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BEDNER FAMILY BREAKS GROUND ON EXTENSIVE NEW FRESH MARKET

By Barbara Wunder, FFVA communications manager

Exciting things are happening at the intersection of State Road 7/U.S. 441 and Lee Road in Boynton Beach. The Bedner family, whose farming heritage dates to the 19th century, has broken ground on a 9,800-square-foot building that will house a retail store dedicated to offering fresh, locally grown produce to the Palm Beach County community.

Bedner's Farm Fresh Market aims to open as early as December if all goes well. Steve Bedner, a fourth-generation farmer and one of three brothers who have a hand in the

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The intersection of State Road 7/U.S. 441 will soon see a beautiful new farmers market thanks to the Bedner family.

family business, said, "We've dreamt about this for a long time."

The idea for the market took form because of the success of the family's spring garden, which brought forth delicious sweet corn, mainly for consumption by family and friends. But, year after year, demand far exceeded production. The Bedners finally decided to expand their horizons and bring their fresh harvested fruits and vegetables directly to the public. They will offer product from their own fields and from other local growers.

"So many farmers in Palm Beach County ship their goods away from where they were grown," said Bedner. "We want to bring ours to the community and make it a destination for families to come to learn more about what's grown locally."

"We want to make it a fun experience and educate people as we go," said Marie Bedner. Steve's whole family is involved in the planning and execution of the market. Steve's brother Charlie Suzanne along with their son, Jesse, work side-by-side with another brother, Bruce, his wife daughter Megan.

"Everything is already in the ground and growing, so we're putting Megan out with a roadsic wagon even before the market is built," said Steve.

The market is part of a trend toward buying local produce, which benefits the consumer and community. During the market's groundbreaking in September, Palm Beach County Commis Aaronson said the market is something he believes is needed.

"It's helping the economy in Palm Beach County and putting people to work. The Bedner family are the true farmers who want to continue farming in Palm Beach County. That's certainly some and I commend them for that."

USDA TRYING TO BUILD CONSUMPTION OF LOCAL PRODUCE



Various produce items grown steps away will be sold at the new market. In the meantime, Megan Bedner will operate a produce wagon at the site to give the community a taste of things to come.

The Bedners are at the leading edge of a trend USDA has thrown its weight behind with a new program called Know Your Farmer, Know Your Food, designed to begin a national conversation to help develop regional food systems and spur economic opportunity, according to a USDA news release. In the meantime, USDA says it will seek to use existing programs to help break down structural barriers that have inhibited local food systems from thriving."

So far, USDA's plans include an effort to connect local producers and consumers and promote local-scale sustainable agriculture. Those include \$3.4 million in funding from the Agriculture Management Agency for collaborative outreach and demonstration programs to socially disadvantaged and underserved communities. These programs would be designed to support Know Your Farmer goals by helping producers and direct marketing practices. For example, nearly \$10,000 will go to the University of Minnesota to bring together experts on food safety and regulations for a discussion of marketing to institutions such as schools, colleges, universities, hospitals and other health care facilities.

Another facet of Know Your Farmer, Know Your Food is a pilot project underway at a few locations across the country that helps bring local food to lower-income families. The markets accept SNAP and WIC coupons, which are worth twice as much as they would be in conventional supermarkets.

LOCAL FOOD MOVEMENT IS GRADUALLY GROWING

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People in the agriculture industry say they see more people than ever paying attention to their food. In announcing the Know Your Farmer, Know Your Food program, Deputy Secretary of Agriculture Kathleen Merrigan said, "Americans are more interested in food and agriculture than other times since most families left the farm."

Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack also brought up the economic benefits of bringing local markets to the market. "An American people that is more engaged with its food supply will create new income opportunities for American agriculture. Reconnecting consumers and institutions with local markets will stimulate economies in rural communities, improve access to healthy, nutritious food for our citizens, and decrease the amount of resources to transport our food."

THE WAY IT SHOULD BE

Marie Bedner knows that it's high-quality produce that really brings customers to farmers markets. This year, the family offered a preview of what it will sell in the new market from a rented building event called the Delray Affair. Crowds were attracted to brilliantly colored peppers, tomato heads of romaine lettuce.

"They had never seen 'real' lettuce like that, so dark green and fresh," Marie said. "They were going to like it, so they would just buy a little." It turns out that they liked it. "They were back the next day looking for more. We sold out of everything."

"We look forward to exposing people to the taste of vegetables and fruit that go from the farm to the fork," said Steve. We know they're going to keep coming back."

In the weeks before the grand opening of Bedner's Farm Fresh Market, the family plans to sell not only Megan's produce wagon, but also a field where customers can pick their own strawberries and tomatoes. For updates, go to www.bedners.com. The new facility will be located at 12033 S. U.S. Highway 441 in Boynton Beach.

(Photo at top: From left - Marie, Megan, Bruce and Steve Bedner)



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