

# By The Book

## Local Foods Movement Here to Stay; Neb. College Offering Urban Farming Classes

BY RITA BRHEL  
P&D Correspondent

Fads come and go, but it appears that the local foods movement is one trend that is here to stay and grow. “People enjoy getting to meet the ones that are producing their food,” said Alice Henneman, University of Nebraska Extension educator at Lincoln, Neb., in an UNL press release. “They get to ask questions about the food that you could not ask someone who works at a grocery store.”

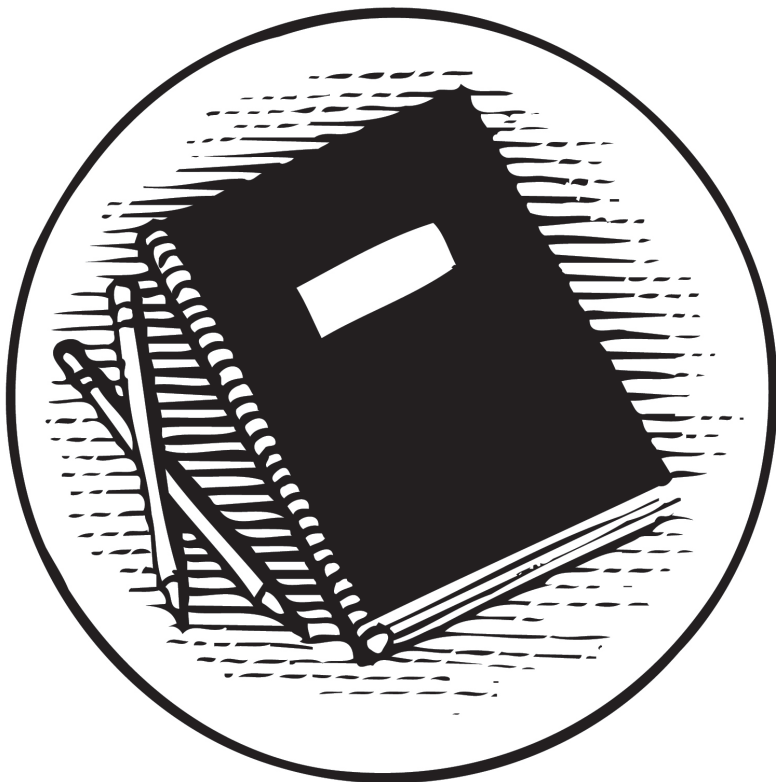
The local foods movement in the United States can be traced back to 1981 when proposals to the Society for Nutrition Education’s guidelines encouraged the development of “sustainable diets” through local foods production to slow the loss of farmland to urban development.

At the time, these resolutions were unsuccessful due to strong criticism from the food industry. Local foods remained largely an alternative lifestyle choice until about 2000 when scientific evidence of man-induced climate change, the renewable fuels standard, increased interest in conservation and other aspects of the green movement were on the rise. Suddenly, “sustainable diets” was in vogue and the organic foods industry took off.

Then, in 2008, the U.S. Farm Bill was revised to include fresh fruits and vegetables in nutrition programs for low-income seniors and school children, with the addition that produce could be purchased from local farmers markets.

Today, the U.S. Department of Agriculture estimates that more than 1 million people visit a farmers market weekly, and there are approximately 8,000 farmers markets held across the United States.

While Nebraska has a strong history of traditional, conventionally raised crops and livestock and there has been division between local foods and conventional agriculture supporters through the years, the local foods movement has been beneficial in reintroducing consumers to agriculture in a positive way.



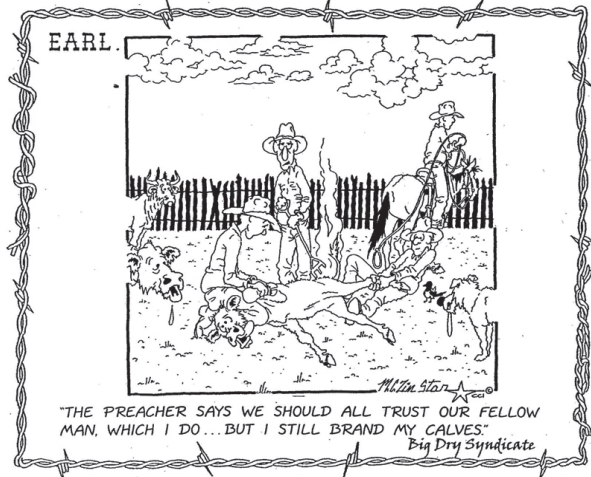
In modern society, it has been easy for consumers to lose touch with how their food is grown, and therefore to develop misunderstandings about agricultural production. The local foods movement – through farmers markets, u-pick farms, food-subscription farms, farm-fresh eggs and other farmer-direct sales – gives an opportunity for consumers to develop relationships with farmers. These farmer-consumer relationships have been a first step in consumers caring about agriculture.

Besides the growing number of farmers markets around the state, including in Yankton, another sign that the local foods movement is here to stay in Nebraska is the inclusion of “urban farming” classes at the college level. The Curtis, Neb.-based Nebraska Technical

Agriculture College (NCTA), an affiliate of UNL, has announced that it will begin offering organic food production and small-scale poultry production classes this fall in Omaha, Neb., at the Omaha Home for Boys’ Cooper Memorial Farm.

While the classes provide an opportunity to develop employment and entrepreneurial skills, according to Connie Fisk, NCTA’s Urban Agriculture Program coordinator, they are also a reflection of the integration of local foods into the mainstream culture.

In support of continued growth in urban farming, Fisk said the course material will be offered to 4-H members and the public through non-credit workshops and online classes.



### USDA Announces Available Funds For Farm Bill Broadband Loan Program

WASHINGTON — Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack today announced the availability of loans to build broadband in rural areas, along with changes to the program required by the 2014 Farm Bill.

“USDA is committed to providing broadband to rural areas,” Vilsack said. “Broadband is as vital as electricity was 80 years ago. Since 2009, USDA investments have delivered broadband service to 1.5 million households, businesses, schools, libraries and community facilities. But our work is not done. With program improvements and available funding made possible by the Farm Bill, we can continue our work to make broadband more accessible to those who live and work in rural areas.”

In a rule published on page 45397 of the July 30 Federal Register, USDA is establishing two funding cycles to review and prioritize applications for the Rural Broadband Access Loan and Loan Guarantee program. USDA also is setting a minimum level of acceptable broadband service at 4 megabits downstream and 1 megabit upstream. USDA urges applicants to design systems that allow for 25 megabits downstream and 3 megabits upstream to meet future needs. USDA is accepting comments on these changes through September 28.

To be eligible for funding, an applicant must serve an area where at least 15 percent of the households are unserved. Applications with the most unserved households will be processed first.

The maximum loan amount under today’s announcement is \$20 million. Applications will be accepted through September 30, 2015. For more information, see page 45504 of the July 30 Federal Register.

The 2014 Farm Bill builds on historic economic gains in rural America over the previous five years while achieving meaningful reform and billions of dollars in savings for taxpayers. USDA has made significant progress to implement each provision of this critical legislation, including providing disaster relief to farmers and ranchers; strengthening risk management tools; expanding access to rural credit; funding critical research; establishing innovative public-private conservation partnerships; developing new markets for rural-made products; and investing in infrastructure, housing and community facilities to help improve the quality of life in rural areas.

### Future Unsure For Troubled

#### New Mexico Green Chile Production

ALBUQUERQUE, N.M. (AP) — Green chiles have defined New Mexico for generations, gaining fans and fame around the globe.

However, as this year’s harvest begins, labor shortages, shrinking acreage, drought and foreign competition have hurt production in the state.

Farmers and producers say the problems reveal the need for changes in the industry.

To rejuvenate production, investors and inventors are testing machines that would harvest and de-stem the crop.

The delicate chiles are now picked by hand, and problems with bruising and the removal of stems have made it difficult to make the transition to machines.

“The labor force is getting older and not a lot of young people are getting into the business,” said Ed Ogaz, owner of the Anthony, New Mexico-based chile wholesaler Seco Spice Co. “Something needs to happen.”

Ogaz prefers the old ways and believes farmers need more laborers to improve production as acreage dedicated to chile production has fallen to a 43-year low in the state.

Chile has been a staple of New Mexico cuisine for centuries, and the Hatch region has become world famous for its flavorful hot peppers.

Chile is also the state vegetable and the basis of the official state question, “red or green?”

In recent years, researchers at New Mexico State University have been trying to solve the labor issue by developing machines for the harvest.

Elad Etgar, inventor of a chile-harvesting device at an Israeli company, said he will be testing his machine for the next two months. After the harvest, he’ll sit down with farmers to assess its performance.

“So far, everyone supports it but we will have to see,” Etgar told The Associated Press.

Another device by a New Hampshire investor also is being tested.

Ogaz said he is withholding judgment until he sees how the devices harvest green chiles without damaging the signature look.

The stakes are high. In 2014, New Mexico saw a 10 percent decline in acres of chiles harvested. Experts say the state is losing chile acreage to West Texas and Mexico, partly because of the cost and availability of labor.

Despite marketing efforts and the attractiveness of New Mexico chiles to national suppliers, federal numbers show the value of New Mexico red and green chiles was estimated at \$38.7 million, compared to \$49.5 million in 2013.

State officials say the number reflects only the value of agricultural items in the raw commodity state. They point to New Mexico Chile Association numbers that say the full economic impact of chiles, both fresh and processed, was more than \$460 million a year.

## Scouting Fields For Insect Problems Important To Yields

BY CONNIE SIEH GROOP  
Farm Forum Writer

ABERDEEN — As corn tassels and soybeans blossom, farmers are breathing a collective sigh of relief.

In a year when moisture was scarce to start the planting season, rain has revived hopes for a good harvest. Most fields in northeastern Brown County are looking great, despite swaths of hail that have hit areas in McPherson and Marshall counties.

Danger continues to lurk, though, from unwanted pests.

That’s where Tim Borge comes in. He’s an agronomist with Performance Ag of Aberdeen who checks fields to identify potential insect-related problems.

With ever-increasing input costs, farmers have been trying to minimize their expenses and carefully analyze when crop spraying is needed, he said.

Those who held back on fertilizer could be looking at some deficiencies in corn, but not much more can be done for those plants growing in the fields. Many applied their last pass of Roundup on beans last week, he said.

Borge sees himself as a guide for farmers. As he drives a loop from farm to farm, he’s keeping a sharp eye out for potential concerns. Running a four-wheeler through fields at this time of summer can cause too much damage, so he will walk in, checking for hot spots for insects.

“When I see a problem, I talk to the farmers and show them what I’m seeing,” he explained. “I don’t go over every acre, but I take them out for a look, and they can decide what to do from there.”

“Corn is pretty much set for this year’s crop,” Borge said. “We have good-traited seed here, so little insect

trouble is expected.”

“As far as beans, I’m seeing a few baby grasshoppers,” he said. “But if it continues to rain, we don’t expect much pressure. As wheat is harvested, the hoppers may move to the bean fields, but they generally stay on the edges. It’s pretty late in the season, so they shouldn’t cause much damage.”

An abundance of grasshoppers can clip pods as well as eat the leaves, reducing yields and destroying plants.

From his experience since 2007, Borge said that aphids make their appearance in this area in the second week of August. Spraying is generally done the third week in August. After that, as soybean plants canopy, aphids aren’t much of a problem.

As he walked through fields, he noted pollination will determine corn yields. Control of resistant weeds is best in those fields where pre-emergent chemicals were used. A big change in the last seven years is the emergence of weeds that are harder to kill. Kochia, waterhemp and mares tail are especially bad in this area. Roundup is not doing much right now to keep those under control. Borge said that by putting down chemical before planting, control is improved.

Certain times of the year require more diligence. The economic threshold for spraying for bugs depends on commodity prices.

“When commodity prices are high, it’s more affordable to spray,” he explained. “When commodity prices are low, farmers look for a break-even point. If the aphids are at 250 aphids per plant, then it’s time to spray.”

But the threshold could be much lower if beans were at \$12 a bushel. Now, though, the going rate for a bushel of beans is below \$10.

Borge provided a ballpark estimate of costs.

“If chemical control is needed for aphids, it costs around \$5 an acre for the insecticide,” he said. “For the aerial application, it is \$7 to \$9. If a fungicide is put down at the same time, the cost is \$12 to \$16. That brings the cost to \$25 to \$35 an acre. Farmers need to pencil out if they can afford not to spray.”

Weedy patches in the field can steal valuable moisture from plants, Borge said. Any moisture in the field should nourish crops, not weeds. And if weeds are left to go to seed, the damage is compounded the next year. A second pass of Roundup has been used to knock down problem areas. Borge said that products other than Roundup, called burners, are only able to control about 70 percent of weeds.

Down the road, Borge said that dicamba-tolerant trait soybeans may provide a way to increase control of troublesome weeds. Right now, the product is waiting on approval for export to China. He believes there will be a limited supply of the seed in 2016. It will probably be 2018 before it’s readily available.

“I do like the changes I’ve seen in agriculture in the past seven years,” Borge said. “It’s fun to see the higher yields and new varieties that are developed. But I don’t like the prices. Getting \$3 for a bushel of corn is not good. Farmers shouldn’t have to give it away.”

Borge expects that those who irrigate will see tremendous yields. But in Brown County, he doesn’t think cornfields will yield 300 bushels an acre soon.

“We just don’t have the moisture. I think we’ll see 200-bushel-an-acre averages, but not in the upper 200s. And 300-bushel an acre is a long way down the road.”

### Scouting With Drones

For some, scouting fields for problems means getting a

bird’s eye view.

Micah Samson, at Muskrat Farm Supply in Eden, reports he’s sold 15 drones - unmanned aircraft systems or unmanned aerial vehicles - to farmers and those with seed businesses this year.

“The drones can show the big picture and the troubled parts of the field,” Samson said. “From the air, anyone who is doing prescription agriculture can get a really good look at their fields. Some take photos of the fields to compare how the crop progresses. Others have used it to document hail damage.”

Samson said that those who have the devices are really impressed with what they can see and think it’s a good scouting tool. The drone, from its elevation, can identify major insect problems, hail damage or stressed areas.

He estimated those who buy drones are from 25 to 40 years old. The 12-inch-x-12-inch quad copters have four props. They can travel up to 1.2 miles. They are connected to cell phones and have GPS built into them. The high-definition video and photos flow to the phone. The drones fly roughly 25 to 30 mph and run about \$1,600. They run off rechargeable batteries good for 15 to 20 minutes per flight. If one loses its signal, it will come back and land itself.

“The operator is in control of the device,” Samson said. “You are making every move the drone is making. They are classified for hobby use. Federal Aviation Administration rules limit flights of these types of drones to a maximum elevation of 400 feet.”

He believes drone use is becoming more common.

“They take great farm photos, and what you see is in real time, both for photos and video,” Samson said. “It’s a great way to know what’s in your fields.”

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