

Grant County first to adopt local foods plan

The Grant County Job Development Authority (JDA) adopted a countywide local foods initiative at its November meeting to promote the production and marketing of local foods. "Growing Grant County," the local foods initiative, includes six points which JDA Director Luann Dart will pursue with local partners, including the Grant County Extension Service and communities within Grant County.

"We see this as a good opportunity for local economic development within Grant County," Dart said. "The Grant County JDA board has been extremely forward-thinking in adopting this type of initiative as one more avenue of economic development within the county."

Included is the development of community gardens in three communities in Grant County. Groundwork is already being laid, with plans for planting this spring.

The Grant County JDA is a 13-member board which promotes economic development throughout Grant County, which includes the communities of Carson, Elgin and New Leipzig.

The six-point initiative includes:

1. Community gardens

Community gardens will be planted in New Leipzig, Elgin and Carson at approved sites and will be maintained by community volunteers, both children and adults. This will be a partnership between the Grant County JDA and the Grant County Extension Service, along with other entities.

Educational programs will be presented throughout the growing season to children; during the fall harvest, recipes and preparation lessons will be presented to adults.

Signs will be located at each site to promote the Growing Grant County

initiative.

Food will be distributed to garden participants who will donate planting, watering and weeding labor.

Bylaws will be established for operation of the community gardens. Additionally, food will be donated to each community food pantry.

2. FFA projects

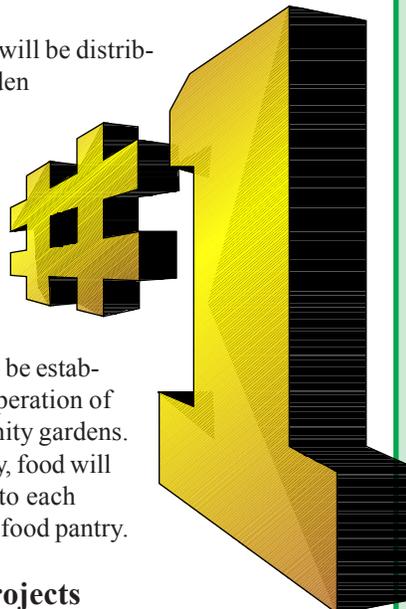
Grant County FFA students will be encouraged to launch individual projects associated with the local foods initiative, such as an onion test plot or horticultural plots.

3. Growing Grant County marketing initiative

Institutions, grocery stores, restaurants and schools will be approached regarding the establishment of local markets for locally grown produce. A list of markets will be developed, which will include the types of commodities the markets are interested in purchasing. Upon establishment of local markets, including farmers' markets, growers will be encouraged to begin producing local fruits and vegetables for these markets.

4. Plant a plot

Grant County residents will be encouraged to plant one container or a small plot of vegetables with the harvest donated to local food pantries.



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Local business busy with sauces and salsas.

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Leopold Center introduces handy new tool for calculating market potential.

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What's an Amy Gordon processor?



Amber Landa empties tomatoes into an enormous batch of salsa at Full Service Foods in Hillsboro.

Identifying gaps in the local foods system

BY SUE B. BALCOM

If you are looking for an Amy Gordon processor, stop now. You won't find it on the Internet, or even the yellow pages.

It's because Amy Gordon is not really a process, or a piece of equipment; but rather a real-live person, living in the small town of Hillsboro happily producing condiments.

Gordon said she has been there for 20 years, in a metal building tacked to the end of a quiet Main Street, where the unobtrusive building fits right in. There's really no telling what's going on behind the "Full Service Foods" sign out front.

Save for the smell.

The minute you walk into the door, you can't mistake the tell-tale scent of spices and barbecue sauces being brewed in 100-gallon batches.

What began as the family-owned Mexican Village restaurants eventually evolved into a processing enterprise in Hillsboro, a community of a little more than 1,500 people.

Gordon said the plant produces product for about 30 companies, 10 to 12 of them are Pride of Dakota companies. Sixty to 70 percent of her business comes from Minnesota.

Current condiment production includes salsas, barbecue sauces, mustards and shakers of spice. The company produces 50 to 60 barbecue sauces and 40 salsas, employing 12-15 people working four 10-hour shifts a week.

The bad news is – at this time, it's very difficult for Gordon to make use of local products.

Sauces are mostly tomato-based, and of course, the canned tomatoes come from out of state. Other ingredients like onions and peppers are canned or frozen because Gordon's plant is not

set up to handle washing, peeling and dicing fresh vegetables.

"And, fresh fluctuates – frozen doesn't," she said.

Use of local foods also presents issues with seasonality and inexperienced growers who don't know how to handle or package produce for potential processing markets.

While there are a few companies in the state that package locally-grown fruits and vegetables into washed and cut fresh produce, Gordon thought the state's local food initiative would greatly benefit from test kitchens, commercial kitchens, education and marketing.

There may be opportunities for other types of processing plants in the state.

Gordon has turned away many requests for pickled products because she is not set up to handle that type of process. The plant in Hillsboro also does not process any products using meat.

Gordon said there's a waiting list for producers who would like to have her do their processing, "but I'm being pretty picky, because I can be," she said.

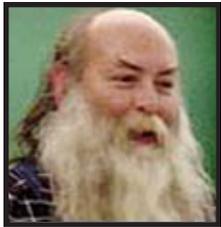
As far as startup costs for a processing plant, Gordon said plan for \$1 million.



Tanya Nelson fills the gallon jugs with hot fresh salsa.



Local Foods Summit speakers provide educational food for thought



Waldrop

Several knowledgeable local foods speakers will be the main course on the menu for the first Local Foods Summit planned in conjunction with the 5th Annual North Dakota Farmers Market and Growers Conference on Tuesday, Jan. 13 in Bismarck.

Local foods enthusiasts should plan on attending the summit Tuesday, and Marketplace for Entrepreneurs on Wednesday, Jan. 14, also at the Bismarck Civic Center. Both events are free and open to the public.

Summit registration begins at 8:30 a.m. Tuesday, with Pat Garrity, Yankton, S.D., kicking off the event with his keynote at 9 a.m.

Garrity currently works with the Iowa State University Leopold Center developing regional local food systems in Iowa. He also works with the South Dakota Specialty Producers Association to establish a South Dakota “Buy Fresh Buy Local” chapter.

Garrity is an undergraduate in horticulture from South Dakota State University, and has owned a fruit orchard in southeast South Dakota for more than 20 years. He worked three years for Floyd Boulevard Local Foods Market in Sioux City, Iowa, and several years for Gurney Seed and Nursery.

Topics to be presented by Garrity include regional local food concepts,

consumer education programs and director marketing as well as grower cooperative efforts. He has both successful and not-so-successful efforts to share.

Second keynote of the morning is Bob Waldrop, a native fourth generation Oklahoman who was born and raised on a farm in southwest Oklahoma. His family raised wheat, cotton, hay, and cattle.

Waldrop is the president and general manager of the Oklahoma Food Cooperative, the director of music at Epiphany Catholic Church, and the founder of the Oscar Romero Catholic Worker community. He is one of the founders of the Oklahoma Sustainability Network, and served on the organization’s first board of directors.

He lives on a 1/7th acre lot near downtown Oklahoma City, and grows more than 100 different varieties of useful or edible plants on his former lawns.

Waldrop received a Permaculture Design Certificate from Barking Frogs Permaculture in Florida, and is an assistant instructor with the organization’s online Permaculture Design Course.

Waldrop will speak about his efforts with the Oklahoma Food Cooperative and the “permaculture” of his yard.

In the afternoon, husband and wife team, Chuck Waibel and Carol Ford, Milan, Minn., will be presenting two sessions on their community supported agriculture business called Garden Goddess Produce.

Chuck Waibel and Carol Ford are in their fourth season of their winter CSA in west central Minnesota. They provide members with weekly deliveries of fresh produce and storage crops from October to April.

With the help of a SARE research grant they tested crop varieties and growing methods last winter, and are currently writing a book about their experiences developing and operating their unique business.

Their sessions will provide valuable information about how Waibel designed a small greenhouse that requires only \$50 to \$75 of propane for heat during the season. Ford will share details about her winter soil mixes, pest control and crop varieties.

Also set to present are Holly Mawby from the MSU-Bottineau Entrepreneurial Center for Horticulture, Steve Sellent from the LSS Great Plains Food Bank, and Dr. Gerald Combs from the Grand Forks Human Nutrition Research Center.

Combs was named Center Director, USDA Grand Forks Human Nutrition Research Center, in January, 2002. He came to Grand Forks from Ithaca, New York, where he was a Professor of Nutrition in the Division of Nutritional Sciences at Cornell University, having been on that faculty since 1975. At Cornell, Dr. Combs served as the Director of Graduate Studies for the Field of Nutrition of the Graduate School and as a coordinator of the Food Systems for Improved Health Program in the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences.

A free lunch will be served at noon and the NDFMGA business meeting begins at 4 p.m. Everyone is invited to attend the Marketplace reception at 6 p.m.

For more information or to pre-register for the Local Foods Summit, call Stephanie Sinner at the North Dakota Department of Agriculture at 701-239-7211.

Permaculture

As in, “agriculture that is permanent, that is sustainable”.

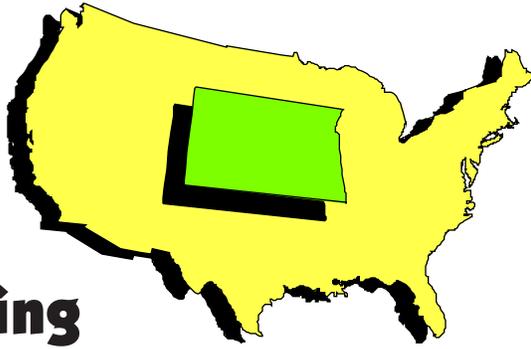
Permaculture is based on applying patterns to gardening.



Ford



Waibel



Green and Growing grants available for school gardens

It's time to start planning your school garden project

Defining 'local'

Using information from a Grow Montana report, the ND Department of Agriculture has decided to define local foods with this statement until our initiative progresses to the point where a new definition could be written.

Local foods in North Dakota can include agricultural products grown, processed or manufactured anywhere in the state with the focus on middle sized farmers and processors such as Pride of Dakota companies, who have the capacity and infrastructure to access public institution markets in the near future.

Regional food is defined as agricultural products grown, processed or manufactured in the nearby states of Idaho, Washington, Oregon, Wyoming, Montana and South Dakota.

Are you still Going Local?

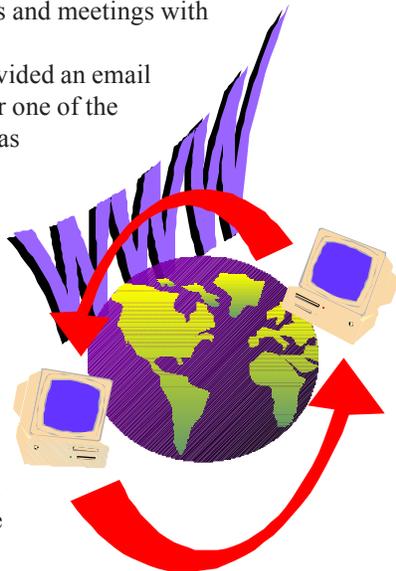
You can find the "Going Local North Dakota" network at <http://goinglocalnd.ning.com/>

It was built by Sue B. Balcom at the ND Dept of Agriculture and could be used to keep in touch, cheer each other on, share ideas, photos and meetings with each other.

Every person that provided an email address while registering for one of the four regional meetings, or has indicated interest in local foods will be invited to join. It would be awesome if everyone set up a profile and became a member of this network.

There's no obligation and your name and email address will not be sent out to other sites or advertisers. You will need to complete a form and set up a user name and password to access the site. If you have questions about how this works, call Sue at 328-4763 or email suebalcom@nd.gov.

Let's keep the momentum going...



The North Dakota Department of Agriculture has grant funds available to begin a school garden and/or greenhouse project through the Green and Growing Initiative. Grants from \$500 to \$1,000 will be available on a competitive basis. An allocated \$5,000 will be available for this program in 2009. A school previously awarded a school garden grant from the Green and Growing Coalition will not be eligible two years in a row.

The Green and Growing Coalition consists of the following partners: The ND Department of Public Instruction, ND Department of Agriculture, ND Department of Health, ND Career and Technical Education, ND Moving More, Eating Smarter Communities Program and NDSU Extension Service. The collaborative will provide technical assistance and resources to schools and communities participating in this initiative.

Some of the goals that we hope schools will adopt include:

- √ educating students on the inter-connectedness of people, plants and the planet;
- √ providing service learning opportunities;
- √ helping students gain better nutritional habits;
- √ providing marketing opportunities for students;
- √ introducing and/or integrating food safety into the curriculum;
- √ helping students grow a portion of the food they eat at school or at home; and
- √ increasing community engagement.

Deadline: Grant applications must be received by January 15, 2009.

A decision on the grant requests are expected to be made by February 1.

For additional information, or to request an application, please contact Sue Balcom at North Dakota Dept. of Agriculture, suebalcom@nd.gov, or 701-328-4763.

Grant County JDA to pursue six elements of local foods

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5. Specialty crops

Information will be shared with farmers regarding producing and marketing specialty crops which are feasible in this area.

6. Community-supported agriculture

Information about community-supported agriculture will be shared and assistance will be offered to those interested in launching a CSA.

Localmotion◆◆◆

Interest in eating more foods grown locally has prompted some community leaders to move to the next step in local foods initiatives in their area.

Residents of Bowdon, Dickinson and Hazen will be hosting meetings in December to generate interest and identify leaders in local initiatives.

Anyone interested in eating more local foods for their health or becoming a producer or processor are invited to attend. Producers and small family farmers are invited to be a part of the supply side of the equation.

Food service directors, city council members, county commissioners and public school teachers and superintendents would also benefit from these meetings.

“Going Local North Dakota,” sponsored by the North Dakota Department of Agriculture, was launched in October with four regional meetings. Information from those meetings can be found at www.agdepartment.com under hot topics.

Interested people can join the networking site for local foods enthusiasts at <http://goinglocalnd.ning.com/> to keep in touch.

Central Counties plan Local Foods meeting Dec. 8

A local foods dinner will serve as an introduction to the topic for a meeting at 6 p.m. Monday, Dec. 8 to discuss furthering the local foods movement in central North Dakota.

Anyone interested in learning more about the use and production of fruits, vegetables, processing and benefits of eating more foods grown in the state is invited to attend.

Local foods supper will be served at 6 p.m. at the Bowdon Community Center, 121 Warrington Ave., in Bowdon. The meeting is expected to last until 9 p.m.

North Dakota Department of Agriculture staff will be hosting the meeting and support targeting key players and the next steps in a local foods initiative in that area.

For more information, call Sue Balcom at 701-328-4763 or e-mail suebalcom@nd.gov.

Dickinson poised to go local

Jumping on board the local foods movement, Kelly Jilek proposed a local foods meeting in her area after attending the first regional meeting held in Mandan in October.

North Dakota Department of Agriculture will be hosting the meeting from 6 to 9 p.m. Wednesday, Dec. 17 in the Ag Auditorium room 104 at DSU, 291 Campus Drive, Dickinson, ND 58601.

Anyone interested in becoming a part of a more economically vibrant and healthy state is invited to attend.

Information about the benefits of local food will be presented. Then, breakout sessions divvying up the survey work and identifying leaders will be held.

Frank Kutka, Sustainable Agriculture Specialist and Dakota SARE Coordinator for the Dickinson Research Extension Center will also have information about young farmers and ranchers grants available.

Hazen meeting set

Duke Rosendahl has partnered with the North Dakota Department of Agriculture to jumpstart local foods in Hazen with a meeting set from 6 to 9 p.m. Monday, Dec. 22.

The meeting is open to anyone interested in local foods and will be held at the Hazen City Hall.

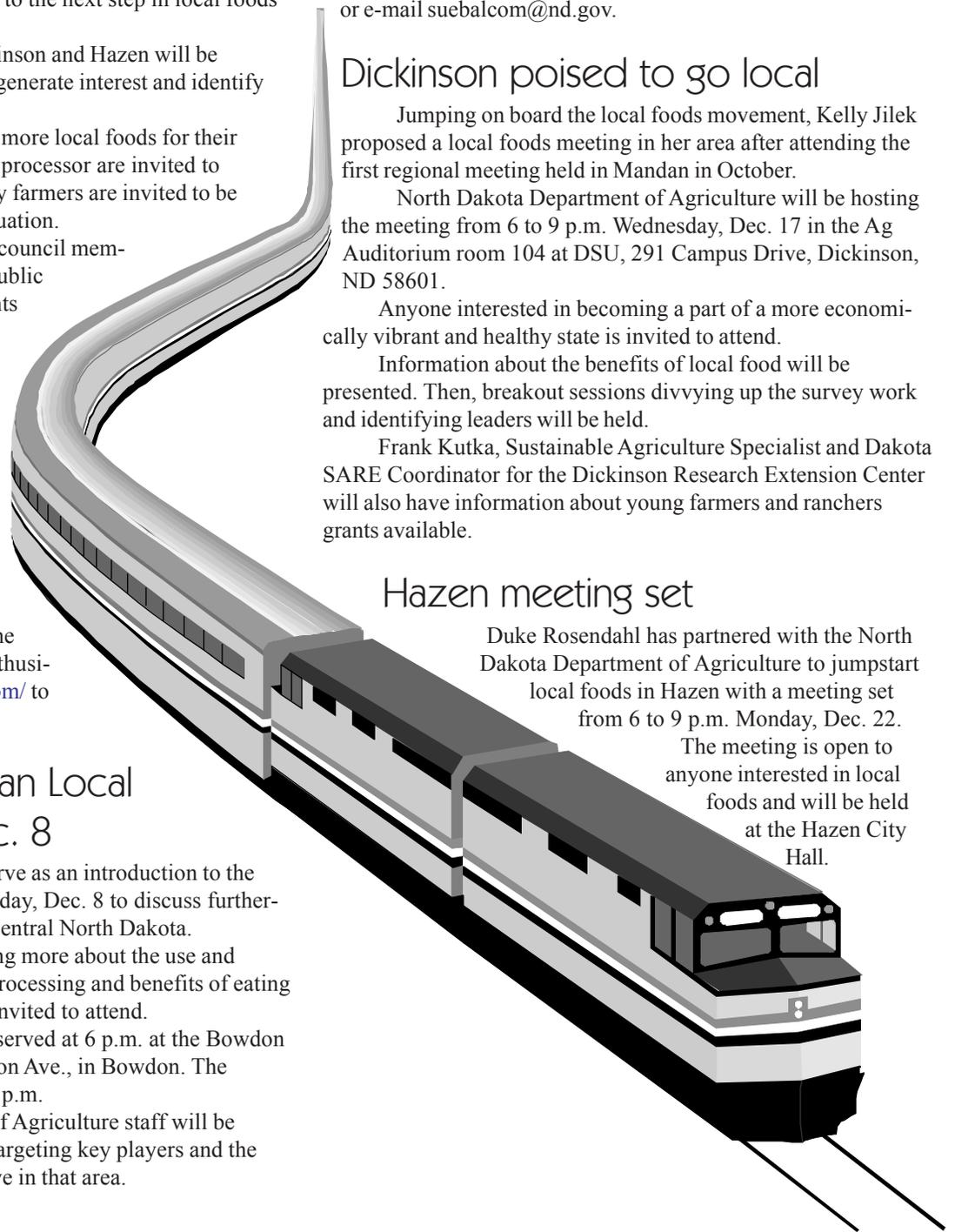
Local foods wellness event planned in Grand Forks

On the front edge of using local foods in school lunch programs, Julie Tunseth, director of the child nutrition program and wellness coach for Grand Forks Public Schools, has chosen a local foods theme for this year's school wellness fair.

The event has been set from 3 to 5 p.m. Tuesday, Feb. 3, at the Alerus Center in Grand Forks.

There are about 17 food vendors featuring national brands, and wellness booths from NDSU, UND Wellness, school nurses, physical education teachers, etc.

It is open to the school community to give input on foods served at school and to also learn new things about wellness, Tunseth said.



Market calculator available

A useful tool for estimating potential demand for 204 food items, developed by the Leopold Center, has been recently added to the Iowa State web site. Demand for fruits, vegetables, dairy, meat and grains can be easily calculated using consumption figures provided by data collected the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Economic Research Service (ERS).

This link: <http://www.ctre.iastate.edu/marketsize/Default.aspx> will take you to the U.S. Food Market Estimator with additional links to the tutorial and other useful information for producers.

This new tool includes provides information by county in all the states, including North Dakota.

Calculations can be made by individual product, or groups of products, at key stages of the food supply chain. Results can also be adjusted by market share or several different units of measures. The information available from the data can be displayed in servings, pounds produced, truckloads transported, even cubic feet of warehouse space needed to store a particular product.

For instance....

If everyone in the state of North Dakota ate fresh spinach at the recommended rate of slightly more than 15 servings a year, (come on that's about once a month,) the potential servings consumed statewide would be 9,724,763. In an ideal world, residents in Morton County alone would consume 394,120 servings of spinach annually.

According to the calculator's estimates, that's a whopping 500,345 pounds of potential spinach that could be marketed in the state. Of course, people would need to be convinced to eat spinach on a regular basis and then someone would need to grow and distribute the product.

On the more sensible side, using pounds of potatoes, North Dakotans consume 14,070,814 pounds annually. That shows potential for selling a whole lot of potatoes locally.

According to the web site "The U.S. Food Market Estimator uses the USDA-ERS Food Availability Data System, an annual estimate of the amounts of 204 food items available at a per capita rate for human consumption in the United States. This tool multiplies the national per capita rate by the county 2007 Population Estimate (from the U.S. Census) to determine the potential market for each food product at the county level.

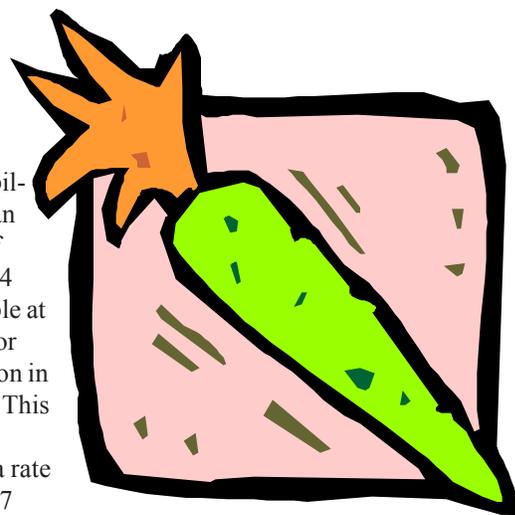
For each of the 204 food products in the Food Availability Data System, the ERS provides pertinent information for farm production (such as farm weight, carcass weight, dairy weight, etc.), as well as amounts received by retailers and sold by retailers. The system accounts for amounts lost to spoilage, trimming, and other factors at key points in the supply chain."

In reality, the estimates are not based on actual consumption, so work must continue to educate people to eat more healthy locally produced food.

More information and documentation about the Food Availability Data System:

<http://www.usda.gov/Data/FoodConsumption/FoodAvailFaqs.htm>

<http://www.ers.usda.gov/Data/FoodConsumption/FoodAvailDoc.htm>



Calendar of upcoming events

DECEMBER 8 Local Foods meeting in Bowdon, 6 to 9 p.m. with local foods supper.

DECEMBER 17 Local Foods meeting in Dickinson at Dickinson State University, 6 to 9 p.m.

DECEMBER 22 Local Foods meeting at Hazen City Hall, Hazen, 6 to 9 p.m.

JANUARY 13 Local Foods summit held in conjunction with NDFMGA annual meeting at the Civic Center, Bismarck.

Is your community planning a local foods meeting or event?

Send your information to suebalcom@nd.gov or go to <http://goinglocalnd.ning.com/> and add your information to the calendar of events.

Mark your calendars

Turning your family recipe into a business

Entrepreneurs are invited to attend a National Program to Help Food Business Entrepreneurs seminar hosted by the South Dakota Department of Agriculture on two dates in March.

The University of Nebraska Food Processing Center's nationally recognized "From Recipe to Reality" seminar will be held in Spearfish, S.D., on March 17 and Brookings, S.D., March 19.

The seminar is the first phase of the Food Entrepreneur Assistance Program. This program, which has existed since 1989, is the only program in the nation that provides complete assistance to individuals wanting to start a food business.

Have you ever asked yourself, "How do I start a food company? How do I start selling my family recipe for salsa, BBQ sauce, jelly.....to stores?" "How do I add value to the commodity I am growing/raising on my farm/ranch?" "How do I get my restaurant menu item ready to wholesale to grocery stores?" "Can I sell products I am currently selling at the local farmers market to stores?" "Do entrepreneurs ask you any or all of these types of questions?"

If you answered yes to any of the questions, then the "From Recipe to Reality" seminar is the perfect start before you invest any money in your business.

The Food Entrepreneur Assistance Program was designed specifically to assist food manufacturing entrepreneurs. It begins

with a one-day "From Recipe to Reality" seminar that provides entrepreneurs with an understanding of the key factors that need to be considered when starting a food manufacturing business.

Topics include market research, product development, packaging, labeling, pricing, product introduction, promotional materials, food safety, and legal and business structure issues. In one day entrepreneurs will gain valuable insight on the basics of starting a food business that could take them months or even years to research on their own. Following the seminar, participants may choose to enter the "From Product to Profit" phase of the program. During this phase entrepreneurs will receive comprehensive, individualized and confidential assistance from food scientists and business consultants with the development of their own business venture.

We hope you will encourage potential entrepreneurs to contact Alison Kiesz for a complete information packet.

Alison Kiesz

South Dakota Department of Agriculture

420 South Roosevelt Avenue

Aberdeen, SD 57401

605-626-3272

Email: Alison.kiesz@state.sd.us

Space is limited, so early registration is encouraged.



Merry Christmas to all, and to all a "good night."

Local light

It's all about the food...

By SUE B. BALCOM

My daughter called me one day and said something like this, "what's up with the way we were raised? All I think about is food."

I just laughed. The only answer I could think of was that was the way I was raised, my mom and dad were raised, and so it goes back for many generations.

Germans from Russia speak the language of love with food - lots of it.

My husband teases me because we no sooner get into the car after eating at a restaurant when I say, "what should we have for breakfast?"

He also placed a new rule on the kitchen. "No more baking cookies until the last batch has been eaten."

It's not such a bad rule, we both are of the age where weight and healthy eating has become increasingly important. But, the rule at my house remains, "ice cream is one of the basic four food groups," and "eat dessert first." That way you will have room for it.

My grandpa Meidinger once said to me, in English, "eat the things you like now, as you get older, they begin to take them away from you." This from a man who still cracked his Christmas walnuts with his own teeth.

Yes, from the time I was old enough to remember, my Saturdays were spent in the kitchen with my mother and her friend, Gladys, observing them baking kuchen together.

You can learn a lot from listening to women behind aprons in the kitchen with the smell of warm love coming from the oven.

When I was in high school, after the thrill of baby sitting for 25 cents an hour wore off, I took a job at the local cafe.

From that vantage point, I learned how to cook things like basted breakfast eggs and the best darn pot roast you ever ordered off a menu.

LaVonne, the cafe owner, could take Monday's lunch special and turn it into Tuesday's soup of the day with a flash of silver spoon. Nothing went to waste at the small-town restaurant, most frequently occupied only on special occasions and when the custom harvest crews came to town.

Between those two women in my life, I learned how to cook with imagination and boldness.

In spite of being raised on flour-based foods like knephla and dumplings, my taste buds craved things like cream puffs, asparagus and split pea soup. No doubt images from reading books, my second love.

So I began to experiment in the kitchen.

Easter dinners from the glossy pages of Woman's Day magazine. Aspic and baked ham with pineapple and brown sugar glaze grouted into inch-wide scores along the ham's back side. Asparagus with lemon butter.

Layered cakes with butter creme frosting. The perfect apple pie, which I sold to my mom's boss, Oscar, while in high

school in the 1970s for \$2.50 each.

While in college, I was the "cook" of the dorm and then of our small apartment in Wahpeton.

My friends Karen and John still ask me to make deep-dish pizza for them every time I make a visit to the northeast corner of the state to see them.

Then, it was prune kuchen for another boss after college. I worked for the Grant County Journal in Ephrada, Wash. Apricots grew abundant on his trees and he paid me to bake fruit kuchen for him.

After I had my two children, I became the neighborhood cookie monster. When we moved from a small townhouse in north Bismarck to Mandan, my friend Mary said "I'm going to miss your cookies most of all..."

I'm still baking, albeit not quite to frequently. And, I have begun a quest to collect my families old recipes and preserve them for the next generation.

Since Christmas is right around the corner, I will share with you a recipe from my mom's mother, my Grandma Meidinger.

It can be made with local honey, local flour, local sugar and local eggs. The anise will have to be a "watershed" food. That's a new term I came across for the foods that can never be sourced locally because we just can't grow some stuff here. So, rather than give up coffee, we can acquire it through a food watershed instead.

Enjoy this simple honey cookie by frosting with powdered sugar frosting and adding some Christmas-colored sprinkles.

Honey Cookies

- 1 cup sugar
- 1 cup warm honey
- 2 teaspoons soda
- 2 teaspoons baking powder
- 2 teaspoon liquid anise
- 3 eggs
- 1 cup flour

Mix ingredients and refrigerate overnight. In the morning add enough flour to make a stiff dough. You may need to allow the batter to come to room temperature first.

Bake a sample cookie in preheated 350-degree oven. If the cookie spreads too much, you need more flour.

Cool and dip in powdered sugar or frost with powdered sugar frosting.

My grandmother made these cookies every Christmas I can remember, as well as popcorn balls with Jell-O for color. She also served seasonal citrus fruit and mixed nuts in the shell.

Here's wishing you a Merry Christmas.



Sue B. Balcom