

Cream of the CROPS

Demand increases for locally grown, organic foods



Photo by Jeff Cooper

Days of maze:

Lance Lattin of Lattin Farms walks through the corn maze on his family's farm in Fallon.



Photo by Candice Towell

Fresh produce: An assortment of fruits and vegetables sit on a table at the Hometowne Farmers Market in Sparks.

By Brandi Schlossberg

The fertilizers, pesticides, fossil fuels and waste associated with large-scale agriculture place a heavy burden on the planet to produce huge bounties of meat, grain, fruit and vegetables.

According to experts, the environmental cost of commercial farming one day may negate the nearly surreal abundance of food in American grocery stores.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture's Alternative Farming Systems Information Center points a heavy finger at industrial agriculture, attributing to it a long list of environmental ills, including:



Photo by Lisa J. Tolda

Good eats: Zucchini and other squash are offered at the Community Roots Nursery farmers market in Dayton.

- a decline in soil productivity
- loss of topsoil
- contamination of groundwater
- water scarcity
- pesticide-resistant insects, pathogens and pests
- loss of beneficial species, including pollinators
- loss of wetlands and wildlife habitat
- destruction of rainforests and native vegetation
- elevation of greenhouse gases

An increased awareness of the steep tax on the environment for cheap, mass-produced food has led to a growing demand for local and organic meat and produce. Farmers in Northern Nevada and nationwide are stepping up to meet the needs of concerned consumers.

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"Farmers are reluctant to try anything new unless people are there willing to buy it," said Peggy McKie, program manager for the Organic Certification Program at the Nevada Department of Agriculture. "With the increased demand, things have improved dramatically."

According to McKie, it's entirely possible — with a bit of determination — for Northern Nevada residents to find almost any type of meat or produce, with the exception of stone fruits, grown or raised organically, locally or both.

"For me personally, my order of priority would be locally grown organic produce, then local produce, then organic," McKie said.

Tina Smith of Homegrown Nevada, an organic livestock and produce farm in Smith Valley, said that in the end, it's up to the consumer to choose foods that bode well for the planet.

"Consumers should be supporting local farms with a loud voice of sustainability," Smith said. "As sustainable growers, we're totally dedicated to the land, so we're going to keep the land in the best possible shape — clean and producing and living."

Currently, there are no federal or local certifications for sustainability alone, but in order to receive the "certified organic" stamp, a farm must prove itself sustainable year after year.

"The organic regulations require that farmers enhance the environmental quality of their

farm and their soil; that they do no damage to any of the surrounding water systems," McKie said. "Farmers are held accountable for any environmental damage they do in terms of losing their organic certification."

For access to locally grown organic meat and produce, visit the Great Basin Community Food Co-op (271 Wonder St. in Reno; greatbasinfood.coop) or log on to agr.nv.gov/PLANT_OrgProducers.htm, and follow the link to a listing of producers. 🌱

WHAT'S ON THE MENU

- 1 The food in an average U.S. meal travels approximately 1,500 miles before being consumed. Locally produced food is fresher and helps create a stronger community that's less reliant on fossil fuels. — Steve Rypka, Nevada green-living consultant
- 2 The Great Basin Food Basket program allows residents of Northern Nevada to purchase a "subscription" to one bountiful basket of locally grown, mostly organic produce per week. For more information, call 324-6133 or e-mail greatbasinbasket@yahoo.com
- 3 18: The number of organic farms in Northern Nevada certified by the Nevada Department of Agriculture