

Save some room for local food

By Greg Clary

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When you sit down to Thanksgiving dinner next week, after you've remembered all the blessings you have, ask yourself where the food on the table came from.

If you say the kitchen, you're right. But only in a comedic sense.

If you say the grocery store, again you're technically right, but that answer misses the point.

Much of what will be on America's table once again on the biggest eating day of the year will come from a good distance away, maybe even outside the country's borders.

It likely was trucked or brought by rail, kept fresh by refrigeration and preservatives, and grown in such large quantities that taste takes a back seat to economics.

The point of all this isn't to take away your appetite, but rather to remind you to consider locally grown food as a staple in your weekly diet.

"You have three food votes a day, and if you did the right thing with just a few of those a week, it would make a huge impact," said Ken Kleinpeter, director of farm and facilities at the Glynwood Center in Cold Spring. "No one is saying you have to do all local because that would be unrealistic, but even 5 percent more would create the momentum to bring the farming infrastructure back in this area."

The options are greater than you might think.

Farmers markets have found a steadily growing base of customers in this area, and the more grocery shoppers and restaurant patrons ask for

locally grown produce, eggs and meat, the more business will pay attention.



Dave Llewellyn, the head gardener at the Glynwood Center in Cold Spring, holds a flat of kale yesterday at the center's greenhouse. Glynwood Center is a model for sustaining local agriculture, a 225-acre farm set up to help communities understand what they can do to help local farmers stand their ground. (Joe Larese/The Journal News)

Kleinpeter and the rest of the Glynwood staff are zealots for healthier eating and sustainable farming and are working to reinvigorate local farming in the Hudson Valley.

This 225-acre property, with 13 buildings including a mansion, was the county estate of the Perkins and Merck families, and is currently owned by the Open Space Institute, which leases the land to Glynwood for \$1 a year.

The center's Keep Farming program is designed to help communities evaluate farming potential, even for small parcels, and figure out what can work.

Just this week, its experts talked with some 200 Rockland residents who turned out for an evening meeting dedicated to building Community Supported Agriculture, or CSAs, like the 2-acre parcel at Glynwood that supplied

60 families last year with produce and farm-fresh eggs and chickens.

One thing that resonated at the meeting was a survey showing that nearly four out of five people who answered said they'd be willing to pay a little more for locally grown food.

With land at a premium in this neck of the woods, more creative solutions will be needed if demand grows as advocates hope.

Judith LaBelle, Glynwood's president, said the strategy is to find ways to bring land back into farming use that has been unavailable.

"We're talking about the possibility of farming on state parkland," LaBelle said, sitting in an office that affords a view of the nearby 16,000-acre Fahnestock State Park. "We're doing a workshop week after next with people from (New York) state parks, including the deputy commissioner, and Vermont and Pennsylvania, where they're already farming on state lands."

In the meantime, the center is working on a pilot program to lower greenhouse early growing costs by running heated water pipes under the soil rather than heating the entire structure, saving nearly 80 percent in energy costs.

"Plants don't need really warm air temperatures," said Dave Llewellyn, Glynwood's gardener. "They need the warm soil temperatures."

They normally couldn't do that kind of a 12-month growing project because it was too expensive. But with some off-the-shelf materials and a water heater from the hardware store, Llewellyn was able to make the greenhouse work for less and all year around.

Kleinpeter said Glynwood also will use a federal grant in 2009 to study the effectiveness of goats in controlling invasive species.

"They love to eat multiflora rose," Kleinpeter said of the interloper species that has overcome parts of the area. "They'll stand in clover and eat the (invasive) bushes. A lot of our property is steep, and you can't mow. If you're going to control it here, you're going to have to control it with animals."

And that's got to be better than pesticides, right?