

Time Out

Chicago

The where-to-go what-to-do weekly

May 12-19, 2005 Issue No. 11 \$2.50

Thievery Corporation goes public

Trainwreck alert:

Tuning in to *Britney and Kevin*



green eats

Going organic is easier than you think

Inside:

**Farmers' markets
that don't suck**

Eco-friendly booze

50 spots to eat organic

How to grow your own

Cover Price \$2.50

1 9>



0 71896 44501 5

DAVID CLEVERDON
KINNICKINICK FARM

GREEN THINKERS

David Cleverdon just bought a second truck. That's not exactly headline news, but for a small farm, it's big. Another means of carting his organic produce to Chicago is a step toward proving that small, sustainable farms can survive. "The only way this kind of agriculture can work," he says, "is if it can earn farmers a living."

In '92 he and his wife, Susan, started Kinnickinnick Farm (named for the creek that runs through the property) on 40 acres near Rockford. Since then, Kinnickinnick has become a preferred provider of produce to thriving restaurants like AVEC and Green Zebra, as well as an important voice for the organic farming community.

Cleverdon has survived by finding a niche (providing Italian greens like arugula and *cavolo nero* to local chefs), but turning an organic farm into a moneymaker isn't easy. As a Midwest farmer, his growing season is shorter; as an organic farm he needs more manual laborers, not just to weed, but to plant larger crops to compensate for those lost to hungry pests.

His second truck will help him cover both Green City Market and the Evanston Market this summer, boosting the sustainable-farm business one truck at a time.—Margaret Littman



Comparing oranges to oranges

The price is right with conventionally grown foods, but that's about all

By David Tamarkin Photograph by Abel Berumen

So you're in the grocery store, and all you want is an orange. You don't care what kind it is—valencia, navel, it really doesn't matter. But when you get to the checkout you find that the three oranges you've picked are organic, and they're going to cost you four bucks. And now, suddenly, it does matter.

And it should. When bought in a grocery store, organic produce can be anywhere from 25 to 100 percent more expensive than conventional produce. The widely accepted reason for this is that organic farms incur more labor costs. Instead of using pesticides to control pests, they uproot their gardens for crop rotations; instead of using chemical herbicides, they pay somebody to weed manually.

But it's not that simple. An organic activist will tell you that organic foods are actually cheaper, because conventional produce has "hidden costs"—the price we'll have to pay, over the long haul, to combat the environment- and health-damaging pollution caused by conventional farming methods. And they have a point. The Organic Consumers Organization estimates that 95 percent of all pesticides sprayed miss their target, spreading chemicals into (a.k.a. polluting) the soil, air and water. That's why conventional agriculture is the number one indirect-runoff source of water pollution in the U.S.

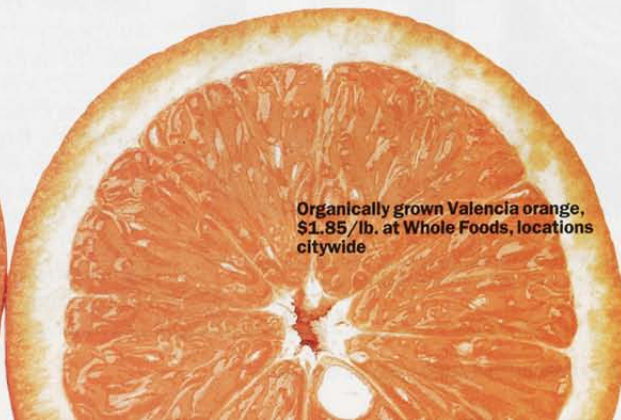
Still, if knowing you're helping pollute the Earth doesn't keep you up at night, and you don't mind paying more taxes to clean the lakes, conventional produce is a cheaper choice. Unless you count the health risks. Even though studies have shown organic foods to have more vitamins, the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) is careful not to definitively claim that organics are healthier. For those who consider ingesting excess amounts of chemical pesticides "unhealthy," though, they are. Pesticides are generally not water soluble, so that quick splash of water you give your fruit to "clean" it doesn't do much. (You'll need a fruit and vegetable spray wash—Fit is one such brand—to really get the job done.) For an orange, removing the pesticides seems easy: Just peel it. But when fields are sprayed with pesticides, the chemicals find their way into the soil, and into the root systems of trees. Which means that a conventional orange doesn't just have chemicals on its skin; it may have chemicals in its flesh, as well.

Not that you can taste them. In fact, you'd be hard pressed to make any definitive statement about organics or conventional foods tasting better. Sometimes those big, seedless, genetically modified oranges are sweet and juicy; other days they taste bland. The same goes for organics.

So you've got a tough decision ahead of you. Of course, this assumes that you're privileged enough to have access to organics, which many people are not. Lower-income neighborhoods generally lack decent grocery stores where they can get fresh produce, let alone organic options. If you're lucky enough to have the choice, be smart enough to choose wisely.



Conventionally grown navel orange,
\$1.29/lb. at Mac Kelly's Greens &
Things, 21 E Adams St (between State
St and Wabash Ave)



Organically grown Valencia orange,
\$1.85/lb. at Whole Foods, locations
citywide

Eco-maniacs

A chef and a farmer weigh in on the hassle of certified organics **By Heather Shouse**

Henry Brockman has been eating and farming organic foods most of his life. But since the USDA laid claim to the word *organic* in 2002, the sign on his market stand now reads MORE-GANIC.

"I can't legally say I'm organic, and if I do I could be fined or even sent to jail," Brockman says, laughing. "Since the USDA owns that word, guys like me can't use it, and I have just as much right because that word has been used for the past 80 years to describe what I do."

Unhappy with how closely the Organic Foods Production Act of 1990 was being followed, in 2002 the USDA's National Organic Program became more strict. Since then, third-party certifiers like the Midwest Organic Services Association (MOSA) have been called in as enforcers, making the process of calling one's produce "certified organic" more complicated for Brockman and farmers like him.

He started his farm in central Illinois about 13 years ago, but Brockman was certified only during the first seven years. "And then the USDA got involved and things were getting really crazy," he says. "I never could figure out a reason to go through all of the red tape of getting certified under all of these new rules."

The red tape includes what Brockman calls a "draconian" rule about compost being turned three times within 14 days (an issue on which most farmers and scientists can't come to a consensus), and a rule that



Michael Altenberg

farmers have to use organically grown seed, unless they can prove that they called three seed suppliers and struck out. For farmers like Brockman, who uses around 400 hard-to-find heirloom and hybrid varieties, this means 1,200 phone calls a season. And, according to MOSA, the fees for a farm to be certified are close to \$1,000 a year.

These rules and regulations are what chef Michael Altenberg of Lincoln Square's Bistro Campagne says will help "keep me in line." Altenberg is on the path to becoming the first certified-organic restaurant in Chicago, and one of only a couple in the country. "I'd like to make it so that people walk the walk instead of talk the talk," Altenberg says. "Quite honestly, when some magazine person calls a restaurant and says, 'I'm doing a story on organics, do you use them?' they're basically asking 'Do you want press?' So of course these restaurants say, 'Oh yeah, we're big on organics' and they've got, like, one bunch of organic lettuce."

To set a precedent, Altenberg called MOSA to find out the steps he needs to take to get certified. He not only has to go through an inspection to prove that everything from meats to dried spices is organic, he must also use organic cleaning products and organic pest control.

Altenberg figures he's about six months away from becoming certified and thinks the payoff in the end is worth it—ethically rather than financially. "It's very expensive to do this, but this is a personal goal that will hopefully popularize organics," he says. "One of my kids is a cancer survivor, and I think about what we're feeding our kids, and how do I, as a chef, run a business in a way that I can look in the mirror at the end of the day."

Ethically, Altenberg and Brockman couldn't agree more. "Every other organism survives without polluting its environment, so why should humans live any differently?" Brockman says. "If you walked into a grocery store and the signs said FOODS GROWN WITH POISON and FOODS GROWN WITHOUT POISON, what would you choose?"



Henry Brockman

Harry Rhodes doesn't just believe in the old adage "Teach a man to fish..."—he lives it.

Through his four-year-old program, Growing Home, he teaches the recently homeless or incarcerated how to grow food through on-the-job training. The fledgling farmers work ten acres in LaSalle County and an acre in the Back of the Yards, and also study marketing and business finance, with the eventual goal of making them more employable.

For Gloria Carter, it worked. After completing the program, she realized a goal to work in the restaurant biz by landing a job at Bistro Campagne, where she now works under chef Michael Altenberg.

"I'm living a lifelong dream," Carter says. "When we started, I wondered how the program was going to help. Then we started planting seedlings and everything changed. I saw something I worked on sprout into beautiful vegetables."

Those vegetables are at the Hyde Park and Green City farmers' markets (see page 20). But you may have already eaten them at restaurants like Blackbird, Lula Café and North Pond, which support Growing Home to ensure that Rhodes can keep teaching those like Carter how to grow. For more info, visit www.growinghomeinc.org. —JR



HARRY RHODES
GROWING HOME

GREEN THINKERS



Market research

These farmers' markets are good enough for the city's top chefs. Here's why you should check them out, too.

By Jody Robbins

Wondering where Blackbird chef Paul Kahan got the garlic for that soup you lapped up last week? Where Lula Café scored the arugula for the salad you devoured yesterday? Can you get your hands on the blueberries Mindy Segal uses at HotChocolate, or the heirloom tomatoes found on the menu at North Pond?

Now that it's farmers' market season, you can. The area's open-air markets aren't just a fun way to pretend you're a European for a day, strolling past makeshift stalls as you pluck items to go with the baguette protruding from your shopping bag. They're the everyday resource that the city's best chefs use to get their hands on the highest-quality ingredients in the Midwest.

"If you're buying from local farms, you really are cooking seasonally and not just talking about it," says Sarah Stegner, executive chef and owner of Prairie Grass Cafe in Northbrook

and a longtime devotee of local organics. "Chicago chefs have affected the farmers by being vocal and telling them what we like and don't like, thus affecting the quality and variety of what they are growing."

That quality and variety is available to anyone, whether you have gourmet goals, green ethics or are just looking for an amazing apple to sink your teeth into. But if you plan on competing for the very best produce at the top three farmers' markets listed below, don't sleep in late: Chefs are early risers.

Green City Market

www.chicagogreencitymarket.org

Where: Along the path that runs through Lincoln Park between 1750 N Clark St and Stockton Drive

When: Wednesdays and Saturdays, beginning May 18; 7am–1:30pm

The lowdown: This is season No. 7 for the

Green City Market, widely known as one of the best farmers' markets in the country thanks to the high standards its vendors must meet to participate and its affiliation with many of Chicago's top toques. Items on sale here include organic produce, poultry, meats, grains, flours and herbs, organic breads, vinegars, cheeses, mustards, honey and flowers.

What's new: This year the market expands to the south end of Lincoln Park (near North Ave and Clark St), with 20 to 30 vendors setting up shop. Two new programs also debut this season. One of them, a joint effort with Lincoln Park Zoo's Farm in the Zoo, teaches hands-on sustainable agriculture to kids while parents shop the market. The other, developed in partnership with the city of Chicago, adds a full-time staffer charged with recruiting new farmers to increase the diversity of the vendors.

Don't-miss vendors: Kinnikinnick Farm's Italian greens, asparagus and beets are used by

GREEN THINKERS

JIM SLAMA
ORGANIC ACTIVIST



Jim Slama didn't coin the phrase "Think globally, act locally," but he's certainly lived it. In 1988, he launched *Conscious Choice*, a monthly magazine covering environmental issues and natural foods, nutrition and alternative health care. He also developed the Local Organic Initiative, an advocacy project supporting local organic farmers and making their produce available to Chicago restaurants and low-income neighborhoods; and, most recently, FamilyFarmed.org, a website, labeling project and annual expo that connects regional farmers with consumers and commercial buyers. The last two projects fall under the aegis of Sustain, the River North-based nonprofit Slama founded ten years ago to promote healthy environmental policies.

Slama encourages family-owned farms and food manufacturers to place a FamilyFarmed.org label on their product, directing consumers to the website, which profiles producers and tells where to find their produce. In return, farmers are asked to track and report local sales increases resulting from their participation in the program.

"We still need to be vigilant, but the environment has changed dramatically," says Slama of the government's growing support of organic farms. "It's a far cry from where organic was." —Margaret Littman

almost every chef who shops the market. **Growing Home's** lettuces, garlic, cavolo nero (an Italian braising green) and fingerlings are used by Avec, Green Zebra, Lula Café, Wishbone and Bistro Campagne. **King's Fisher Farms** is known for its gooseberries and chicories, which are used at Blackbird. **Sandhill Organics** provides heirloom tomatoes, baby white turnips and baby golden beets for North Pond. **Len Klug Farm's** blueberries, peaches, apricots, raspberries and green grapes are used at HotChocolate. **Homegrown Wisconsin's** wild arugula and ramps (wild leeks) are used at Prairie Grass Café.

If you're hungry: A cornucopia of items, like wood-burning-oven pizzas, burgers, panini and crepes (both breakfast and dessert), make the chow here a cut above the usual fare dished out at street markets.

Evanston Farmers' Market

www.cityofevanston.org/enjoy/market.shtml

Where: At University Place and Oak Avenue; free parking next door in the Maple Avenue parking garage

When: Saturdays, beginning May 21; 7:30am–1pm

The lowdown: This long-standing market, celebrating its 30th anniversary this summer, is the first stop for many farmers selling their products in Chicago. You'll find a wide variety of top-notch vendors here.

What's new: The traffic flow. Market coordinator Jean Speyer-Scruggs estimates that at least 3,000 people visit the market on any given Saturday; Kinnikinnick Farms' David Cleverdon thinks that number might be higher.

"The Saturday markets have historically been three-stage," Cleverdon says. "Early marketgoers, from the time we open to about

8:30am, seem to be weekend chefs who love the ingredients and want to get there early to get the best stuff. After that, you get the more relaxed customers who like to shop and visit. They're the backbone of the market. Now we're packed into the afternoon. It's incredible, and it includes a lot of younger people."

Don't-miss vendors: **Henry's Farm** offers more than 450 varieties of organic fruits and vegetables, many of which are served at Spiaggia, Prairie Grass Cafe and Bistro Campagne.



J.W. Morlock & Girls Farm's Michigan-grown fruits and vegetables are on display here and at Blackbird, which uses the farm's strawberries, peaches, apples and raspberries. Cuts of **Heartland Meats'** Piedmontese-style beef can be found on menus at Wishbone, Rodan and Ina's Restaurant. **River Valley Ranch's** Eric Rose and Jennifer Dean offer portabella salsa and pasta sauce, pickled mushrooms and spinach-artichoke dip, some of which you'll find on the menu at Ben Pao and Frontera Grill.

If you're hungry: Weekly bake sales, featuring cakes, pies, brownies and more, raise money for various nonprofit organizations.

Ina's Farmers' Market

www.breakfastqueen.com

Where: Ina's Restaurant parking lot, 1235 W Randolph St between Elizabeth St and Willard Ct

When: Wednesdays, beginning May 18; 4–7pm

The lowdown: This entrepreneurial venture was started by Ina Pinkney, whose restaurant's parking lot will hold the renamed Randolph Street Market this year. It looked like this evening market had sold its last zucchini after infighting threatened to close it down last year, but it's back from the brink, and this time it's all about making life easy for the farmers, Pinkney says. "I want to support the community here," she says, "and make this as profitable and comfortable for the farmers as is possible."

What's new: As far we know, this is Chicago's only restaurant-sponsored farmers' market, and its after-work hours promise to draw shoppers who can't spare the time for farmers' markets on weekends. You'll likely see new vendors each time you visit, since they aren't committed to weekly appearances.

Don't-miss vendors: **Seedlings'** berries, apples, peaches and dried fruit, grown by Peter Klein, will be on the table at just about any of the restaurants listed above and below. **Grazer's Gourmet's** "cowboy" coffee, gourmet granola and caramel corn are munchies worth the trip. **Hillary's Cookies** offers natural and organic cookies. **Rolling Goose Farms'** fresh, all-natural, free-range chicken and duck eggs (goose eggs in season) feather the nest at Green Zebra, North Pond and Lula Café. **McKenzie's Own** sets out various styles of jams and jellies.

If you're hungry: Ina's full menu will be available at the dog-friendly sidewalk cafe.

Thinking of building a dream house in the country? Don't do it in central Illinois. Terra Brockman is making it her business to save farmland from "these de facto suburbs springing up without zoning or planning," as she puts it. She's founded Land Connection, an organization with a simple mission: Buy farmland with money raised via grants, fund-raisers and donations; educate those interested in the intricacies of being a farmer; and give new farmers the purchased land so they can turn it into organic soil and grow products to earn a living.

Most of the project is being done around the Mackinaw River Valley, where Brockman's siblings have split up their parents' land and turned it into organic farms. (Her brother Henry is one of the most popular organic food growers in the Midwest.) She's adapted a Farm Beginnings™ class, and created a program where wanna-be farmers attend 10 weeks of classes and then are paired up with mentor farmers for hands-on learning. Graduates have gone on to raise vegetables, sheep and steers on allocated Land Connection farms.

As one of the loudest voices advocating sustainable organic farming, Brockman's building a different kind of dream house, one farm at a time. For more information, visit www.thelandconnection.org. —HS



TERRA BROCKMAN
THE LAND CONNECTION

GREEN THINKERS