pages of this week's paper for a full listing and map of the participating venues, but keep in mind that you won't have to visit each and every one to get a taste of what it takes to get the goods from farm to fork.

At Lynden's Bellewood Acres, for example, you may well choose to spend the entire day using your own power to create an apple cider slushy, riding on an antique wagon

through the orchards or sharing recipes with Debra Daniels-Zeller, author of *The Northwest Vegetarian Cookbook*.

Berries will reign supreme at Ferndale's Boxx Berry Farm, but those who drop by can also expect corn on the cob, berry sundaes and a kid-sized train. While you're in Fern-town, stop by the Twisted S Ranch for samples of bison meat, viewings of the majestic mammals, ranch tours and a display of bison hide and fiber.

Over in Everson, Edelweiss Dairy—which isn't generally open to the public, so take advantage of the once-a-year opportunity—milk is the name of the game. As the first certified organic dairy in Whatcom County, activities at the pastoral paradise includes sneak peeks of the beautiful bovines, as well as guided tours.

If you don't have time to hit the county, a healthy representation of what Whatcom County has to offer can be discovered at the Bellingham Farmers Market. Here, more than 50 local farmers sell their hard-earned wares, many of which were plucked from the gardens that very day. Also to be found in the 'ham are Bellingham Country Gardens, where you're invited to pick, gather or dig fresh produce for yourself.

Also on the lineup, for those who need even more inspiration, are Everson's Cloud Mountain Farm, Blaine's Dakota Creek Winery, Custer's Grace Harbor Farms, Mama's Garden in Deming, Lynden's Heritage Lane Farm, and Silver Spring Creamery on Hemmi Road.

Should you have time to venture even further, Whidbey Island is also hosting its own Farm Tour this Saturday and Sunday. Skagitonians who don't have time to venture forth can also mark their calendars for the Oct. 2-3 Festival of Family Farms.

While you're out and about, picking produce and petting cows, don't be afraid to ask questions of those who make eating local easy and delicious. If they're anything like me—an urban chicken farmer who's learning as she goes—they'll be thrilled to share what they know.