

Healthy Local Food



EcoExperience · Minnesota State Fair 2016
Summary Report

Summary

The 2016 Healthy Local Food exhibit of the Minnesota State Fair Eco Experience ran from Thursday, August 25th-Monday, September 5th. Organized by Renewing the Countryside, the 2016 exhibit theme was "Forever Green." This year was a record year at the State Fair with almost two million visitors. Approximately 262,000 visitors attended the Eco Experience exhibit hall during the 12 day event.

Purpose:

The primary goal of the exhibit was to educate the community on the Forever Green Initiative. Led by the University of Minnesota, the Forever Green Initiative works to supplement summer annual crops with perennials and winter annuals. The exhibit displayed information about these new crop initiatives and the benefits they can provide to farmers by creating new income opportunities, and benefits to the environment, by helping to create cleaner water, improved habitat, and healthier soil. Each year we also educated fairgoers about healthy eating, purchasing local food, and promoting local food businesses, farmers and foodmakers.

Partners:

Minnesota Pollution Control Agency, HealthPartners, Peace Coffee, The McKnight Foundation, Organic Valley, The University of Minnesota College of Food, Agricultural and Natural Resource Sciences, Minnesota Institute for Sustainable Agriculture (MISA), The Minnesota Farmers Union, and Co-op Partners Warehouse,

With additional support from Eversharp Knives

The Cooking Demonstration Stage was provided by Domain Architecture & Design, Dakota Surfaces and Warners' Stellian Appliance Company

Presented by:

renewing the countryside
just. sustainable. vibrant.



Healthy Local Foods Partners:



HealthPartners®



College of Food, Agricultural
and Natural Resource Sciences
UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA



Exhibit Description: Forever Green

The Forever Green exhibit educated viewers about the Forever Green Initiative. Led by the University of Minnesota, this initiative works to supplement summer annual crops with perennials and winter annuals. These new crops can provide farmers with new income opportunities while providing a series of environmental benefits. As the “Land of 10,000 Lakes,” clean water is among the most important issue in Minnesota, and our water is threatened by nutrient pollutants from agricultural systems. These new crops can provide cleaner groundwater, lakes and rivers, as well as improved habitat for pollinators and wildlife, less erosion, and healthier soils.

These new perennial and winter-annual crops, working in tandem with summer annuals, can increase the efficiency of production systems, as well as bolster the rural and agricultural economy. The Forever Green Initiative is working to create crops that are beneficial and attractive to farmers which at the same time provide benefits to the environment. These crops can:

- Diversify economic opportunities for Minnesota farmers by adding new sources of production of food, feed, and high-value biomaterials.
- Allow continued abundant productivity in the face of climate variability and new pest and disease pressures.

Information about Forever Green crops, such as Kernza™, Hazelnuts, and Elderberries was highlighted, as well as information about what makes and keeps water clean and soil healthy, and why this is important. Kernza™, for example, can be planted just once and grow back for several years. It's roots can grow more than 10 feet in the ground, allowing them to be more resistant to droughts and floods, while also helping to keep soil healthy and in place. Information was also presented about livestock, grazing, and managed pasture.

Attendees had the opportunity to reflect on the benefits of Forever Green and it's impact on local food in Minnesota via chalkboards and hangtags placed throughout the exhibit. Questions ranged from: “Name your favorite edible perennial”, “Why is healthy soil important?” and “Name a farm animal that can be raised on pasture.”

In line with the theme of our exhibit, several businesses that produce perennial or pasture foods came to hand out samples and information. Volunteers engaged visitors by asking them questions about perennials and healthy local food, and Forever Green researchers from the University of Minnesota stopped by daily to field questions from visitors about the exhibit.



forever green
Perennial Crops

Kernza™

Intermediate Wheatgrass
Thinopyrum intermedium L.

While distantly related to wheat, intermediate wheatgrass differs substantially in that it is a perennial plant rather than an annual. That means a farmer can plant it once and harvest it for multiple years, eliminating the need for annual tilling, planting, and fertilizing.

Intermediate wheatgrass roots grow up to 12 feet deep, several times the depth of annual wheat. Roots like this not only hold soil in place, they build soil health and soak up water from heavy rainfalls. They also reach deep to find water during droughts, making the plant adaptable to a wide range of climates.

Kernza™ is the grain that comes from intermediate wheatgrass. While not an exact wheat replacement, it has captured the interest of chefs, bakers, and food companies looking to source more environmentally-friendly ingredients. Elite bakeries like Brooklyn's Bien Cuit and San Francisco's Tartine are experimenting with this new and unique grain, and in Minneapolis, the Birchwood Café regularly showcases Kernza™ on its menu.



Above: Norm Erickson of the Minnesota Hazelnut Foundation handing out samples of their hazelnuts.

Right: fairgoers wrote their favorite edible perennials each day.



Volunteers

Over the course of 12 days of the State Fair 158 individuals volunteered for 170 shifts to assist with cooking demonstrations, sample local foods, and oversee the children's activities. This number includes students and faculty from the University of Minnesota who stopped by most days to volunteer and answer questions about perennials and winter annual crops.

Volunteer Orientation

Renewing the Countryside hosted a volunteer orientation for our volunteers before the start of the Fair. The orientation was located at our exhibit in the Eco Experience building. Snacks of cheese were provided by Organic Valley, and coffee was supplied by Peace Coffee.

Volunteers were given a tour of the exhibit, and information about the exhibit. Peace Coffee, HealthPartners, a representative from the Forever Green Initiative at the University of Minnesota, as well as a Renewing the Countryside representative educated volunteers on different aspects of the exhibit.

Reaction to the orientation was positive. One volunteer wrote: "I thought it was a great orientation, especially for a new volunteer. Being able to hear background on each organization was really helpful, and to see the layout of the different exhibits/sections made me feel more comfortable for volunteering."

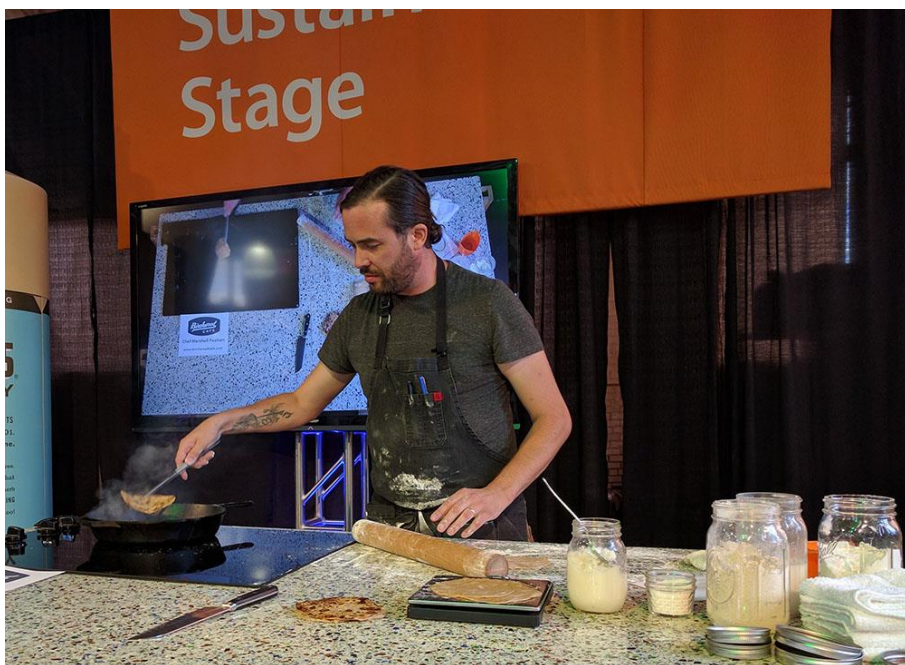
Right above: a volunteer educating fairgoers about Forever Green with the University of Minnesota's rainfall simulator.

Right below: a group of volunteers as they arrived to volunteer and get their t-shirts.



Cooking Demonstrations

Three 30-minute cooking demonstrations took place each day at 11am, 1pm, and 3pm. Each day, Twin Cities area chefs and foodmakers shared information about their food, restaurant, or business, and cooked a dish using local ingredients. Demonstrations ranged from artisan sourdough bread, to Kernza™ tortillas, to cooking with local meats. When possible, chefs highlighted food crops that were related to the Forever Green initiative.

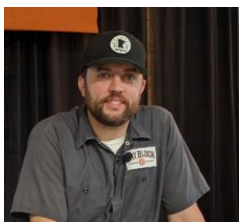


Above: Chef Marshall Paulsen of the Birchwood Cafe demonstrates how to make tortillas using the flour, Kernza™, made from perennial indeterminate wheatgrass.

Right: Frey Haile of Flamingo Café serves samples of Alichia with injera.



Cooking Demonstration Schedule



Thursday, August 25th **Joe Williams, Day Block Brewing**

Joe Williams demonstrated how to use unique summer perennial farmed and foraged foods in familiar dishes.



Friday, August 26th **Yia Vang, Union Kitchen**

Yia Vang demonstrated how to make his Minnesota Hot Dish with a regional Hmong twist.



Saturday, August 27th **Christopher MacLeod, Luane Bread**

Christopher MacLeod showed us the process of making and shaping his sourdough bread.



Sunday, August 28th **Ross Logas, The Moral Omnivore**

Ross Logas demonstrated how to make Beet Crostinis using all locally sourced ingredients.



Monday, August 29th **Frey Haile, Flamingo Cafe**

Frey Haile demonstrated how to make the ethiopian dish Alichea with yellow split peas.



Tuesday, August 30th **Kim Olson, Grandma's Gourmets**

Kim Olson demonstrated how to prepare her tomato, cucumber and pickle salad.



Wednesday, August 31st **Emily Paul, The Good Acre**

Emily Paul demonstrated how to make gazpacho, as well as two other chilled soups.



Thursday, September 1st **Marshall Paulsen, Birchwood Cafe**

Marshall Paulsen prepared tortillas using flour made from the perennial wheat Kernza™, and sampled them with locally-sourced toppings.



Friday, September 2nd **Jennifer Monsos, Tansy's on Main**

Jennifer Monsos cooked us a stir-fry using an assortment of local, seasonal vegetables.



Saturday, September 3rd **Jim Bovino, Gyst Fermentation Bar**

Jim Bovino demonstrated the basic technique of lacto-fermentation of local, organic vegetables.



Sunday, September 4th **Karl Gerstenberger, Seward Co-op**

Karl demonstrated how to make Paillard and Carpaccio using Minnesota meats.



Monday, September 5th **Ruhel Islam, Gandhi Mahal**

Ruhel Islam demonstrated how to make Sag Bajee using locally sourced spinach, onions and garlic.



Above: Yia Vang of Union Kitchen demonstrating his Hmong Minnesota Hot Dish on the Sustainability Stage

Sampling Station

Local food samples were handed out all day, every day. Peace Coffee offered samples of their coffee to fairgoers every day from 9am-3pm. Local food producers and businesses donated their products and time to share their local product for 4-hour shifts in the morning and afternoon, and volunteers handed out samples of local foods donated from the Twin Cities based local food distributor, Co-op Partner Partners Warehouse. Over 30,000 toothpicks were used to hand out samples over the course of the State Fair.

Samples and Sampling Businesses:

- Cheese and protein shakes from Organic Valley, La Farge, WI
- Chai Blends from Gray Duck Chai, Minneapolis, MN
- Wild Rice from White Earth Wild Rice, Waubun, MN
- Micro-greens from Product of Nature, Northfield, MN
- Gluten free cookies from Prairie Kitchen, Eden Prairie, MN
- Gluten free cakes and breads from Mama Stoen's, Owatonna, MN
- Elderberry Juice from River Hills Harvest, Minneapolis, MN
- Beef jerky from Thousand Hills Cattle Company, Cannon Falls, MN
- Balsamic from Locust Lane Vineyards, Little Canada, MN
- Apples and apple products from Hoch Orchards and Gardens, LaCrescent, MN
- Chicken bone broth from Taking Stock Foods, St Paul, MN
- Hazelnuts from Trees Forever, Marion, IA
- Snacks and cereals from Kay's Naturals, Clara City, MN
- Granola from Gustola Granola, Minneapolis, MN
- Salsa from Salsa Del Diablo, Rochester, MN

Co-op Partners Warehouse Sampling:

- Wrangler Cantaloupe, Orchid Watermelon, and Heirloom Tomatoes, from Featherstone Farm, Rushford, MN
- Plain, tomato basil, herb, and chipotle Gouda from Eichten's Hidden Acres, Center City, MN
- Cherry Tomatoes from Ridgeland Harvest, Viroqua, WI
- Castle Rock Whole Milk from Castle Rock Dairy, Osseo, WI



Above: Prairie Kitchen hands out samples of their gluten free cookies.

Below: Gray Duck Chai hands out samples of their Chai blends

Peace Coffee

Peace Coffee celebrated their 20th Anniversary with us at the Fair this year. They handed out samples daily from 9am to 3pm, talked about the benefits of organic, fair trade, shade grown coffee, noting that coffee is a perennial crop, and gave out stickers and coupons to fair goers. Nearly 30,000 samples of their Twin Cities Blend and Blue Ox Blend coffee were given out over the 12 days of the Fair.

The theme of their booth was Paul Bunyan and Babe the Blue Ox. Visitors could take photos in their cut out, as seen below.



Above: Peace Coffee offer samples of organic, fair trade, shade grown, bike delivered coffee to exhibit visitors.

Left: Volunteers posing as Babe and the Blue ox.



Above: A volunteer offers samples of Featherstone Farm's Wrangler Cantaloupe donated by Co-op Partners Warehouse.

Prize Drawing

Names and email addresses of fairgoers were collected and entered to win one of several local food prizes. Prizes included: one Renewing the Countryside Local Food t-shirt, one Minnesota Homegrown Cookbook, two gift baskets of food donated to us by our samplers, and a one years supply of Peace Coffee. All prizes went to individuals randomly selected at the end of the fair, and were mailed out to winners.

Local Food Video

Episodes from Perennial Plate, an online weekly documentary series, were screened each evening starting at 7pm.

The Perennial Plate documentaries feature Chef and Activist, Daniel Klein and Co-producer/Camera girl Mirra Fine on their travels around Minnesota exploring Minnesota food and agriculture. Seven episodes relating to healthy, local, and perennial foods were screened each night. Topics included: making maple syrup, hunting morel mushrooms, eating wild edibles, the production of Thousand Hills beef, growing and harvesting cranberries, producing hard cider, and food waste in America.

While watching the documentary attendees had the opportunity to sample Whole Grain Milling popcorn from Welcome, MN drizzled with Organic Valley butter.

Kid's Activity Area

In the kid's activity area, children had the opportunity to do an array of different games and activities. Healthy eating activities were designed and provided by the HealthPartners' YumPower team and Renewing the Countryside provided opportunities to learn about local foods.

Activities included:

- Racing local vegetables down the Veggies Grand Prix race track
- Drawing on healthy foods coloring worksheets.
- A "try for five" guess what's in the box vegetable guessing game
- A HealthPartners spinning game where kids acted out vegetable related scenes.
- A slider game showing kids how much sugar is in an energy drink.
- We also participated in a building wide climate change bingo game organized by the MPCA. We asked players questions about perennial vegetables and fruits in Minnesota.

Additionally, HealthPartners provided handouts for visitors to take. These included "try for five" magnets, magazines to help get kids to eat their fruits and vegetables, kids activity sheets, and temporary tattoos of superpower vegetables.



Above: Volunteers help kids race vegetables on veggie tracks and apply temporary vegetable tattoos at the kid's activity area.

Left: HealthPartners volunteers at the kid's activity area.



Conclusions

The 2016 Healthy Local Food exhibit successfully engaged a large audience around the many aspects of the Forever Green Initiative and healthy local food in Minnesota. Of the food businesses and organizations who participated in our post event survey, nearly all reported that the event generated new leads and engagement; and 100% indicated that the experience was worthwhile and that they would like to participate in future years.

Some comments received in writing from visitors and volunteers after the fair include:

- "This was an exceedingly worthwhile experience and one of the most rewarding outreach activities I've ever participated in." - Volunteer
- "THANK YOU SO VERY MUCH for the opportunity. Well planned, well accommodated, and well done!"
-Gustola Granola, Sampler
- Thank you for the volunteer helpers with cutting and chopping. The organization of the event was great!
-Jennifer Monsos, Tansy's on Main, Chef

Renewing the Countryside would like to extend our gratitude to the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency for hosting the Healthy Local Food exhibit at the Eco Experience. We also thank all of our key partners for supporting the exhibit; and all the farmers, foodmakers, samplers, demonstration chefs, and other contributors, and volunteers who made this event a success.

Right Above: Ghandi Mahal chef and helpers prepare Sag Bahee on stage
Right Below: veggies from the Veggie Grand Prix vegetable racetrack.



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