



Creating Organic Thanksgiving as Easy as Pie

By Stacey Fowler, Science Interchange Reporter

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Creating an organic Thanksgiving is as easy as pie in Marin. That's because the County boasts an abundance of organic farms that produce a wide variety of tasty and healthy fruits and vegetables. But flavor is just one reason to buy organic. By purchasing produce grown organically in Marin, you're also doing a great deal to support family farms, the environment, the local economy, and your community.

"When you buy organic, you're supporting sustainable agriculture and you're supporting a growing practice that's really important to our community," said Barbara Ambler-Thomas, general manager of Marin County Farmers Market Association. Ambler-Thomas says the Association currently includes about 200 farms, with 50 to 75 farmers selling their goods at the Marin Farmers Market each Sunday and Thursday at the Marin Civic Center.

Hot items at the market these days include winter squash and pumpkins, apples, leafy greens and salad mixes, chestnuts, and unusual varieties of beets and carrots. The Market also features a bakery where you can purchase pumpkin breads, and pecan and pumpkin pies.

All the organic produce sold here is grown according to the California Certified Organic Farmers rules and regulations; the highest standard there is in the industry. "We want to make sure you know where things are grown and at our markets you can meet the farmer and know that he's grown food organically under those rules," said Ambler-Thomas.

Knowing where your food comes from is important. "I think it's really beneficial if consumers are aware of what farms are in their region and where their food comes from in an age when a lot of food is being imported from out of state and out of the country," said Warren Weber, owner of Star Route Farms in Bolinas. "Supporting the farms is a way of supporting the people who are working and growing in your community," he continued.

Star Route Farm has been around since 1974 and specializes in salad greens, leafy greens, and vegetables like leeks, broccoli, beans, and squashes. Weber prides himself on his European and Asian salad greens like chicory, arugula, escarole, and tatsoi.

Weber suggests a colorful salad as part of your organic Thanksgiving. "Arugula, frisée, and escarole are great and they're very festive," he said. "Even though they're not native American greens, they're really quite delightful," continued Weber.

Marin provides an ideal climate for growing these delicious and delicate greens. Fresh Run Farm, also in Bolinas, produces chard, kale, collards, and beans. "Bolinas is a peninsula with water on three sides and that favors plants that tolerate cooler weather," said owner Peter Martinelli. The climate is also stable--meaning there's not much fluctuation in temperature from day-to-day or

day-to-night. "With something like beans, that tends to make them very mild, sweet, and flavorful," explained Martinelli.

Martinelli recommends people think seasonally when shopping for organics. "Rather than buy an organic tomato that was probably grown in Mexico and shipped up here with all the food miles and unnecessary costs," said Martinelli, "I'd like to see people buy things that are seasonal and produced right here in Northern California."

Supporting local farms has greater implications than simply knowing where and how your food is being grown. "Marin residents really value open space and the fact that there is still a good percentage of the County in agricultural production," said Martinelli. He emphasized that local growers depend on the local market since they really can't compete with the large, corporate operations that supply wholesalers and supermarkets. "It's important that Marin consumers support the farmers that are here and therefore ensure that we can all stay on the land and continue producing," he said.

Marin organics encompass more than fruits and veggies—there are also local producers of organic poultry, beef, and dairy products.

The Straus family has been farming in Marin for over 60 years. In 1993, Straus Family Creamery became the first organic dairy in the western United States and in 1994 they opened the first wholly organic dairy processing plant in the U.S. and began bottling their own milk in glass bottles. The dairy has just purchased their first delivery truck and is now taking orders for home delivery in West Marin on their web site.

"Cream and butter, of course, are staples in any holiday meal," said Vivien Straus, marketing director for Straus Family Creamery, located in Marshall.

Straus is very excited about a Straus Creamery item being produced for the first time this holiday season. "Our eggnog comes in quart glass bottles and it's made only with 100% organic ingredients." She believes it's the first 100% organic eggnog on the market in the U.S. "It's made with organic nutmeg, eggs yolks and our own whole milk," said Straus, "It can be served with brandy over ice, or by itself--it's really delicious, I wish we had it year-round," she continued.

Incorporating local organics into Thanksgiving is a way to express gratitude for the bounty of healthy foods in Marin. "By shopping at the farmer's market, you're really supporting small family farmers that have dedicated their lives to bringing organic, as well as traditional fruits and vegetables, to the marketplace," noted Ambler-Thomas. "We should be really thankful that we have the choices that these farmers have given us."

Organic Thanksgiving Recipes

Courtesy of Straus Family Creamery

Straus Yogurt Cheese

This is a wonderful appetizer that can only be made with yogurts that do not contain thickeners—like Straus Yogurt. Dazzle your friends with your own homemade cheese!

- 2 cups Straus Whole or Nonfat Plain Yogurt
- Fresh herbs (i.e. parsley, chives, dill, your choice)

- Salt and Pepper

Line a sieve with cheesecloth or a clean kitchen towel and set it over a bowl. (A coffee filter lined with filter paper will also work). Spoon in yogurt and let it drain in the refrigerator until reduced to 1 cup, about 5 hours. Mix in your favorite herbs and a dash of salt and pepper to taste. Or keep it plain and serve with some chopped sundried tomatoes and kalamata olives on the side. Drizzle a little lemon juice mixed with honey on top.

Spread on sourdough bread or serve as an accompaniment to fresh, raw vegetables.

Popovers

- 2 eggs
- 1 cup Straus Organic Whole Milk
- 1 tbs. Straus Unsalted Organic Butter, melted
- 1 cup all-purpose flour
- ¼ tsp. Salt

Preheat oven to 425°F and butter a popover pan. In a large mixing bowl, combine eggs, milk, butter, flour, and salt. Mix until ingredients are just blended and only tiny lumps of flour are visible, about 1 minute. Fill popover cups halfway with batter, and then bake at 425°F for 15 minutes, until they begin to brown and rise. Reduce heat to 350°F and bake another 15 minutes, until popovers are brown and crisp. Makes 12 mini or 6 regular popovers.

Squash Soup

- 1 medium butternut squash, pumpkin, or winter squash
- 1 can chicken or vegetable stock (14.5 oz)
- ½ cup chopped onions (yellow or white)
- ½ tbs. Straus Organic Sweet or Salted Butter
- ½ cup Straus Organic Whipping Cream
- Seasonings (salt, pepper, ginger, nutmeg, cinnamon)
- 1 tbs. brown sugar

Bake squash in 350°F oven for about an hour, until a knife slides into it easily. While squash is baking, sauté onions in butter until onions are translucent. Once squash is tender, let it cool slightly then cut it in half. Scoop out seeds and string and place meat in blender. You should have approximately 2 cups of squash. Add onions, cream, and seasonings and blend until pureed. Put in pot and reheat. Makes 4-6 servings.

For a variation of this soup, instead of above seasonings, add ½ cup of Straus Organic Whole or Nonfat Plain Yogurt and a tablespoon of curry powder with salt to taste.

RESOURCES

The Marin County Farmers Market takes place Sundays and Thursdays from 8 AM to 1 PM at the Civic Center. For more information, call 1-800-897-FARM (3276) or www.marincenter.org/events/farmer.html.

Star Route Farms' produce is available at United Market and Good Earth in Fairfax and at the Marin Farmers Market.

Straus Family Creamery products are available at health food and independent stores throughout the Bay Area. For more information: www.strausmilk.com

Fresh Run Farm's produce is available at Bolinas People Store and Tomales Food Company and at many local restaurants. To find out more, email vegetableman20@hotmail.com