



Harrison Market Gardens

World War II started the promotion of Victory Gardens, ways to be self-reliant when it came to food production. As people started providing enough food for themselves, their family, relatives and friends, these gardens permitted the government to ship more food supplies to American troops.



However, since the war, people have given in to the power of marketing during a time of unprecedented economic prosperity. An entire generation has come to rely on others to produce their food. As the prosperity of the '80s and '90s declined and our food sources have shown their vulnerability, people are beginning to realize they might have to do things differently.

Some of the choices we have to consider as families to meet food needs are: GMO's, organics, gluten-free, local, seasonal, sustainably sourced, free-range, grass-fed, and the list goes on and on. Rather than cowering under the media assault of doom and gloom people should view the current situation as a time of exciting change. People are adaptable and Americans have a heritage of adapting.

For those who do not have the space, ability or patience to start a garden there is Harrison Market Gardens run by Ben, Jill and Bill Beyer. Harrison Market Gardens in Winnebago County provides an 11- acre garden that produces more vegetables than most people know exist.

The Beyers open their garden to the public. Customers who like to pick the food they eat are welcome to try the U-pick system. If the customer prefers, they can take advantage of the CSA

model at the Beyer's market, where their share of vegetables can be picked for them, cleaned, and ready for pick up every, or every other, week.

“People buy a share early in the season that way we know how much to grow,” Beyer said “They can pay for the season and they have the choice of picking weekly or bi-weekly depending on what their family needs are. The CSA plan goes for 20 weeks (10 if biweekly) the U-pick plan usually continues until mid-November. U-pick families often pick for 26 (or 13) weeks.”

Many of the vegetables the Beyers raise are started as seedlings in the basement in square sections of earth so they have a head start when it is time to transfer them outdoors. Many crops are direct seeded. Some of the hardy crops lie dormant in the ground under straw throughout the winter just waiting for the ground to thaw and warm. “Every year is an experiment when you are gardening because no two years are alike.” Jill said.

In 2006, Harrison Market Gardens started with five weekly pickers. Last year, the farm fed over 100 families and sold to several restaurants in the Rockford area. Most of their customers are town people who wish they had time to garden. Many of the customers refer to the place as “my farm”. There is a wash-station where people can clean their produce if they so desire. Some people prefer to take the produce home and clean it there.

One of the advantages of Harrison Market Gardens is that it is easy to find only 7 miles North West of Rockford. The customer base is primarily growing by word of mouth. Visit their website for more information www.harrisonmarketgardens.com (Published July 2, 2015)