



Press Information

September 8, 2008

Wild Center's Puts Local Farmers Center Stage

Free Farmer Market Day Event Scheduled for Thursday

Tupper Lake NY - The Wild Center attracted visitors from all 50 states this year, but its idea of good food is much more local, and the Museum's big tent and Great Hall are becoming a center for area farmers and local food events.

According to executive director Stephanie Ratcliffe, The Wild Center plans to get into local food in an even bigger way in the future. The next food and farm event takes place this Thursday starting at 1:00 p.m. inside the Center's Esplanade tent, and is free to the public. There will be cooking demonstrations, farmers with their products, children's activities, and museum presentations related to local food production in the Adirondacks. "We started buying locally for our own cafe because we always look to source locally," said Ratcliffe, "then Kerri Ziemann, one of our naturalists who organizes the museum's Winter Wilddays had an idea to invite area farmers to join us as part of our winter weekend events, and her instinct proved to be a great one - that The Wild Center was the right location to bring farmers and the public together, and a place we could add a learning experience to what the farmers were bringing."

Products that will be showcased this week include produce and other goods from Sunwarm Gardens, honey from Suzanne Rinas Apiary, a wide range of products from Well Dressed Foods, Underwood Herbs, Whitestone Farm, Hohmeyer's Lake Clear Farm, and Merchia Farm. Additionally there will be special presentations including a noon walk with well-known herbalist Jane Desotelle, one of the leaders in the local food effort, who will help visitors identify wild plants that can be used for food and medicine. At 1:00 p.m. Chris Hample of Long Lake will do a cooking demonstration using local ingredients. At 2:00 p.m. Amy Kohanski, a natural food specialist with Nori's Village Market in Saranac Lake will demonstrate the best ways to make sure different supermarket fruits and vegetables don't pass on the pesticides and herbicides on their skins.

Bernadette Logozur of the Cornell Cooperative Extension will present information on farming in the Adirondacks, and how people can access foods produced from local working farms. The Wild Center staff will also offer worm composting demonstration, a food miles game, food-related crafts for children, and a guided walk on the newly open "New Path" focused on sustainability and green design on the 31- acre campus.

The local food movement is gaining attention around the country as rising oil and shipping costs push industrial food prices higher. A series of tainted food scares, including tomato and beef recalls, increased awareness of some of the health issues related to mass-produced food. Soaring costs that have seen wheat prices jump 70 percent in the last year also pointed at the potential for food shortages that could cut supplies of imported food to the United States. David Tomberlin, whose Well Dressed Food company will be part of the Thursday event, says he sees a new reality in the increased awareness and demand for locally grown food. "Cheap oil and cheap fuel helped set up the way we think about food," he said, "the price of oil may go up and down, but long-term there is a new cost reality in food, and we need a new system that is going to be much more local."

"I think we're going to find that we're better off in a lot of ways if we can start to get more of what we eat from our own communities," said Ziemann.

All of that may mean more opportunity for locally produced food in the Adirondacks. The Adirondacks were once known for local farming. Towns and villages fed themselves, and Great Camps were often attached to equally great farms, where wide varieties of foods were raised. Most local antique shops carry collections of bottles bearing the names of Adirondack dairies. The industrial food systems that developed after the Second World War put an end to many Adirondack farms, but the new demand could put the ones that survived back on map.

Tomberline said that connection between The Wild Center and the renewed growth of local food seemed like a natural for the museum. "It's an extension of what they have done so well already – which is to bring a clearer view of the Adirondacks to a much larger audience. It's really perfect to add the story of locally grown food and highlight it to their larger audience."

Upcoming food programs at The Wild Center will include a harvest event October 2nd, and then the Featured Farmer events will start up in January, and run every other weekend all winter, showcasing different farmers and their products. The winter events let local farms present away from the busy summer season, and are part of an effort in the region to extend the season for fresh and locally grown products in the Adirondacks.

Jen Kretser said local food has an impact on the natural world that is the Museum's core focus. "When you look closely at where a lot of our food comes from you can see that the way it is produced, shipped and packaged now is not going to work much longer as our only big source of food. Aside from problems of shipping and storing food, it's going to get harder to believe that that the pollution, use of steroids and antibiotics and other industrial practices that are happening in places like China or the big meat and poultry plants in the southern U.S. don't matter to the Adirondacks."

“The Adirondacks are a place with nature and people. Some of the people are farmers, and we think it’s better all around if we feed our customers and help others get their hands on our neighbors’ sustainably grown food instead of industrial food,” said Ratcliffe. She said the effort was driven by the same thing that drives the Museum’s live exhibits and extensive programs. “We think a museum can do more. It can help the environment, help the economy, and help people connect. The local food initiatives do all of those.”

The summer programs were supported with an agritourism grant from New York State Department of Agriculture and Markets. The grant will also help support more local food events at the Center next winter and summer.

The Wild Center is located at 45 Museum Drive in Tupper Lake New York, and is open from 10:00-6:00 p.m. daily. More information is available at www.wildcenter.org.