

Farmers Markets: Retail Incubators to Determine Best Practices for the Sale of Heritage Foods

“Heritage eating is conscious-, memory-, and sensory-eating, which starts with conscious-, memory-, and sensory-buying -- all of the components found in farmers markets. Linking all these things creates connection to food from several personal angles that, we believe, are most potent to the human spirit, making a 'heritage diet' more easy to stick to from the heart.”- Sarah Dwyer, *Oldways*

Introduction

According to Stacy Miller, the Executive Director of the Farmers Market Coalition, “heritage foods are the *ultimate* local—heritage foods have been grown locally and sustainably for hundreds of years”¹. “Buy local” has become a commonplace phrase that we hear often and immediately understand that it is in reference to food. The term “locavore” has been coined to describe a person that does “buy local”. And now, as is the danger of such a quickly growing trend, “localwashing” has become a concern as companies market something as being local that isn’t actually so. But this return to local living was not so prevalent in so many outlets immediately. In the early 1900s, when nearly 40% of Americans lived on farms, it was easy and natural for communities to see the quality of foods through talking directly with the farmers. Eating was dictated by seasonality without the advancements in transportation and processing technology. After World War II, as refrigerated trucking improved and transportation costs

¹ Miller, S. (2012, April 19). Personal Interview.

decreased, the US food system made a shift to the nonlocal and its been difficult to go back.²

Recently, however, the demand for relocalization of the food system has been strong. Because our society has been changed by this globalization of food, the indirect retail sources that have expanded with the new technologies, such as restaurants, grocery stores, as well as catering in schools and hospitals, the demand for local is being infused to these retail outlets. But it didn't start there as about four out of five respondents to a 2006 national survey said they purchased fresh produce directly from growers either occasionally or always.³ Another national survey showed that about half of respondents said they purchased food directly from farmers either by visiting farmers' markets, joining a CSA, or buying direct from the farmer.⁴ In speaking with Roxanne Garcia, the manager of the Tucson Farmers Market in AZ, it became clear the role that farmers markets have played in the expansion of the retail of local foods. Farmers markets provide a natural space for innovation and have more freedom to experiment with creative ways to connect consumers to food; "this is where ideas start—farmers markets are the place to experiment and then larger retails start to catch on".⁵ This hypothesis seems to be further proven by the rapid growth of farmers markets that has occurred. By 2010, the number of farmers markets had more than tripled since 1994

² United States. Department of Agriculture. Economic Research Service. *Local Food Systems: Concepts, Impacts, and Issues*. By Steve Martinez and Michael Hand. Vol. 97. Economic Research Service USDA (2010): 1.

³ Keeling-Bond, J., D. Thilmany, and C. Bond. 2009. "What Influences Consumer Choice of Fresh Produce Purchase Location?" *Journal of Agricultural and Applied Economics*, 41(1):61-74.

⁴ Zepeda, L., and J. Li. 2006. "Who Buys Local Food?" *Journal of Food Distribution Research*, Vol. 37, pp. 1-11.

⁵ Garcia, R. (2012, April 19). Telephone interview.

with approximately 7,100 markets in the US. now.⁶ The retail of local foods has exploded from being in solely farmers markets to being present in restaurants, chain grocery stores, and hospitals.

The retail of local foods present an important case study and seeing the success of the local food movement, I can't help but apply these concepts to the retail of the "ultimate local", heritage foods. The retail of foods is an important part of our food system because it creates demand for products, in turn increasing the need to supply more of products. In the study of local foods, that means more money in pocket of regional farmers. As Figure 1 portrays, the sale of food that has been produced, potentially processed, and distributed, is then sold through direct and indirect sales outlets. However, this diagram should really be in a circle to represent the true importance of the retail piece in our food system. With the increased sales of local foods there is a demand for an increased supply, thus increased production.

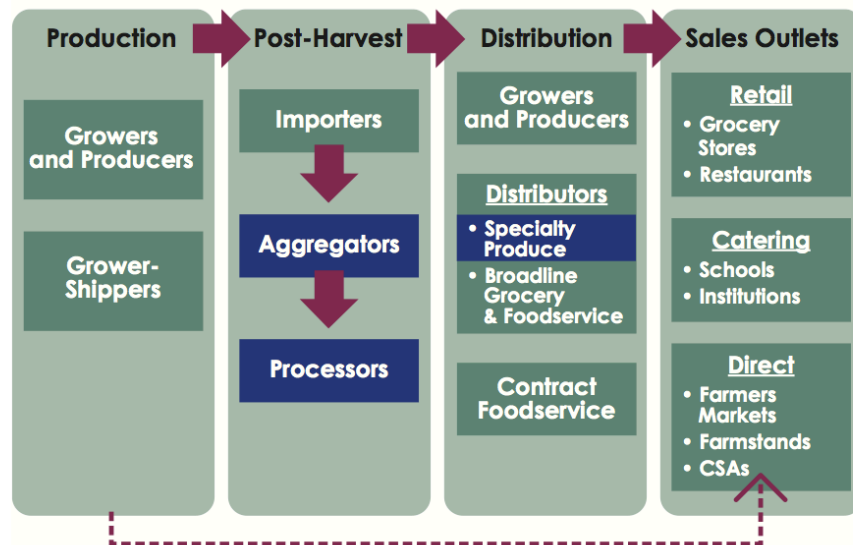


Figure 1: U.S. Food System Value Chain⁷

⁶ Miller, Stacy. "Farmers Market Coalition." *Purpose*. Farmers Market Coalition. Web. 6 May 2012. <<http://farmersmarketcoalition.org/joinus/purpose>>.

Further, retail represents an opportunity to educate consumers, as retail is the main point at which there is contact between a seller (whether it be a farmer, waiter, chef, cashier, or brand) and a consumer.

In the sale of local foods, farmers markets play a large role in increasing the demand for local foods. As the “place to experiment [before] larger retails start to catch on”⁸, farmers markets present an important location to jumpstart the demand and consumer education around heritage foods. Farmers markets allow for a “trial run” to test the identification, certification, and marketing needed to retailing heritage foods. Farmers markets present a natural starting point to expand the demand and production of heritage foods to start understanding how a larger scale retail system of heritage foods would work. Farmers markets

In this paper, I will trace the characteristics of farmers markets as naturally in line with the sale of heritage foods. Further, by making the explicit connection between consumers and heritage foods, the sale of heritage foods will even strengthen the mission of farmers markets. I will then explore potential programs and initiatives that would help put the goals of food heritage into action and propose farmers markets as perfectly positioned to explore what would be needed to expand the retail of heritage foods on a larger scale. Farmers markets present an important retail option for heritage foods.

⁷ United States. Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity. Energy and Sustainable Business Programs. *Building Successful Food Hubs*. By Timothy Lindsey. 2012. *Agricultural Marketing Service*. Jan. 2012. Web. 6 May 2012.
<<http://www.ams.usda.gov/AMSV1.0/getfile?dDocName=STELPRDC5097191>>.

⁸ Garcia, R. (2012, April 19). Telephone interview.

Making the Case: Why Farmers Markets Are Natural Retailers of Heritage Foods

In a society that is often governed by a monetary bottom line, farmers markets present a refreshingly comprehensive bottom line or rather, multiple bottom lines. The Farmers Market Coalition sums this up well concluding, “farmers markets are a community experience, where you can meet your neighbors, friends, and farmers, and where more of your dollar will stay in the community.”⁹ This community experience and the mission behind creating this unique retail space align with the mission of food heritage and the sale of heritage foods. For this reason, I was shocked to find so few examples of farmers markets selling and promoting heritage foods. It seems like a natural connection to me as the natural “ultimate local” retailer. However, I emailed the Farmers Market Coalition market manager listserv, comprising of over 850 market managers and supporters, to see what experts in the field were seeing around heritage foods. I received only three responses from a usually very active group. One of which simply said, “what do you mean by food heritage, I have not heard this term before”. It became clear that farmers markets have not yet embraced this concept of heritage foods like they have embraced the importance of local foods. However, farmers markets present natural retailers of heritage foods as their missions align and strengthen each other.

Farmers Markets Provide Local, Sustainably Produced Foods

In the last century, the agriculture industry in the U.S. has changed dramatically. In the midst of the increased demand for a relocalization of our food system, farmers

⁹ Miller, Stacy. "Farmers Market Coalition." *Farmers Market Q & A*. Farmers Market Coalition. Web. 06 May 2012. <<http://farmersmarketcoalition.org/joinus/faq>>.

markets provide consumers with fresh produce that is grown locally and sustainably. Farmers markets connect these consumers with farmers directly as an important alternative to our largely industrial food industry. They give consumers the opportunity to enjoy seasonal produce from farmers they can trust and farmland they can picture. According to Agricultural Marketing Specialist, Velma Lakins, at USDA, a farmers market is defined as “a common facility or area where several farmers or growers gather on a regular, recurring basis to sell a variety of fresh fruits and vegetables and other locally grown farm products directly to consumers”¹⁰. The Farmers Market Coalition’s definition also exemplifies the centrality of providing fresh, locally produced foods in the mission of farmers markets: “farmers markets consists principally of farms selling directly to the public products that the farms have produced”¹¹.

This mission aligns well with the retail of heritage foods. While it is difficult to find an agreed upon definition of a “heritage food”, the importance of locally grown seems to be consistent. According to The Santa Cruz Valley Heritage Alliance, heritage foods are “locally produced foods tied to the region’s history and cultural identity”¹². They further define the locally produced can be “locally grown, traditionally grown, and wild harvested”¹³. The Ark of Taste project through Slow Food USA is designed to preserve heritage foods and breeds that are at risk of going “extinct”. In order for a product to qualify to be under the Ark of Taste it must fit into their 5 guidelines, one of which being “sustainably produced” and another being “produced in limited quantities by farms or

¹⁰ United States. Agricultural Marketing Service. Department of Agriculture. *How to Start a Farmers Market*. By Velma Lakins. Marketing Services Program, May 2007. Web. 6 May 2012. <<http://www.ams.usda.gov/AMSV1.0/getfile?dDocName=STELDEV3022129>>.

¹¹ Miller, Stacy. "Farmers Market Coalition." *Farmers Market Q & A*. Farmers Market Coalition. Web. 06 May 2012. <<http://farmersmarketcoalition.org/joinus/faq>>.

¹² "Tastes of the Santa Cruz Valley." *Welcome to the Santa Cruz Valley*. Santa Cruz Valley Heritage Alliance. Web. 06 May 2012. <<http://www.santacruzheritage.org/foods/workshop>>.

¹³ Ibid.

small-scale processing companies”¹⁴. Farmers markets are the prime location to sell sustainably produced products. Further, the products at farmers markets are grown on small scale farmers, just as the Ark of Taste's criteria call for.

In addition to heritage foods aligning with the defined product criteria for farmers markets, the farmer market consumer base might be similar to those interested in buying heritage foods. In Gary Nabhan's book, *Linking Arizona's Sense of Place to a Sense of Taste*, he defines the primary audience for heritage foods as “well educated and broadly informed residents of the state, who are loyal to local growers, interested in food quality, and taste and aware that certain products can only be harvested in certain seasons”¹⁵. These characteristics seem to describe many farmers market customers and while little data is available on overall consumer trends at farmers markets, it makes sense that those that are concerned about food quality and meeting their local growers would invest time and money into farmers markets. According to Nabhan, “this group is the easiest start-up market for [heritage foods]...and these are the people who often show strong initial interest in novel products and ideas, and who then promote them by word of mouth”¹⁶. Thus, farmers markets' consumers representing the easiest “start-up market for heritage foods”, farmers markets represent an important space to pilot the retail of heritage foods.

¹⁴ "US Ark of Taste: Slow Food USA." *US Ark of Taste*. Slow Food USA. Web. 06 May 2012.
<http://www.slowfoodusa.org/index.php/programs/details/ark_of_taste/>.

¹⁵ Nabhan, Gary Paul., Patty West, and Rich Pirog. *Linking Arizona's Sense of Place to a Sense of Taste: Marketing the Heritage Value of Arizona's Place-based Foods* / by Gary P. Nabhan, Patty West and Rich Pirog. Flagstaff, AZ: Center for Sustainable Environments, Northern Arizona University, 2005. Print.

¹⁶ Ibid.

Farmers Markets Provide Space to Build Relationships

According to Charlie Jackson in *Reclaiming our Food* by Tanya Denckla Cobb, “the key to building markets for local food is all about building relationships: meet with people, have conversations, listen”¹⁷. Farmers markets provide this opportunity for relationships. Direct farmer to consumer interactions are economically valuable for the farmer but also have the secondary effect of creating an opportunity for consumers to build a relationship with those who produce the food they eat. Farmers markets are a community space where community members can come together and see neighbors and friends and even meet people that they otherwise would not have. Farmers markets present opportunities to build relationships between consumer and vendor, consumer and food, and consumer and community. As Stacy Miller says in a blog post on the Farmers Market Coalition website

I have yet to meet anyone that goes to the grocery store to connect with their neighbors, create meaningful relationships with farmers, taste produce that was picked that morning, or ask questions about where and how their food was grown or how to prepare it. For these things, people seek out farmers markets, where they can watch first-hand the power that their dollars have in nourishing local entrepreneurship and sustainable growing practices.¹⁸

¹⁷ Cobb, Tanya Denckla. *Reclaiming Our Food: How the Grassroots Food Movement Is Changing the Way We Eat*. North Adams, MA: Storey Pub., (2011): 244.

¹⁸ <http://farmersmarketcoalition.org/transparency-civil-eats-op-ed> Miller, Stacy. "Where the Heart Is: Relationships, Trust, and Transparency Set Farmers Markets Apart." Editorial. *Farmers Market Coalition*. 28 Oct. 2010. Web. 6 May 2012. <<http://farmersmarketcoalition.org/transparency-civil-eats-op-ed>>.

The key to building a market for heritage food is also all about relationships. Farmers markets present the perfect opportunity for consumers to ask questions about a product. Seeing a Cherokee Purple Tomato for the first time (see Image 1), I might wonder why it was green and purple. In a grocery store,



where products have come to need to all look the same, with tomatoes needing to be perfectly round and red, I wouldn't dare purchase a tomato that looked like this. But in a farmers market, consumers are able to ask questions and learn from the farmer the value of a heritage food such as this. Vendors at farmers markets can have samples and introduce consumers to the great taste of heritage food, since taste is a quality of the Ark of Taste's criteria for heritage foods¹⁹.

Further, heritage food is intertwined with memory and personal connection. Food heritage is overwhelmingly people-based, not only place-based like local foods are, because of the criteria of it being culturally intertwined with the region. The national organization Renewing America's Food Traditions (RAFT) describes the importance of reinvigorating the "stories of North American traditions that lie hidden within our foods" providing examples of "a tender pear once planted in Thomas Jefferson's orchards, an oily fish that built trade routes in the Northwest, a hot pepper that tells the story of

¹⁹ "US Ark of Taste: Slow Food USA." *US Ark of Taste*. Slow Food USA. Web. 06 May 2012. <http://www.slowfoodusa.org/index.php/programs/details/ark_of_taste/>.

Minorcan immigration to Florida”²⁰. This implies the inextricable connection between heritage food and stories and memories. Stories are deeply personal and strive to connect people with their food. Farmers markets strive to do the same by providing not only a place for consumers to buy produce but to also have social interactions. According to Richard McCarthy, the Executive Director of marketumbrella.org, “No place is more efficient than the farmers market to cultivate nourishing relationships to food. The farmers market is the place where food is both fuel and culture, and thus the place where we grow healthy communities”²¹. Thus both farmers markets and heritage foods are connected with connecting culture with food and most importantly reconnecting *people* with food.

Farmers Markets Act As Small Business Incubators and Offer A Place for Innovation

Farmers markets provide a unique business structure that allows for time to experiment and learn before entering other retail outlets. Farmers markets can serve as small business incubators by allowing residents to enter the business with lower overhead cost than opening up a storefront. According to Roxanne Garcia, the manager of the Tucson Farmers Market in AZ, “where else in the country can you start a business for \$500 or less?”. Further, as USDA’s Know Your Farmer Know Your Food Initiative blog explains, “the direct and valued contact with their customer base makes for innovative and responsive farmers that can experiment with offering new items more

²⁰ "Renewing America's Food Traditions-RAFT." *Center for Sustainable Environments*. Northern Arizona University. Web. 6 May 2012. <<http://www.environment.nau.edu/raft/>>.

²¹ Farmers Market Coalition. *Farmers Market Coalition Celebrates Health and Wellness During National Farmers Market Week*. Farmers Market Coalition. 5 Aug. 2011. Web. 6 May 2012. <<http://farmersmarketcoalition.org/health-and-wellnes-8-8-2011>>.

easily—if a producer is able to find the right product mix for consumer demand, they can develop a sound business, create new jobs, and grow successfully”²². Farmers markets have more freedom to experiment with creative ways to connect consumers to food and provide small to mid-sized farmers with the opportunity to develop business ventures rooted in their local communities. Farmers markets indeed become pilots for larger retail outlets and training grounds for farmers and start up businesses to develop and hone sales and business skills while learning from other vendors and direct consumer interaction.

In order to expand the retail of heritage foods and create a market for food heritage, farmers markets allow for a space for vendors to experiment with the idea of selling heritage foods. Farmers markets provide an opportunity for vendors to see what consumers purchase and what they aren’t interested in. Further, farmers markets enable farmers to build relationships with their consumers so that if they were to move to a store front one day, they would already have a loyal consumer base. And the farmers would have already worked out the kinks and worked on understanding the demands of this consumer base in advance of entering a larger scale retail opportunity. Farmers markets have low barriers to entry that allow new farmers or business owners to take a chance and try. In the retail of heritage foods, such a training ground is invaluable.

²² Bragg, Errol. "Farmers Markets as Small Business Incubators." Web log post. *Know Your Farmer Know Your Food*. USDA, 1 Sept. 2010. Web. 6 May 2012. <<http://kyf.blogs.usda.gov/2010/09/01/farmers-markets-as-small-business-incubators/>>.

Farmers Markets Increase Access to Affordable, Fresh, Healthy Food

While the number farmers markets have tripled since 1994, low-income communities have not fully participated in this upward trend. More than one-third of US adults (35.7%) are obese²³, a concern stemming from many causes but better access to healthy, fresh, affordable food for all can help improve the situation. Farmers markets can play an important role in improving such access but there are substantial economic, social, and even cultural barriers to operating farmers markets successfully in low-income areas and making access into a reality. More of us are experiencing economic hardship, and living below the poverty line. In 2011, national participation in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance (formerly Food Stamps), rose to more than 46.5 million people, an increase of 2.4 million in one year alone²⁴. One such barrier has been accepting SNAP benefits at farmers markets as is seen from the meager .016% of total SNAP benefits redeemed at farmers markets in 2011²⁵. In a study conducted by the Community Food Security Coalition and the Farmers Market Coalition, *Real Food, Real Choice*, it was found that while many SNAP customers may not be aware of the opportunity to use their benefits at markets, other barriers exist including cultural obstacles. For example, one study that *Real Food, Real Choice* references is "Food Stamps Accepted Here" by D.C. Hunger Solutions, which states that offering a product

²³ "Adult Obesity Facts." *Centers for Disease Control and Prevention*. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 27 Apr. 2012. Web. 06 May 2012. <<http://www.cdc.gov/obesity/data/adult.html>>.

²⁴ "SNAP/Food Stamp Participation." *Food Research & Action Center*. Food Research & Action Center. Web. 06 May 2012. <<http://frac.org/reports-and-resources/snapfood-stamp-monthly-participation-data/>>.

²⁵ Roper, Natalie. "SNAP Redemptions at Farmers Markets Exceed \$11 Millions in 2011." *The Market Beet* (18 Jan. 2012). *Farmers Market Coalition*. 18 Jan. 2012. Web. 6 May 2012. <<http://farmersmarketcoalition.org/snap-redemptions-at-farmers-markets-exceed-11m-in-2011>>.

mix that is responsive to diverse customer needs is an important way for farmers markets to serve low-income shoppers²⁶.

Because heritage foods are inextricably connected to cultural identity and personal stories, selling heritage foods at farmers markets has the potential to create the variety and diversity in product mix that heritage foods intrinsically offer and *Real Food, Real Choice* suggests. Food heritage believes deeply in the importance of reinvigorating the important connection between our food and our cultural identity. Heritage foods may be able to connect people and bring those in who have previously felt that they were not culturally welcome. Food connects people. Heritage foods connect people and cultures and may provide a previously missing link in lowering the cultural barriers that farmers markets are struggling with.

Making the Connection: Program Ideas to Unite Farmers Markets and Heritage Foods

Farmers markets being shown to be a natural retailer for heritage foods, the following programs would make the connection explicit to consumers to strengthen the missions of farmers markets and heritage food simultaneously.

Seed Saving

In order for farmers markets to be able to sell heritage foods as a part of their already existing market for local and fresh food, there has to be enough seeds for farmers to grow heritage products. In a conversation with Roxanne Garcia from the

²⁶ Briggs, Suzanne, Andy Fisher, Megan Lott, Stacy Miller, and Nell Tessman. *Real Food, Real Choice*. Publication. Food Security Coalition, 2010. Print.

Tucson Farmers Market, she couldn't emphasize enough the importance of a seed bank. She said that a major barrier that she is seeing that limits farmers ability to grow and sell heritage products is that "there is not enough seed in the seed bank for farms to grow enough of the product for it to be worth selling"²⁷. It is important, then, to not only have a seed saving and exchanging venue but also a way to be multiplying the seed available so that it there is access to enough seed that can be used productively and on a large enough scale. One creative and successful example of this is the Seed Library housed in the Pima County Public Library in Tucson, AZ. In the public library, right there with the books, there is a section called the Seed Library where the public can "check out seeds" for free assuming that they will return a few harvested seeds from their own plant to replenish the supply. The packets are labeled Green to Red, from Easy to Advanced, and materials on their website outline how to save seeds. This ensures that heritage seeds are not only being kept in a seed bank but also are being grown around the region. This furthers the connection between the public and the importance of seed saving. It is important for seed banks and exchanges to become more public and prominent so the average person can be a part of heritage growing but also to ensure access to a large enough seed supply so that heritage products can be realistically grown and sold. ²⁸ This project responded to the opportunity of a public library structure to spread the knowledge of heritage seeds at a very low cost. Central Virginia has many libraries whose space could be taken advantage of through a partnership with the Southern Exposure Seed Exchange.

²⁷ Garcia, R. (2012, April 19). Telephone interview.

²⁸ "Pima County Public Library." *Seed Library*. Pima County Public Library. Web. 06 May 2012. <<http://www.library.pima.gov/seed-library/>>.

Small Growers Conference

In talking with Roxanne Garcia in Tucson she said that “food heritage is the edge that vendors are always looking for”²⁹. She referenced a memory she has of one vendor having purple asparagus. At first, people thought it was odd and then before they knew it, the purple asparagus was completely gone. Supporting this, Nabhan says that “variety is key to attracting customers and maintaining repeat shoppers”³⁰. Customers want something different—otherwise, they wouldn’t be coming to the farmers market. Holding a small growers conference about the value of heritage foods, the uniqueness of heritage foods, and some ideas on marketing heritage foods would be a great way to lower barriers to entry for farmers that are interested in starting to sell heritage food. Further, if vendors don’t see the value of selling heritage foods, there won’t be any heritage food at the farmers markets. There is no market without the vendors. Because farmers markets are small business incubators, an opportunity like this falls within the mission of farmers markets, heritage foods, and the goals of the vendors.

Customer education

It is important for consumers to understand the importance of heritage foods and farmers markets are in a perfect position to be able to jumpstart this education. The first hurdle in educating consumers is to tackle the question of what are heritage foods. An identification system would



Fair Food Heritage Breed Label

²⁹ Garcia, R. (2012, April 19). Telephone interview.

³⁰ Nabhan, Gary Paul., Patty West, and Rich Pirog. *Linking Arizona's Sense of Place to a Sense of Taste: Marketing the Heritage Value of Arizona's Place-based Foods* / by Gary P. Nabhan, Patty West and Rich Pirog. Flagstaff, AZ: Center for Sustainable Environments, Northern Arizona University, 2005. Print.

create a list of criteria to then certify and label heritage foods. This would allow customers to see a food labeled as “Central Virginia Heritage”, for example, and begin learning about that food, making the choice to support the mission of heritage food, and might even feel more connected to that food if there is a memory associated with it. A labeling system would be important in the sale of heritage foods in a larger retail outlet and farmers markets present the perfect opportunity to pilot such a project. Fair Food in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania is one example of an organization that has done this. They have created a “Heritage Breed” label (see Image 2) in order to identify heritage breed products in the market place. The goal of this project is to “raise consumer awareness about heritage breed animals by identifying the meat, dairy, and eggs from heritage



breed products animals available at the Fair Food Farmstand”, their farmers market³¹. While the project does not have specific criteria for plant species, their label assures that anything identified as a “Fair Food Heritage Breed” “contains at least 50% heritage bred stock and

³¹ "Heritage Breed." *Fair Food Philly*. Fair Food Philly. Web. 06 May 2012. <<http://www.fairfoodphilly.org/our-work/heritage-breed/>>.

each of these genetically unique heirloom breeds is a link to our American agricultural past, and provides bio-diversity in our food supply”³². According to Annemarie Vaeni, Program Associate at Fair Food, “we have found that consumers really respond to information we provide through labeling but also info sheets at the Farmstand and breed information on sales receipts”³³. Further, they use their Farmstand newsletter as a way to profile breeds to further educate consumers (see Image 3). While Fair Food Philly’s label provides a wonderful starting point, there is still the need for more specific criteria for both animal products and plant species. But, as Fair Food did, piloting this system at their farmers market provides a low cost way to understand the needs for retail on a larger scale. This process of identification, certification, and branding is an important first step in being able to sell heritage foods in a way that is meaningful to consumers. Farmers markets represent the prime potential to pilot such a project. In talking with Roxanne Garcia about this idea she was supportive such a system and referenced again the value that farmers markets have as market incubators for innovation such as this. She even had a great label idea feeding off of Gary Nabhan’s ideology: “Respect your elders and eat them”. Garcia was confident that a catchy label and phrase would be an important step in selling heritage foods and educating consumers.³⁴

Heritage Food to Increase Access and Cultural Acceptance

Farmers markets should be mindful of the cultures that are represented in the surrounding areas and consider the use of heritage foods to make a wider audience feel welcome at the market and increase access to healthy foods. Cooking demonstrations

³² Ibid.

³³ Vaeni, A. (2012, May 3). Email Interview.

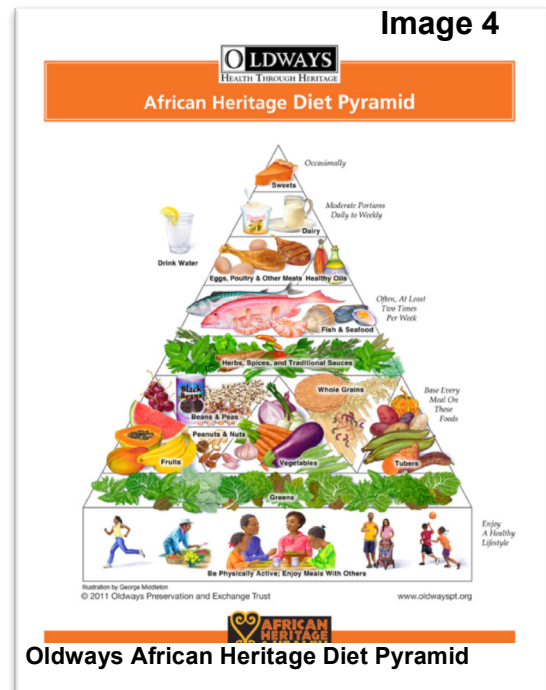
³⁴ Garcia, R. (2012, April 19). Telephone interview.

are a great way to get people's attention. Further, if people don't have specific memories of particular vegetables or fruit varieties, seeing them prepared and smelling the aroma may trigger those memories. However, it is important that these cooking demonstrations or classes function as such, not just a prepared food vendor, because SNAP benefits can only be used for items that have to be prepared at home or plants that produce food for the household to eat. Anything that can be eaten at the market is not eligible.³⁵ Thus, it is important that heritage prepared foods are not the only outlet for recipes or teaching customers how to prepare heritage foods bought at the farmers market. Providing culturally representative heritage foods could be an important way to make more members of the community feel welcome at the farmers market.

Oldways is a wonderful example of how heritage foods can be used to promote healthy eating and paired with a farmers market setting, it might be able to use heritage eating to increase the access to local foods. Oldways was founded in 1990 to address the rising health issues around the lack of access to healthy, fresh food. Their mission is to help people make healthy connections to their food and their food heritage through preserving culinary traditions and heritage food education. I was in contact with Sarah Dwyer, the program manager for their African Heritage and Health Program. This program works to develop resources to promote the eating traditions of African Heritage but they also have efforts around Mediterranean Heritage, Latino Heritage, and Asian Heritage. Their theory is that through what they call pyramids, plates, and real food, dietary guidance comes alive in a way that people can understand and connect with and hopefully stick with. For each cultural heritage, Oldways has created a food pyramid that

³⁵ Owens, Nora, and Kelly Verel. *SNAP/EBT at Your Farmers Market: Seven Steps to Success*. Publication. Project for Public Spaces, 2010. Print.

shows a balanced diet overall (see Image 4). The plate pictures supplement this larger picture guidance by showing proportions on a real plate using pictures of real food, hoping to capture people's senses and memories to again connect with them. Each plate is accompanied by the respective recipes. The pyramids' bases all consist of "be physically active and enjoy meals with others", again connecting heritage eating with personal memories and sharing food together. Further, their website includes sheets listing heritage foods for each culture by food group which would be an important resource for farmers markets to reference.³⁶



In talking with Sarah Dwyer, she was clear about the many overlaps with farmers markets and heritage foods; "as we promote a return to the "old ways" of eating, preparing, and growing our foods, sustainable farming and farmers are truly revered as a foundational part of the puzzle." Further, in asking about farmers markets role in promoting this return to heritage diets she responded, "farmers markets are the perfect spot for this especially because of their direct display and supply of exotic and familiar heritage vegetables (the numbers of which are countless)".³⁷ She explained that it is important first to know what foods your ancestors have been eating for centuries, primarily due to availability, but then very much due to pleasure and flavors. Farmers markets should take the initiative to

³⁶ "Oldways: Health Through Heritage." *Oldways: Health Through Heritage*. Oldways Preservation Trust. Web. 06 May 2012. <<http://www.oldwayspt.org/>>.

³⁷ Dwyer, S. (2012, April 24). Email Interview.

understand the cultures that their communities represent and then understand the heritage foods around that culture. Secondly, consumers have to know how to prepare these foods in their simplest and most flavorful ways – “to capture how they were enjoyed in earlier times”.

Heritage eating is conscious-, memory-, and sensory-eating, which starts with conscious-, memory-, and sensory-buying - all of the components found in farmers markets. Linking all these things creates connection to food from several personal angles that, we believe, are most potent to the human spirit, making a 'heritage diet' more easy to stick to from the heart.³⁸

According to Sarah, farmers markets and heritage food *can* be a part of the change by providing access to healthy foods in a new way that is personal, “from the heart”, and inclusive.

Conclusion: The Retail of Heritage Foods in Central Virginia

Farmers markets are a natural retailer of heritage foods and should be used as incubators for determining best practices for identifying, marketing, and promoting the importance of heritage foods on a larger scale. Thus, in order to increase the sale of heritage foods, we need to protect our farmers markets. However, many farmers markets are vulnerable; “with very few exceptions, everybody loves the Market but there is a huge gap between the amount of love for farmers markets and the amount of support”³⁹. In order to support both the 5-county regions farmers markets and the retail of heritage foods, the TJPDC should seek sponsorship to fund programs like those listed above to serve as case studies and trial runs of programs to be expanded to a

³⁸ Dwyer, S. (2012, April 24). Email Interview.

³⁹ Groc, Isabelle. "Growers' Gamble." *American Planning Association Guide* (2008). Print.

larger scale. Farmers markets in the 5-county region should be used as a pilot and training ground for an identification/certification program of heritage foods as well as for using resources similar to those used at Olways to determine success of such education on access and healthy eating. The TJPDC should observe marketing methods employed by farmers markets and the consumer base that is drawn to them to better inform policies and best practices for the retail of heritage foods on a larger scale in the future.