

# If it's not local, it's not at Green City Market



Deborah Kraemer with some of her Abbey Brown bath products, including olive oil-based soaps and salts from the Dead Sea. A former teacher for 17 years, she became interested in natural products after her son developed allergies and she later started the business in her Old Irving home.

## STORY AND PHOTOS BY SUZANNE HANNEY

Greens, radishes, onions and asparagus were on sale at the Green Acres booth at the May 19 opening of Chicago's Green City Market in Lincoln Park.

Eggplant would be ready soon from the 155 rotating acre vegetable farm in North Judson, IN. Basil had just taken off the previous day.

But it's not the season yet for corn and tomatoes, said Myron Katz, who was minding the store for the third generation farm owners Beth and Brent Eccles.

"If you see tomatoes, they're not coming from around here," Katz said.

And that's what you would expect sellers to say at the twice-weekly market, which promotes organic food that is local and seasonal and whose mission is to connect local producers with Chicago consumers and chefs.

Support for the small family farm and a healthier society is also part of that mission, which goes hand in hand with the market's "sustainable agriculture" philosophy. This philosophy is one that values small family farms that take care of the land: they don't use pesticides to protect soil and water and preserve the land for future generations.

For example, Beth Eccles' grandfather was originally from Japan, but lived in California before he moved to the Midwest and bought a truck farm that dealt wholesale with Chicago's Chinatown. The couple converted it to organic.

Traderspoint Creamery of Zionsville, IN is another third-generation enterprise for Jane Kunz and her husband, Fritz, who say they are the only organic milk processors in their state. Their cows are not barn-fed, but allowed to roam freely outdoors on the 160-acres, where they graze rotationally on hay or grass.

Crop rotation as an alternative to pesticides is also used at Growing Home, said marketing coordinator Stephanie Knol.

Now in its fourth season, Growing Home is a social enterprise that converted land around a former weather radar station in Marseilles, IL, about 70 miles from Chicago, into an organic farm that will employ up to 17 people this season, Knol said.

Many of the workers were homeless, but Growing Home provided them with transitional jobs with wages of \$5.15 to \$8 an hour. During the three months to a year they participate in the program, they also receive help in developing a career and life plan as well as training in horticulture, marketing and nutrition that could lead to employment in similar areas.

Growing Home was chosen for the second round of the Yale School of Management/Goldman Sachs Foundation annual business plan competition for non-profit social ventures last year, when its sales nearly quadrupled over the previous year. Sales were \$11,500 in 2003 and over \$38,000 last year. The farm received certification as an organic farm from the U.S.



Chefs Maneet Chauhan, left and Nicholas Heineman of Vermilion restaurant, 10 W. Hubbard, prepare a Green Cumin terrine of zucchini, yellow squash, eggplant, onions and red, yellow and green peppers for the 10:30 a.m. demonstration that is a staple of the Wednesday and Saturday markets.

Department of Agriculture, which led to the increased sales, officials said.

Now in season from Growing Home are spinach, lettuce, mesclun, radishes, chives, herbs, mustard greens, kale, and tatsoi, an Asian green similar to bok choy and mustard greens, Knol said. She has marketed their produce to Chicago restaurants such as Lula, Blackbird, Bistro Campagne, North Pond, Green Zebra and Vie. (Chefs' presentations are a regular 10:30 a.m. feature of the Wednesday and Saturday markets.)

While "Know Your Food, Know Your Farmer," is a motto of the market, the same could just as easily be said of other items sold there, from honey to soap.

Similar to Growing Home as a social enterprise is Sweet Beginnings, which provides paying jobs for formerly incarcerated individuals who often have trouble finding jobs in the mainstream market because of state legislation and private company policies.

Spearheaded by the North Lawndale Employment Network (NLEN), Sweet Beginnings produces chemical-free honey from 70 hives it maintains on four acres of the former Sears Roebuck property in the economically depressed West Side neighborhood. Director of business relations Tom Wetzel said their city-made honey is freer from pesticides than Downstate honey, which can be contaminated by agricultural spray.

NLEN bees, on the other hand, feed on local gardens as well as those in nearby Garfield and Douglas Parks, officials said. Eight people worked the program last year for nine months, while three people stayed all year to develop products like soap and beeswax candles. The program now employs five people and could employ 11 at the peak of the season this year, Wetzel said.

Honey will be harvested in mid-July, when it is clear from the clover bees have fed on. Honey harvested in late September will be darker, from the fall aster flowers, Wetzel said. The wax is also correspondingly darker.

Calvin Mitchell, who has been with the program since the beginning, said he likes "being outside with the bees." Mitchell feeds them sugar water and checks their hives every day to see that no mice have invaded and that no new queen has tried to take over.

"My life is different now," Mitchell said. "I've got savings, money in the bank, my own apartment. Life is more easy to me now and I'm working to take care of myself."



Calvin Mitchell with some of the Beeline chemical-free honey, and candles and bath products created with it, produced by Sweet Beginnings, a jobs program of the North Lawndale Employment Network.



Stephanie Knol, left and Eduardo Casarez of Growing Home with some of the greens -- spinach, lettuce, radishes, mustard greens and kale -- of the early growing season.

Located on Clark Street north of LaSalle Drive on the pathway to 1750 N. Clark St., the market is open from 7 a.m. to 1:30 p.m. Wednesdays and Saturdays. It opened May 19 and continues through October 29. Discounted parking is available at \$3 for the first hour with validation in the parking lot off Stockton Drive. There is also a 43rd ward trolley through Lincoln Park and along Michigan Avenue that stops in front of the market every 20 minutes. More information can be obtained by calling (847) 835-2240 and from its Web site, [chicagogreencity-market.org](http://chicagogreencity-market.org).



Bushel baskets hold icicle radishes in the foreground, as well as red radishes and onions from Green Acres farm in North Judson, IN.