



Farm-to-Table DINING

GOOD FOR YOU, THE ECONOMY, AND THE ENVIRONMENT

BY PATTY KELLER



Farm to table has been an important movement in dining throughout Wisconsin. While there's not a standard definition, farm to table generally means meal preparation with food that's purchased directly from local farms, fisheries, wineries, and breweries. Farm-to-table food isn't solely fruits and vegetables—locally sourced products include meats, honey, wine, and beer. Wisconsinites care about where their food comes from and prefer to support local when offered the opportunity.

In order to be called farm to table, Tony Jacobson, Oakwood Village University Woods' chef production manager, says food has to be sourced from a farm no more than 200 miles from the serving location. And local farm-to-table host Liz Henry, of J. Henry & Sons, says, "Farm-to-table meals can be hosted in restaurants or in a field." Liz hosts an annual Outstanding in the Field dinner, which is a national traveling dining experience where the chef comes to the ingredients instead of the ingredients coming to the restaurant. "Eating locally sourced foods means you'll eat what is in season," offering variety in your diet.

Why has farm to table become so popular? The food is fresher and more flavorful, and the presentation is fancier. It's often a gourmet experience for the attendees looking for a different type of meal.

Curt and Sharyl Bush of Madison agree. The couple frequently attends farm-to-table events at Oakwood Village. They were initially drawn to the dinners because they viewed them as a way to eat fresh local food. The Bush's were impressed with the variety. "The chef takes simple ingredients and makes exotic dishes out of them," says Curt. "And it's a fun experience. We enjoy the camaraderie with the other guests." The couple has enjoyed several meals with a variety of themes, from a bayou-themed meal featuring deliciously prepared crawfish and crab legs to a Wisconsin-themed dinner featuring honey, trout, and filet mignon.

You also support your local economy when purchasing food from farmers' markets or enjoying a farm-to-table meal. Along with benefitting from financial support, farmers are inspired by working with local chefs. Gail Gomech, a local bee farmer whose honey is used at farm-to-table events, says, "When I see how a chef uses my product, it gives

me inspiration, and I can share their recipes with my other consumers."

Buying local is additionally good for the environment. Because buying local means that food is transported shorter distances, resulting in less carbon emission and fewer foods that have been gas ripened in a warehouse.

Today's consumer is more educated than any other generation. It comes as no surprise to see farm-to-table dining thriving when the benefits to your health, local economy, and environment are so immediate, making the overall experience that much more appetizing.

Patty Keller is sales counselor for Oakwood Village.

Photographs provided by Oakwood Village.



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