

ALL LOCAL, ALL YEAR

Harvest of Hope Winter Markets

BY WENDY WASSERMAN

Nick Wallace is a farmer in Keystone, Iowa, a town of less than 700 people located between Tama and Cedar Rapids. He sells angus beef raised on his century-old family farm. His cattle are grass-fed and custom processed to meet the specifications of his customers, who he works with closely to make sure they get the cuts they want and know how to use them. Nick primarily relies on the internet and buying clubs around the state to sell Wallace Farm meats. But in the winter, Nick is often at a table at a Harvest of Hope farmer's market.

Harvest of Hope winter markets are sponsored by the Churches' Center for Land and People (CCLP), an ecumenical, all-volunteer, non-profit organization based in Middleton, WI. These winter markets are held in donated church spaces around the region, and nearly every winter weekend, there is a Harvest of Hope market happening somewhere in Iowa, Wisconsin and Illinois. The markets start in November, and will go through the end of March. Offerings vary from fresh meats, root vegetables, bulbs, apples, honey, dried spices, eggs and garlic, to other artisanal products like handspun wool and crafts. Specific vendors might change depending on market dates and location, but all of the participating farmers donate a small percentage of their sales to raise money for the Harvest of Hope emergency fund, which provides emergency assistance for small family farmers in dire need.

The Harvest of Hope emergency fund was established in Wisconsin in 1986 in response to the farm crisis. Since then, over \$700,000 has been allocated as emergency grants to over 1200 farming families in that state. CCLP started the winter farmer's market program in Wisconsin in 2003 to raise money and visibility for the emergency fund. The winter market/fundraising model is new to Iowa, as is the Iowa version of the emergency fund. "We have an average of 6 or 7 vendors at each of the Harvest of Hope markets [in Iowa] this year. It's our second year in Iowa and we're building the program as we go along," says Jim Earles, Iowa Project Director for CCLP. "Each of our vendors has a mission of sustainability and the happier the vendors are, the better the turnout."

Applecourt Orchards has a regular booth at the winter market. The trees in their Vinton orchards may be in winter hibernation, but the business is still in full swing off season pressing cider and sorting apples. All Applecourt Orchard cider is pressed as the season goes, and has a full, fresh and almost addicting flavor. During the summer market season, Applecourt Orchard booths are usually packed and it's hard to chat. Yet, Harvest of Hope winter markets give Allen Israel, the orchard manager, a chance to talk to apple lovers about his fruit. "The vendors are



Photos by Kurt Michael Friese

really good and happy to be here”, he comments as he advises a customer as to the best baking apple for her forthcoming pie at a Harvest of Hope market earlier in the season in Solon.

Harvest of Hope markets also offer an opportunity to find the unusual. Johnson Honey Farm is a regular at these winter markets, showcasing their specialty creamed honey, which comes in 16 flavors. “We are one of the very few licensed kitchens to make creamed honey” say Bill Johnson, owner of the small business. “We are in some selected retail shops, but prefer to sell directly at market to keep our prices low.”

Another unusual vendor is Wallace Farms themselves. In addition to the beef, they also vend wild Alaskan Salmon, which is caught fresh by Shelley and Jerry Brennamen, an Iowa couple who run a fishing camp along Alaska’s Kenai River. The fish is flash frozen or smoked as soon as it is caught, keeping it moist and flavorful for its journey. Nick often sells out at market, which is good for him, good for his customers, and best for Harvest of Hope, which continues to support farms all year long.

Details

Harvest of Hope Winter Markets locations rotate around the state during the winter season. For more information and to verify dates/times, contact the Churches’ Center for Land and People online at www.CCLPMidwest.org or at 563.588.2935. Markets are happening through late March in the following locations:

Saturday, February 17: 10 a.m. – 2 p.m.
Christ Episcopal Church
623 N. 5th St.
Burlington

Saturday, March 3: 10 a.m. – 2 p.m.
Collegiate United Methodist Church
& Welsey Foundation
2622 Lincoln Way
Ames

Saturday, March 10: 10 a.m. – 2 p.m.
St. Matthew’s Lutheran Church
1780 White St.
Dubuque

Saturday, March 24: 10 a.m. – 2 p.m.
St. Luke’s Episcopal Church
2410 Melrose Drive
Cedar Falls

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PAULA POUNDSTONE

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