

Local dinner attracts crowd

Environmental Campus Organization hosts their largest local foods dinner

BY EMILY BATTMER

Features Editor
index.featureseditor@gmail.com

This semester's local foods dinner is bringing together the Truman State community and local farmers with record crowds.

After selling out of tickets in just two days, junior Chelsea Krueger, vice president of ECO, said she is excited to host the 250-person crowd and raise awareness about eating locally.

The dinner combines food purchased from the University Farm and local farmers to create a meal that's made up of about 80 percent locally grown food, Krueger said.

She said planning the local foods dinner is her main responsibility with the club. Krueger has organized it twice during the past, but this is the biggest it has ever been, drawing a diverse crowd with varying reasons for supporting local food, she said.

"I think that's what I enjoy most about this event and this topic in general," Krueger said. "If you're conservative or liberal, all across the spectrum there's some reason why you should support local foods."

She said the cause has gained support from a wide variety of individuals, including state representative Zach Wyatt, R-2, who spoke at the local foods dinner last year.

Supporting local foods is important for small businesses, small farms and the environment, Krueger said.

She said it also makes people more aware of where their food comes from and fosters a sense of community.

The local foods community has grown since Krueger first began organizing the event during her freshman year. Her first dinner was planned for 150 people, and she said she is excited to see the number grow.

She said she has a vision to expand the event even further during the future, hoping to eventually create an all day event on the quad complete with speakers, local farmers and free, locally grown food for all students.

"It's a lofty goal, even compared to feeding 250 people, but that's where I see it moving in the future," she said.

Senior Grant Gregory, Funds Allotment Council chairman, said he also is happy to see the event grow.

"These kinds of events speak to a new generation of kids who are looking more at a sustainable environment," Gregory said. "I definitely think it's a really good, positive change."

FAC has helped fund the local foods dinner for a couple semesters, he said, because they see the event as a good way to promote Truman in Kirksville and put money back into the local community.

With such a large crowd attending the dinner, Gregory said the event is able to reach a diverse group and teach much of the student body about the food they eat and the farming community they live in.

"It makes the student body aware of our surroundings," Gregory said. "It shows that we don't have to eat out or participate in chain restaurants. We have a lot of mom and pop kind of places that offer local food and put money back in Kirksville."

The bigger crowd means more work for director of food services Lora Cunningham, who determines the menu and directs the preparation of the food. She said it takes longer than preparing for a normal banquet because of the local aspect.

She already has spent about 10 hours planning the dinner, and Cunningham said most of the local food won't even arrive until tomorrow, when she'll determine how much additional food she'll need for the dinner.

She can buy additional produce at the farmer's market to supplement the food that's already been purchased, she said. She and three or four others will spend all day Monday cooking the food, Cunningham said.

"It's not something I do every day because it does take so much time," she said.

Even though feeding 250 people with primarily locally grown food is a challenge, Cunningham said it's worth it to provide students with something they enjoy.

She said she is happy to see the event get so much support, and thinks it benefits students by exposing them to new food items they wouldn't have the opportunity to try otherwise, like fried green tomatoes and her squash casserole.

"I think it's great that more and more people are getting behind the local foods dinner," she said. "It's awesome that we are moving toward more local foods."

Fair explains study abroad



Sereno Adams/Index
Study Abroad Advisor Rosa Mendez speaks to a group of students at the Study Abroad Fair Sept. 13 in the Student Union Building. The fair gave students an opportunity to learn about other students' study abroad experiences and upcoming opportunities.

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