



IN PHOTO: (from left) Fifer Orchards co-owner Mary Fennemore, State Rep. Jeff Spiegelman, State Rep. Lyndon Yearick, and Fifer Orchards Vice-President of Sales Curt Fifer with prepared baskets of local fresh produce and farm products.

NEWS:

Delaware Produce Week Seeks to Link Farmers with Local Residents

July 13, 2018 – Facilitating a better relationship between Delaware farmers and local consumers is the goal of Delaware Produce Week.

Established in 2015 as a partnership between the General Assembly and the state Department of Agriculture, each week-long observation includes events highlighting the numerous ways Delawareans can connect with family farms in their communities.

State Rep. Lyndon Yearick, R-Dover South, who was raised on a dairy farm, sponsored [House Resolution 34](#) designating this week (July 9-13, 2018) as Delaware Produce Week. It is the fourth consecutive year for the observation.

"Farm products often travel hundreds of miles from producer to plate," Rep. Yearick said. "In some cases, that's unavoidable. But in many instances, the fruits, vegetables, and meats that Delawareans want are being produced not far from their front doors."

Fresher food translates into better nutrition, better taste, and the potential for better eating habits."

Buying and eating local produce also benefits the economy. "Keeping our food dollars in local circulation stimulates economic activity and supports Delaware's agricultural community," said State Rep. Jeff Spiegelman, R-Clayton. "Better food and better fortunes for our farmers. It's a classic win-win situation."

Today (7/13), Reps. Yearick and Spiegelman visited Fifer Orchards because the fourth-generation family farm near Wyoming fittingly illustrates many of the ways consumers can access local produce. In addition to being a major producer of Delaware peaches, Fifer Orchards also includes a "U-pick" produce business; an on-site farm market (selling their own produce and regionally sourced agricultural products from other local producers); a wholesale operation selling directly to local retailers; and a Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) program.



State Rep. Rich Collins samples one flavor of VanAuken Fudge at the 16 Mile Farmers' Market in Georgetown. Tyler Davidson (right) started the business a little over a year ago as a Cottage Food Establishment working out of his mother's kitchen in Milton.

CSA programs occupy a small but intriguing niche of agriculture consumerism. Typically, customers purchase a share of a farm's seasonal production with boxes of fresh fruits and vegetables proportionally distributed to the shareholders at regular intervals during the growing season.

Jessica Yocum, CSA Coordinator for Fifer Orchards, said their program began in 2011 with about 50 members. About 400 families are participating this year. The CSA program operates for about 25 weeks out of the year: 18 weeks during the late spring and summer, followed by a seven-week shoulder season in the fall.

Another way Delaware farmers can connect with their neighbors is through direct sale, either at farm stands or farm markets. According to the Delaware Department of Agriculture, there are over 80 on-site farmstands throughout the state and more than 20 community-run farmers' markets.

Last year, total sales at Delaware's farmers' markets topped \$3 million, 47 percent of which were tied to agricultural products such as meats, cheeses, jellies, breads, salsa, eggs or honey.

In 2016, the Delaware Division of Public Health promulgated regulations expanding opportunities for those interested in preparing food in their homes for sale to the public.

While the requirements for engaging in a Cottage Food Establishment (CFE) are lengthy, the rules allow for the sale of baked goods (e.g. cakes, breads, cookies, rolls, muffins, brownies, fruit pies and pastries); jams, jellies, and other fruit preserves; and candy (e.g. fudge, lollipops, chocolates, tortes, hard candy, and rock candy).

Because the CFE regulations require direct-to-consumer sales, farmers' markets have become an ideal way to launch a start-up food business directly from home.

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