

# Eating Local

By Allie Black

You've heard the old saying, "You are what you eat." Ever stop to consider that the same holds true for the animals that provide us the meat, eggs and dairy products you eat? Or the veggies and produce you delicately pick each day for you and your family to consume? In this local community there is a demand that is growing each day for more local living.

"We need a personal connection to our foods. Making face to face connections with where your food comes from gives a great sense of security." That according to Matt Churnock who with Jed Park took one look at another empty parking lot and said "what can we do here that will benefit our community." Thus became the brainchild for *Valleydale Farmers Market* which first opened in 2009 to bring fresh, regional produce to Jefferson and North Shelby County.

With overwhelming support from the community, they are full steam ahead into their second season with a wide selection of local arts & crafts, entertainment and



fresh regional produce

tasty samples plus their main draw is all the fresh produce from local growers in Chilton, Blount and Jefferson County. Churnock says his local growers are in high demand and they sell out quickly by 10:30 most Saturdays because customers know it's all "picked that day or the night before and they know the farmer personally so they can trust the product they are eating."

That sense of personal connection within the local community is the fuel that leads Robyn Mitchell's co-op business called *Manna Market* as well. Located in Cahaba Heights, Mitchell practically spear headed the "local, organic" movement back 20 years ago when most people didn't even understand its importance. She started off small on her back porch just selling what she had on her farm and over time the demand grew to over 75 regulars who purchase local and organic produce, eggs, meats and dairy from her business run out of the local community center on Dolly Ridge Road. Every 2 weeks her customers can order local, organic and natural, fresh products from her website and pick them up from her already bagged and ready to take home.

So why all the fuss over local, clean and organic living? Research shows little changes do make a big difference. A new study published just this month in the *Journal Pediatrics* links pesticide exposure in children to a diagnosis of ADHD among several other issues as well. Diet is a major source of pesticide exposure in children, according to the National Academy of Sciences, and much of that exposure comes from favorite fruits and vegetables. Many wonder, how can we keep ourselves and our children safe from high levels of exposure? Nationally renowned doctors are encouraging families to choose local and organic when it comes to what you are

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putting into your mouth...thus keeping the levels of exposure at a minimum.

Mitchell knows all too well about this new research as she credits that to her illness back in 1994. After a bout with Toxic Strep A she says "I did tons of research and started off slowly eating cleaner and felt so good that I'm a living example today of what good eating can do for you. Plus it tastes so good!" She says her produce is picked and delivered quickly with little sitting time, which allows the flavors and nutrients to pop when it hits your mouth.

Churnock also agrees the success of his business is due to the trend nationally moving towards living locally in hopes of bringing down our carbon footprint and increasing the nutrients you are eating. Plus, "there is this great feeling from helping Alabama's economy." Historically many cultures embrace a local lifestyle of living for all of its advantages it brings to the table. Most Europeans revel in daily shopping and eating as they believe in buying it all fresh that day versus purchasing pre-packaged items that tend to sit for longer periods of time in stores and are more regularly filled with preservatives and additives.

For larger grocery stores like *Fresh*



fresh organic tomatoes from the farmers market

*Market* off of 280, Assistant Store manager Lloyd Caya says "our customers like organic groceries" and it helps that we carry specialty items allowing a wide variety when it comes to choosing fresh daily. As summer approaches the colors are breath taking when it comes to fresh produce and that means a plethora of ideas for the menu on your table.

So, whether you shop at a grocery store or choose the local farmers markets and co-op's, the demand is great and the supply is bustling with desire to be picked and put onto your table. So as nature beckons us outside warmly and sweetly to frolic in the backyard or play in the park, with all these delicious and easy to reach places at our fingertips, you can make mealtime another wonderful excuse to get outside and enjoy eating local.