

## Editorial: 'Minnesota Cooks' promotes local food

The eat-local movement is a hit at the State Fair.

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On Tuesday, the tastiest morsels at the State Fair weren't in the Food Building. They were in Carousel Park at the foot of the grandstand ramp, near a large canopy labeled "Minnesota Cooks."

Beneath it, chefs from top Twin Cities restaurants labored before eager fairgoers and proud Minnesota farmers, who supplied the ingredients they prepared. Tasters -- including Olympic runner Carrie Tollefson, DFL Senate candidate Al Franken and our own Lori Sturdevant -- raved at the results.

Unfortunately, that's all for Minnesota Cooks at the fair this year. It's a one-day event. But with five successful years to its credit, the collaboration among the Minnesota Farmers Union, Food Alliance Midwest and Renewing the Countryside ought to be only beginning. In promoting the purchase and consumption of Minnesota-grown foodstuffs by Minnesota eaters and eateries, they have a winner.

Take the word of farmer Audrey Arner, whose Moonstone Farm in Montevideo provides grass-fed beef for Bryant Lake Bowl and Barquette in Minneapolis. She says the meat she produces is leaner, tastier and more healthful than its corn-fed counterpart. Her cattle are less prone to disease. Feeding them consumes less energy and is less taxing to the environment, since the animals produce their own fertilizer and improve soil quality in the process.

Marketing the meat in Minnesota keeps both transportation costs and energy consumption down. All that's possible on a 240-acre farm, much smaller than a typical beef operation in western Minnesota.

Helping Minnesota farmers market their products to Minnesota restaurants, grocers and consumers is expanding work for the venerable Minnesota Farmers Union, which made its name lobbying government.

Entrepreneurial activity is, in turn, helping the union grow. People who aren't farmers, but who want to be sure their food choices include locally grown products from family-sized farms, are signing up as MFU members, said membership director Bruce Miller.

Those new members, the chefs who are choosing Minnesota ingredients, and the State Fair crowd that patiently waited for nibbles of made-in-Minnesota cuisine are all part of a national

trend. An eat-local movement is also evidenced in the expansion of farmers' markets throughout the country.

Minnesota Cooks ought to think big -- beyond a single day at the fair -- and help push that trend along.

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