Local Agriculture

Most food in the United States travels between 1,500 and 2,000 miles from farm to plate. Buying locally grown food is better for the environment, the community, and the consumer. When produce has to travel long distances, it loses nutrients and also requires additional packaging and the use of fossil fuels to transport it. Local farms also give consumers the ability to know how and where their food was produced. Morris Farm is one example of a small scale farm providing nutritious food for local Mainers.

History of Morris Farm

The Morris Farm was historically a family-owned working farm. When it was offered for sale, a large number of community members, from a number of various employment backgrounds, recognized memories of the previous owner’s kindness as a important piece of the area. They volunteered numerous hours to show a great level of support for the farm and the goals of the present Morris Farm Trust. The goal of the trust was to maintain working-farm status while providing an educational resource for all members of the community.

Development Pressures and Small Farms

Maine has one of the highest turnover rates from farmland to developed use. Encroaching development affects small farms in several ways. Rising land values and taxes, competition from corporate farms, and loss of the local agricultural economy are all forces that make it difficult for small farms to survive amidst the development. The Morris Farm Land Trust was founded in 1994 to preserve one of the last remaining small farms in the Wiscasset area. Because Morris Farm exists on a land trust, it will remain safe from development pressures, existing as an example of a small scale working farm and as an educational resource for community members.

History of Maine Farming

Maine has had a history of farming dating back to the 17th century when colonists first inhabited the state. At first, farming was done in order to provide sustenance for the needs of the farmer’s family until improvements in the transportation network, shifts of population into cities to participate in manufacturing industry, and increased competition from the West far Maine farms began to specialize crops and produce crops commercially. The West’s domination of the grain and livestock market determined Maine’s production on crops that we more perishable and claimed the dependence of Northeastern cities. These crops include dairy products, poultry, potatoes, blueberries and corn.

Greenhouses

A greenhouse is a specific structure intended for growing plants year round. Sunlight enters through a clear translucent cover, which heats the greenhouse. If the greenhouse gets too warm, it needs to be ventilated. If nights are too cool or during cold days, a heating system may be required. Greenhouses extend the growing season, which is especially valuable in our Maine climate. Cool weather crops can be grown and harvested year round. Common examples of these crops are lettuce, spinach, carrots, celery, radishes, and beets. Greenhouses can also be used to get a head start on growing long season crops, like tomatoes, cucumbers, and peppers.

Hothouses

A hothouse performs the same function as a greenhouse, however in a simpler form. A hothouse is constructed of half circle frames with a single plastic covering. One of the advantages of a hothouse is the ease of building and covering and the cost is lower. A hothouse is different from a greenhouse because it is generally not heated. Its main purpose is to extend the growing season. Plants can be grown in benches or directly into the ground floor.

Cows and Chickens at Morris Farm

Morris Farm is home to five cows, lovingly referred to as “the girls.” Each a mixed breed of Jersey (for rich milk high in fat and protein) and Holstein (for volume), the cows produce high quality milk ten months out of the year, which is bottled and sold unpasteurized. After calving in the spring, milk production increases as Maine’s weather warms and the girls go out to pasture, where they remain until late Fall. The cows frequently return to fresh pasture and are tracked by Morris Farm’s laying hens. The hens benefit from the insects roaming in the cows’ grazing, nibble on grasses, and spread manure left in their wake. In turn, poultry waste high in nitrogen makes an abundant forage when the cows return. The farm’s five cows can produce six to nine gallons of milk each day, together, the hens lay more than two dozen eggs every day, which are washed by schoolchildren in after-school programs, and brought fresh to customers. That’s it: from the animal to you.

Raspberries

Morris Farm produces about 1,300 pounds of raspberries each year, and they sell them and allow visitors to pick their own in July and August. Raspberry plants are hard to grow and take a lot of care, but the fruit is worth it every summer.

Apples

Growing apples takes a lot of work and is a year-long endeavor. At Morris Farm, the apple orchard is small and contains about 55 heirloom trees, managed organically. The trees are used as a “learning laboratory” by schoolchildren and adult workshop attendees. So far, the farm has not produced enough fruit to have to worry about selling or processing the harvest.

Weather Station

The weather station at Morris Farm isn’t up and running yet, but where it is built it will hopefully include ways to measure temperature, barometric pressure, humidity, and precipitation. Knowing what’s going on with the weather around you is an important part of farming.