

Delicious Inspiration from New England
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Local food – more Nova Scotians are talking about it; buying it; enjoying it. Chefs are showcasing local ingredients on their menus, farmers’ markets are packed, and scarcely a day goes by without a discussion about local food in the news. While we revel in the seasonal taste sensations, we also worry about increasing fuel costs, decreasing numbers of farms, an aging farm population, and global food scares. There is a groundswell of interest in building a sustainable food system in Nova Scotia and we are now grappling with the question of how best to do this.

So, with promises of tasty food and delicious inspiration, the Food Miles team set off for New England on a research road trip to check out exciting initiatives taking place in Maine, Massachusetts, Vermont, and New York State. These states are similar to the Maritimes in many ways – climate, crops, prevalence of small and medium sized farms.

Maine, which falls into the same bioregion as Nova Scotia, has a population of 1.25 million, comparable to the almost one million living here. While we have more year-round farmers’ markets than they do, they have 10 times as many organic farms and an extremely successful annual Common Ground Fair that attracts thousands of people.

Here are some of our favourite inspirations from the trip:

1) **Matchmakers** – Individuals (non-profit or for-profit) who link farmers with institutions, such as schools or universities. Kelly Erwin in Massachusetts describes herself as a ‘dating service’ for farmers and food service managers. She understands the needs and challenges faced by each party. She has a directory of farmers, knows what each grows and in approximately what quantity, and helps them find schools and universities on their existing delivery routes. She develops resources for food service managers, such as local food cookbooks and seasonal availability charts. Five years into this initiative, she hopes that this job will become a permanent part of the Department of Agriculture.

2) **Support for CSAs** – A Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) system is one in which a farm sells “shares” at the beginning of the season. Their customers receive a weekly basket of fresh farm products. In Nova Scotia we have two or three CSAs – Maine has over 100! In fact, the Maine Organic Farmers and Gardeners Association (MOFGA) has a staff person devoted to CSAs, providing resources and support for farmers interested in this marketing approach.

3) **Support for new farmers** – Who is going to grow all the food we are now so interested in eating? An apprentice/journeyman program for new farmers put on by MOFGA is attracting interest and teaching valuable skills to up and coming farmers. Also, the Intervale in Vermont allows new farmers to gain experience and use common land and equipment without a huge investment. Once they’ve proven their ideas work, they move on to create their own farms.



Intervale's incubator farms

4) **Community Farms** – We visited five community farms in New England, one of which was Land's Sake in Weston, Massachusetts. In the 1970s, community leaders had the foresight to protect over 2000 acres of green space in the town – park, woodland, and farmland. Last year, Land's Sake produced about \$280,000 worth of produce and maple syrup, right in the middle of a suburb! They also sold firewood and timber, maintained green trails, ran educational programs for children and grew food for the Boston food bank.



Jen takes in the educational display at Natick Community Organic Farm, MA

For more information about these initiatives, check out the following websites:

MOFGA -- <http://www.mofga.org/>

Intervale -- <http://www.intervale.org/>

Land's Sake -- <http://www.landssake.org/index.htm>



Another kind of Homeland Security

Marla and Jen coordinate the Food Miles Project, a collaboration between the EAC and the Nova Scotia Federation of Agriculture.