

RESTAURANT GUIDE

# Farm markets offer fun and freshness

BY SHERRI & GRAYDON DECAMP

Special to the Record-Eagle

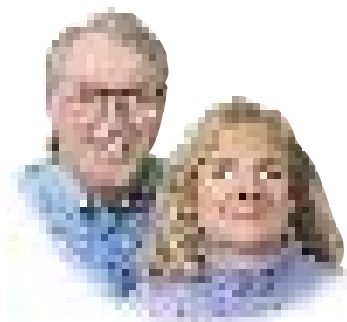
One day in June, on our way home from the Straits, we detoured to Bluff Gardens in Harbor Springs to get some baby asparagus for dinner and pick up a bunch of spring radishes for the salad.

Back on the road, we sampled a radish to see if they were as good as they looked. The sample was so good that we had another, and another, and . . . by the time we got home to Elk Rapids, they were all gone.

Nothing counts like freshness when it comes to food, and among the delights of traveling about northern Lower Michigan this time of year are the farm stands and markets where you can buy fruits and vegetables that were alive and growing only hours before.

Each spring we eagerly await the opening of the farm stores. One we watch closely is Wells Family Farm on Elk Lake Road in Williamsburg, whose season starts with asparagus, maple syrup and the earliest spring greens. Then the seasonal delights parade through summer and into autumn, with strawberries, leaf lettuces, broccoli, cucumbers, beans, beets, raspberries, squash, apples and pumpkins.

One of our favorite moments of summer is when their green zebra-stripe tomatoes appear on the counter. Wells is one of a handful of area farms offering "community-supported agriculture" to folks who want produce at its peak. They pay for a share in



## THE CONNOISSEUR UP NORTH

advance, and then each week pick up their portion of whatever's ripe and ready. Wells is part of a national network of such farms ([www.localharvest.org](http://www.localharvest.org)).

The Michigan Department of Agriculture maintains a registry of farm and farmers' markets at [www.michigan.gov/mda](http://www.michigan.gov/mda). Our list is hardly complete. It omits the ubiquitous roadside stands and places that sell their own fresh fruit and someone else's garden produce, pies, preserves, condiments, maple syrup and honey. Here, alphabetically, are farm markets we know and enjoy either for consistently good quality or some specialty or other.

Altonen Orchards, US - 31S, Elk Rapids (264-8052) is one of our favorite market stands. We don't even think about going anywhere else for sweet corn or fruit pies. Their strawberries were awesome this spring, too. They grow and sell seasonal fruits and vegetables up to and including pumpkins, from mid-May through color season, from 9 a.m.-7 p.m. (6 p.m. in spring and fall).



Record-Eagle/Meegan M. Reid

Jim Beaton, owner of TLC Tomatoes, explains the hydroponic system to visitors.

Bill's Farm Market, 9950 E. Mitchell (347-6735) is known in and around Petoskey for its seasonal berries, asparagus, fruit, new potatoes, sweet corn, peas, tomatoes and beans. Daily from June until the last Christmas tree is gone.

Bluff Gardens, 721 W. Lake Road, Harbor Springs (526-5571), now in its 70th year, specializes in hand-painted Faience pottery, but also still offers unimaginably fresh miniature vegetables and house-made preserves and salsas to the area's knowing cooks. They also sell private-label preserves, dips, relishes, sauces and dressings at the store and by catalog (800-968-5571).

Cherry View Orchards, 1644 U.S. 31N, Kewadin (264-9807) has seasonal berries and fruit. We go there to buy their sugarless fruit butters, jams and jellies. Daily 9-7, June-Oct.

Friske's Farm Market, U.S. 31, Atwood (599-2604) is one of the most visible markets along U.S. 31. Olga Friske herself will probably greet you in the store. It's worth hunting about among the gifts and knickknacks to find the seasonally fresh fruit and produce. They also

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