

From Dirt to Dining: Lisa's Central Market's farm-direct produce

Truckee, Calif., (April, 2003) – The very special and unique relationship between the staff at Lisa's Central Market and the growers that stock their shelves with delicious produce is not only changing the experience of grocery shopping, but also helping to put scrumptious meals on the dinner table. The driving force behind the urban farmer's market is to provide the most flavorful food for customers by offering farm-direct produce; the bonus is that their produce is organic and comes from small, family-owned farms. Remarkably, the neighborhood-style grocery store is able to keep their prices down through sourcing directly, rather than going through a broker, and through personal relationships with their growers developed through years of work in the industry. The market's merchants readily extend this personal connection to their customers about what they're buying, where it's coming from and go the extra mile to share recipes for cooking fabulous meals.

“Short of growing fruits and vegetables in your own backyard, buying from Lisa's Central Market is the freshest way to get produce,” said Gary Peixoto of Lakeside Organic Gardens who has been working with the market's namesake, Lisa Boudreau, for almost a decade. In some cases, he explained, it's even better than your own backyard. “Organic guidelines stipulate that the ground has to be completely pesticide free for three years before being certified. Most people don't test the soil in their yards.”

By purchasing produce directly from growers who are inspired by a passion for agriculture and who adhere to good farming practices, Lisa's Central Market offers incredibly flavorful and fresh items. “The most basic items – rice, beans, broccoli, zucchini – taste the sweetest when the farmer takes good care of the soil,” explained Kirsten Keim, a merchant who has been with Lisa's Central Market for five years. “Healthy plants are like healthy people. Weak plants are more likely to get sick and be attacked by pests.”

The growers who supply Lisa's Central Market are sensitive to consumer tastes and preferences, leading them to cultivate only the best varieties and instilling a tendency to sacrifice quantity for quality. “Not all peaches are created equal,” said Tom Underwood of Sierra Heights Marketing and France Ranch, in Porterville, Calif. “Lisa will call to tell us which variety of peaches her customers are enjoying versus the ones that aren't juicy enough. We might get rid of an entire crop if we get enough negative feedback.”

When produce arrives at Lisa's Central Market, which is generally within two to five days of being picked, the staff carefully sorts through the crates performing quality control before stocking the items on their shelves. Because they work

directly with growers, Lisa often receives fruit 'straight from the vine' and can instantly address any issues about quality. And the money saved by not going through a distributor is translated directly to customers – by passing through fewer hands there is less cost involved which means lower retail prices.

The merchants at Lisa's Central Market premiere items that are new and fresh to make choices easy for customers, slicing up samples and encouraging volume deals along with recipes for new dishes and ways to freeze seasonal items for later use. Keim, who has a degree in sculpture and grew up farming in her back yard in San Diego, takes pride in the merchandising aspect of her job. "Produce is functional sculpture - taking care of perishables is like handling soft clay and building a solid display is all about color and shape," she said.

Growers and customers alike appreciate the enthusiasm surrounding the produce at Lisa's Central Market. "They are very innovative in the way they display their products, very knowledgeable about the produce industry and educate their customers about what they are buying," said Maureen Royal of CF Fresh, a sales representative for multiple growers in the Pacific Northwest, Canada and South America. It's this enthusiasm coupled with an attention to cultivating relationships with both growers and customers that makes a trip to Lisa's Central Market an experience unlike the typical supermarket.

For more information on Lisa's Central Market, call 530-582-2280 or visit their web site at www.lisacentralmarket.com. Stop by the Truckee, Calif. store, located at 10418 Donner Pass Road or the Reno, Nev. store, located in the Magnolia Village at 6990 South McCarran Blvd. at Lakeside.