



Ohio Local Foods



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Local editions of this publication are also being developed to reflect the unique characteristics of regions throughout Ohio.

Overview

Interest in local foods has escalated, resulting in development of a variety of programs focused on production, processing, marketing, distribution, financing, research, policies, events, publications and impacts in communities throughout Ohio. While food system development has a rich history and bright future, this brief publication provides a snapshot of many elements contributing to growth of local food in Ohio. Though “local” has a geographic connotation, there is no consensus on a definition in terms of distance between production and consumption (Martinez, et al., 2010).

Ohio is an ideal place for local foods for a number of reasons:

- Ohio has a unique proximity of metropolitan and micropolitan areas, linking rural and urban consumers, growers and communities.
- Ohio ranks in the Top 10 states for direct-to-consumer marketing (2007 Census of Ag).
- Ohio food producers offer a wide variety of local food products for Ohioans who spend about \$43 billion every year on food purchases.
- Ohio has a tremendous support system to advance food research, production, safety, security, distribution, innovation and consumption.
- Diverse perspectives from small, medium and large-scale agriculture in rural and urban areas offers plenty of opportunity for anyone interested in making connections with others who share their local food interests.

Local food sales through all marketing channels account for a growing share of the total U.S. agricultural sales (Martinez, et al., 2010; Packaged Facts, 2007). Food and agriculture is Ohio's top industry, contributing \$79 billion to the state's annual economy.

Read further to explore the many ways to become more involved with Ohio local food.



Food Accessibility

Concern about access to affordable and nutritious food by low income and rural communities has led to the creation of programs such as the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP, formerly known as the Food Stamp Program), the Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC), Senior Farmers Market Nutrition program and the National School Lunch and Breakfast Programs.

Despite these food assistance programs, some low income rural communities are still considered food deserts. (Muamba, Clark & Betz, 2010). Food deserts exist throughout Ohio in areas where individuals lack physical, economic, and healthy accessibility to sufficient food products. <http://cffpi.osu.edu/fooddeserts.htm>

The *Ohio Neighborhood Harvest* initiative is a statewide effort to ensure that Ohioans in every neighborhood have access to locally-grown, affordable and healthy food. Also, to fill gaps in the lives of Ohioans who have recently lost employment and gaps in the capacity of food service agencies to provide for their needs, the Ohio Food Program (OFP) and the Ohio Agricultural Clearance Program (OACP) collaborate with Ohio Food Banks, www.oashf.org.

In addition, Toledo Seagate, www.seagatefoodbank.org, and local churches, community centers and other organizations provide food pantries.

Local Food Producers and Markets

Fresh and processed food producers in Ohio sell an increasing variety of products directly to consumers and other buyers through various marketing channels. Ohio's rich diversity is reflected in the unique products, buyers and markets around the state. Clusters of food-related businesses are developing in urban and rural communities.



Food Producers

Producers in Ohio raise many species of livestock and grow more than 200 different crops that include an increasing variety of fruits, vegetables, herbs, meat, nuts, eggs and more. Farms that direct market these products come in all sizes, according to the USDA Agricultural Census data and Ohio Direct Marketing Survey, (Lev & Gwin, 2010; Fox, et al., 2009). Various season extension and value-added strategies connect producers and buyers throughout the year.



Food Processors

Ohio's rich food production industry is a diverse sector that includes more than 1,000 food processing businesses. These value-added products include cheese and other dairy products; jams, sauces and salsas; baked goods; functional foods and much more. Ohio's capacity to grow large and small food manufacturers continues to expand through new facilities, equipment; business support, distribution solutions, marketing education and production expertise.



Farm & Farmers' Markets

Ohio offers hundreds of seasonal and year-round markets. Farm markets are retail locations based on or near the farm. Some of these farms offer the option to pick-your-own fruits and vegetables, as well as to enjoy other farm experiences. Ohio's 190+ farmers' markets are community markets that include numerous vendors selling a variety of products. Ohio Farmers' Market Managers formed a new network in 2009.



Community Supported Agriculture (CSA)

With subscription farming, growers and consumers share the risks and benefits of food production. Consumers purchase 'shares' or 'membership' before the season begins and receive food products throughout the season. During the past decade, increased consumer interest in local food has contributed to an increasing number and variety of CSA operations (Woods, et al., 2009).



Produce Auctions

Ohio has eight produce auctions throughout the state, where producers collaboratively sell boxes and bins of graded produce and other items to restaurant owners, grocery store buyers, retail vendors and other buyers. Each auction generates an average of \$1 million dollars annually.



Wineries

There are more than 1,500 acres of Ohio vineyards and 145 wineries currently licensed in the state of Ohio. In 2008, Ohio winemakers produced over 1.1 million gallons, contributing more than \$580 million dollars and 4,100 full-time jobs to Ohio's economy (Ohio Grape Industries Committee, <http://www.tasteohiowines.com/index.php>).



Local Food Buyers/Providers

Local products that offer unique quality attributes that consumers value enter mainstream distribution channels through broad line distribution centers, specialty distributors and direct delivery. The Ohio Direct Marketing Team provides *Market Ready* education to help producers prepare to work with these distribution channels, the Ohio MarketMaker program to help producers and buyers make connections that work and marketing research, including data on where producers distribute their products, <http://directmarketing.osu.edu>.

Restaurants & Caterers

Increasing interest in local foods by restaurants and their patrons is evident in the National Restaurant Association surveys, American Culinary Federation & Chefs Collaborative surveys, the Ohio Restaurant Association publications and the growing number of Chef/Grower networks.

Grocery Stores & Other Retailers

National supermarket chains, regional chains and independent stores have initiated efforts to source and sell local foods (King et al., 2010). The Ohio Grocer's Association invited members to a Local Food Summit to meet with local food producers. Many of these producers also sell to convenience stores and other retail locations where consumers buy fresh and processed food.

Schools, Institutions & Other Food Service Buyers

Public and private school cafeterias, college campus dining services, hospitals and local, state and federal government institutions within Ohio serve millions of meals each day. Other food service buyers include tourism destinations and lodging facilities, as well as companies that provide food to employees and guests. Many of these organizations are committed to buying local food and food from companies that employ Ohioans.



Food Cooperatives

To meet the growing interest in local food, Ohio has a variety of new and established cooperatives. These food cooperatives perform many functions, including collective production, processing, marketing and distribution. Membership in these cooperatives may include food buyers, food producers or a mix of farmers, retailers and community members. Because cooperatives are owned and democratically-controlled by their members, business decisions balance the need for profitability with the needs of their members and the wider interests of the community. (Ohio Cooperative Development Center, <http://ocdc.osu.edu>).

Consumers Want Locally Grown & Produced Food

Consumers who value high-quality foods produced with low environmental impact are willing to pay more for locally produced food (Martinez et al., 2010). For many consumers, a sense of direct linkage to the producer and a desire to support the local economy are also important (King, et al., 2010). Over 75 percent of Ohioans report purchasing farm or food products directly from a farmer.

<http://ohiosurvey.osu.edu/pdf/2008-local-foods-topical-report.pdf>. In addition, a growing number of consumers are growing and preserving local food. Garden centers are also connecting with consumers as 43 million U.S. households spent approximately \$3 billion annually on food gardening (NGA, 2009). <http://www.gardenresearch.com/index.php?q=show&id=3126>

Communities Benefit From Local Food

Advocates tout various benefits of a local food system, including fresher, healthier, better tasting food; lower carbon emissions due to shorter transportation distances; and the retention of economic activity in the local economy (King, 2010). Many Ohio communities are developing local food programs, promotions and policies. For example, Knox County's substantial and vital food and farming system was captured in the report, *Planting the Seeds of Sustainable Economic Development: Knox County's Local Food System*, http://sri.osu.edu/pdf/Knox_County_Assessment_Summary-200908.pdf.

Local Food & Local Fun

Local food and local fun bring two great Ohio industries together – agriculture and tourism. Ohio's tourism industry contributed \$36 billion in total sales and brought in \$2.5 billion in state and local taxes to Ohio's economy in 2009. Segments contributing to this "Experience Economy" include:

Food Festivals & Events Culinary Tourism Agritourism

Local food also links with local culture, heritage, sustainable development and other interests of Ohio residents and visitors.



Programs & Organizations

Numerous statewide, regional and local organizations collaborate to advance local foods in Ohio. While the list is too extensive to include in this brief publication, here are just a few programs:



Food Policy

The Ohio Food Policy Advisory Council brings together representatives from government, the food and agriculture industry, and various regions of the state to analyze food production, processing and consumption in Ohio, link producers and consumers in local food systems and ensure that citizens in need have greater access to fresh and nutritious food. Local food policy councils are also developing throughout the state to address local issues. www.agri.ohio.gov/divs/FoodCouncil/foodcouncil.aspx#top



Local Food Promotions

Ohio Proud (Ohio Dept. of Ag., www.ohioproud.org) and Our Ohio (Farm Bureau, www.ourohio.org) are promotional programs that frequently unite with local, regional "Eat local/Buy Local" campaigns and programs. There are also food-specific programs, such as Ohio Signature Beef & Ohio Wines.



Education & Advocacy Programs

Numerous rural and urban community organizations are involved in local efforts to educate youth, families and other audiences on how to be involved with and benefit from local foods. Schools offer students experiential learning opportunities. Businesses host group tours. Agencies deliver classes on producing, cooking, preserving local food.



Production Assistance Organizations

The OSU Food Industries Center, ACenet Food Ventures, the Center for Innovative Food Technology and a growing list of other certified kitchens provide assistance and facilities to advance local food processing, packaging and distribution.



Local Food Publications & Social Media

Ohio local food is featured in traditional media (television shows, newspapers, magazines, radio and community publications); new media (YouTube, Twitter, Blogs, social networking sites like Facebook); and emerging media (mobile device applications – "apps").



Local Food Resources

Ohio MarketMaker

Free, easy to use web-based resource makes connections that work throughout Ohio's food industry, www.ohiomarketmaker.com



OSU Social Responsibility Initiative, <http://sri.osu.edu>

OSU Center for Farmland Policy Innovation, <http://cffpi.osu.edu/>

Local Food Systems, <http://localfoodsystems.org>

Local Food and Farming Mailing List, locfood@osu.edu (subscribe)

Ohio Farmers' Market Program, <http://ohiofarmersmarkets.osu.edu>

OSU Food Industries Centers, <http://foodindustries.osu.edu>

Ohio Agricultural Research & Development Center (OARDC), <http://oardc.osu.edu>

OSU Extension Local Food Programs, Explore more local food programs in all of OSU Extension's program and geographic areas, <http://extension.osu.edu>

U.S. Local Food Systems www.ers.usda.gov/publications/err97

National Good Food Network, Wallace Center, <http://ngfn.org>

Choices, a publication of Agricultural & Applied Economic Association, <http://www.choicesmagazine.org> magazine/article.php?article=107

Ohio Direct Marketing Team, <http://directmarketing.osu.edu>

All of the resources listed & more are available at <http://directmarketing.osu.edu/content/localfoods.htm>. This publication was created by Julie Fox, Ph.D. Direct Marketing Specialist for the OSU College of Food, Agricultural & Environmental Sciences, <http://cfaes.osu.edu>. Fox can be reached at fox.264@osu.edu; The OSU South Centers, 1864 Shyville Rd., Piketon, OH 45661; <http://southcenters.osu.edu>

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