

CLEARWATER, MANITOBA

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Harvest Moon Local Food Initiative

Who's YOUR farmer? This question is often asked by members of the Harvest Moon Local Food Initiative as a reminder that while we have doctors, mechanics, dentists, handymen, accountants, and sometimes lawyers that we know well, most of us don't know of anyone personally who can provide local, safe, healthy and nutritious food!

Food sources are often mysterious: kids in cities have often never seen a live farm animal, people don't understand what is actually in their purchased dinners, and our vegetables, grains, and meat often travel hundreds of miles before it ends up on our plate. In addition, it is unclear to consumers how, and by what standards, this food was grown or raised. In 2001, the primary grade school and grain elevator in Clearwater, Manitoba closed down and some local farmers began to dream about how they could turn adversity into opportunity. What emerged was a plan to use the school as a learning

centre that would enable people to engage in creative ways with agriculture, and with food and rural community issues. Further brainstorming with community members also led to the creation of the first annual Harvest Moon Festival in 2002, as well as the establishment of the Harvest Moon Society (HMS) shortly afterward.

The Harvest Moon Festival, while limiting attendance to 1000 participants, has become a well known event for Manitobans; an important source of revenue for the HMS; a key strategy for attracting visitors to the community of Clearwater; an opportunity to link people from rural and urban settings; and an →



→ important platform for celebrating the harvest season and local food production. The festival is completely organized by volunteers and offers music, a Fair Trade Fair, a guided nature walk, and a variety of educational workshops for all ages.

The primary focus of the HMS is to build “Health Land and Healthy Communities” by creating long-term rural environmental, economic, and food systems sustainability. They do this by bridging urban and rural communities, creating a more common understanding of food and educating consumers on why food producers are important. Education has been a key strategy of the Harvest Moon Society. They have turned the old Clearwater School into the “HMS Learning Centre” where they host workshops and other activities. The HMS is currently looking to expand their capacity to include a self-guided trail, a summer kitchen, dorm rooms, ornamental and edible gardens, and a greenhouse. They have also built linkages with the Prairie Spirit School division, University of Manitoba’s architecture department and Environmental Conservation Laboratory, and have established a “New Moon Kids Camp.”

Beyond festivals and education, the HMS is also committed to creating economic opportunities for rural producers as a way to re-localize our food economy. Their first step has been to create the Harvest Moon Local Food Initiative. This initiative is a group of nine farming families and two family-owned meat shops in Southeastern Manitoba. These farmers believe: in healthy land and healthy

communities; that everyone should have access to local, tasty and healthy farm fresh food; farmers should be paid a fair price for growing this food; in a more small-scale, sustainable and fair food system that better serves the interests of the land, our families and local communities; and that we all have an important role to play in order to make this happen. Farm produce includes pastured poultry and pork, grass-fed beef and lamb, natural beef, organic vegetables and flour. Food-buyers can

purchase items online or directly from the farmer. Much of the Initiative’s online business comes from Winnipeg, so on-line orders are usually delivered to one central location. They are now looking to establish a network of purchasing groups in Winnipeg based out of homes and businesses who are looking to support local, fair, and clean food as well as getting to know

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“who their farmer is.”

The Harvest Moon Local Food Initiative is part of the larger HMS strategy that is harnessing the power of local grassroots action to create meaningful change. In addition to bringing people and economic activity to Clearwater through a festival model, they are actively engaging and educating Manitoba’s about our food, our food systems, and our farmers, while also creating economic opportunities for rural producers that every one of us can participate in to re-localize our food economy.