

Local food and land conservation a natural fit!
By Jack Kaestner Executive Chef
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In keeping with the Tall Pines Conservancy mission statement, certainly preserving farmland is being accomplished by the group's present practice of purchasing farmland and the development rights. Yet in this much needed effort, funding can be a limiting factor.

Another much needed effort, which could be dovetailed with the goals of TPC, is buying and supporting local food. Most local farms produce crops that become homogenized commodities, subjecting our local farmers to farm gate prices not the true cost of production. This ultimately is a losing battle for many local farms. How can our several hundred acre size farms compete against several thousand acre farms across the country or world? They can't and that's why groups like TPC are forming. By eating local food you reconnect with local farms and farmers. That vital connection encourages local farms to continue farming and thus in turn encourages them to adopt healthier growing practices.

Local Food is Local Farms.

Eating local foods is a great way to preserve and promote local farms. At first I was drawn by the rich flavors, textures and tastes. I also had a desire to help local farmers. Growing up in Baraboo surrounded by farms and farmers somehow touched me. Last year at the Oconomowoc Lake club we purchased about 30% or 60,000 dollars of food from local farmers. These farms range in size from five acres to over 1000 acres. Some farms are first generation, others are 4th and 5th generation farms. Some were homesteaded back in the mid 1800s. We utilize food from over 40 local farms, touching over 10,000 acres of Wisconsin farmland and one just restarted in Waukesha County. This is trend I'd love to see continue. On average we use 30% local food, but when groups come to the Lake Club and request local food we can usually source 90% from local farms. We just have to adjust the menu a bit to utilize local seasonal food. Last year we started inviting some of our farmers to the club so that they could interact with our members and guests. These "farmer events" have become very popular. One of the most common questions I hear now is "when are you bringing the farmers back"? That's the difference between faceless, placeless food and local food: local food is food with a face, a place and great taste! It really has been a bit of a revelation to see and experience this "Farmer -Connection".

Eating local foods is a great way to support local economic development. According to economic development specialists, every dollar spent on local food recirculates five times in the local economy. That means that the 60,000 dollars we spent on local food became 300,000 dollars to the local area. Instead of receiving 20% of the food dollar, these local farms received 100% of the food dollar. When purchasing local food over 60% stays in the state, but when purchasing food from a national food company only 23% stays in the state.

Eating local foods is a great way to preserve open space. Many of the local meats and cheeses that we serve at the Lake Club are pasture based and grass fed. Pasture based farms preserve open space and promote local wildlife, doubling and possibly tripling ground nesting bird populations depending on cropping schedules. It is for these reasons and many other environment benefits that I have become a strong proponent of local pasture-based farming. I especially want those benefits to be in my local environment.

Eating local pasture-based food is a great way to preserve water resources since it adds to ground water recharge and minimizes water runoff. Less runoff means less top soil and other nutrients such as nitrogen and phosphorus; and our waterways and lakes remain cleaner. Water recharge and runoff both are critical issues in Waukesha and surrounding counties.

Bring back the farmers! Over the years food and farming were relegated to the back burner or back forty. We abandoned our local farmers in search of cheaper more efficient food. Our local farmers did what they could do to survive, while protecting the environment and hopefully passing the farm along to the next generation. We all are witnesses these effects on our health and on local farms. I believe local food and farming are the lynchpin to many critical issues. Purchasing land or the development rights are a great stopgap measure, essentially trying to make up for years of neglect. Another step is buying, supporting and enjoying local food, thus supporting and enjoying local farms and farmers.

Eating local foods really is a partnership between local consumers and local farmers. Our land and farms, our environment and economy; we all become healthier and happier together.

Enjoy local food and farms!

Chef Jack

Dollars and sense of local food

As a nation we spend over \$900 billion dollars a year or 2.3 billion dollars a day on food.

One billion dollars a year is spent at local farmer's markets.

Where does all that money go? Why are our farms struggling?

On average farmers get less than 20% of the retail dollar.

Homogenized commodity verses unique (same kind as others, a useful thing, an article of trade, a product)

Part of the problem; the food system is so large it's hard to get your hands around it.

So we just end up ignoring it.

Wisconsin

WI Population	5,363,675
Per capita food spending	\$3,211
Annually	\$17,222,760,425
Daily	\$47,185,645
Individually each day	8.80

Every local food dollar helps

Waukesha County	
Population	381,000
Per capita food spending	\$3,211
Annually	\$1,223,391,000
Daily	\$3,352,800

Just think if we started redirecting a percentage of 3.3 million dollars everyday towards our own local farmers. And then this money would recirculate 5 times. This is why so many states are passing legislative measures to hasten local food purchases.

Local sustainably grown food is priceless.