

# A Garden Grows In Philadelphia

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While "the mixed vegetable grower is the bread and butter of the markets," several farmers also offered home-grown meats and animal products, including beef, lamb, poultry, milk, eggs, and cheese, said Matthew Wright, market director.

Orchard fruits are the second top-selling category behind mixed vegetables, he said.

The Food Trust sets up markets in partnership with local community groups such as a Chamber of Commerce. Establishing a strong community connection results in a bond of loyalty between farmers and their customers, according to Wright.

"Neighborhoods really take ownership in the markets," he said. "People know each other by name."

Wright noted several cases in which locals have pitched in, helping farmers set up and manage their stands.

The excitement of a weekly farmer's market enhances the environment even in "unglamorous locations" and some of the markets "almost become a town center," Wright said.

The Trust strives to eliminate any worries that farmers may have about parking difficulties or the safety of marketing in urban settings.

"There's a lot of misperception about coming to market in an urban environment," Wright said. "Our role is to eliminate security and parking problems."

Perry said that farmers are matched to markets according to the type of products they offer, and are encour-

aged to go to multiple markets.

The direct marketing experience can be contagious, with many farmers committing to two or three markets

"Once they get involved, they get bit with the bug," he said.

Growers typically bring in from \$500 to \$800 for one morning or afternoon market, with some exceeding \$1,000 per day during peak vegetable season, according to Perry.

However, it takes some time to garner a customer base that will bring maximum returns, Perry noted.

"New farmers (at the markets) should have reasonable expectations," he said. "Food shopping is habitual. It takes a long time to establish."

Farmers pay \$32 per week to participate in one market. Additional markets are \$24 per week, with the exception of "upscale" markets, which still require the higher fee, Perry said.

New markets slated to open for the 2002 season include one each in Telford, Phoenixville, and Norristown.

A \$100 "reward" is being offered to anyone referring a farmer who signs up for a market.

The Food Trust partners with the Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture, which helps the Trust underwrite advertisements and sponsor food programs such as those offered for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) and seniors.

The Food Trust also has an educational component, with a team working in schools to affect policy and provide in-

formation on nutrition, sustainable agriculture, and entrepreneurship.

Contact The Food Trust at (215) 568-0830 ext. 11, fax (215) 568-0882.



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