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5-1-2012 JENNIFER HACK

Klaus Karbaumer of Karbaumer Farm in Platte City, Mo. uses Belgian draft horses instead of a tractor to plow his fields. Visitors to the farm can take rides on a wagon pulled by the hefty horses.



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Sarah Gish

It's a delicious time of year to live in the Midwest.

The first crops of the season — asparagus, lettuce, peas — are bursting from the rich soil. Wobbly calves follow their mothers through green fields along I-70. Mushrooms and wildflowers are sprouting, and so are farmers markets across the metro.

Cravings for locally grown food could be stronger than ever. According to a National Restaurant Association survey of 1,800 chefs, locally sourced meat and produce are the top two food trends of 2012. Kansas City restaurants are spoiled: The metro's surrounded with farms that produce top-quality ingredients. Heirloom vegetables. Hormone- and antibiotic-free milk. Free-range chicken and eggs, and artisan cheese made with milk from grass-fed sheep.

Eating those ingredients is satisfying. But learning about how and where they're made is nourishing on a deeper level, says Sarah Dehart, a field crew member at Gibbs Road Farm in Kansas City, Kan. Twice a month, volunteers line up at the farm to weed, seed and do all sorts of unglamorous work in an attempt to learn exactly how food gets from farm to plate.

Dehart sees her farm's growing number of volunteers and visitors as part of a movement to close the gap between farmers and eaters. She says joining that movement is as easy as going to your local farmers market and striking up a conversation.

"If you don't talk to your farmer, you might not find out what his favorite cucumber is," Dehart says. "Or which tomato stands up well when you're making paste. Or which batch of arugula is more mild and tender because it's from the first crop of seeds."

Want to see where your food comes from? Consider volunteering at the Gibbs farm or touring a local farm.

Urbavore, an 11-acre urban farm 5 miles east of the Country Club Plaza, is especially open to visitors. On Saturdays starting in June, you can drop off compost, buy fruits and vegetables grown

on the spot, or tour the farm with a map that tells you where to find the strawberry field, potato patch, geese pond and chicken pasture.

Urbavore farmers Brooke Salvaggio and Dan Heryer planted an orchard on the farm that should begin bearing fruit in five years. They're looking forward to inviting customers to pick their own apples and pears.

They say their goal is to educate the community about urban agriculture. And ultimately, to create a more sustainable and nourishing food culture in Kansas City.

Urbavore and Gibbs Road Farm aren't the only farms working at that goal: Here are 20 farms that welcome visitors (and in some cases, volunteers) with open fields.

Shatto Milk Co.

What to do: Milk a cow, pet baby calves and sample Shatto products such as cotton candy-flavored milk and ice cream sandwiches — all made with milk from cows raised without growth hormones on rolling green pastures.

When to go: On Family Day at the Farm, 11 a.m. to 3 p.m. June 23. Tours are also available by appointment.

Where: 9406 N. Highway 33, Osborn, Mo.

More info: 816.930.3862, shattomilk.com

Weston Red Barn Farm

What to do: This autumn oasis is a wonderland for kids — there are chickens, pigs, donkeys and pony rides. Adults will dig the barn-like country store, which sells rustic home decor as well as local peaches, berries, corn and other in-season produce. The farm is particularly popular in September and October, when the apple orchard is ripe, the kettle corn's poppin' and the pumpkin patch bursts with gourds of every size, shape and color.

When to go: The country store and farm are open from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. Monday through Saturday and noon to 5 p.m. Sunday between Memorial Day and Labor Day. Between Labor Day and the first week in November, hours are 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. daily.

Where: 16300 Wilkerson Road, Weston, Mo.

More info: 816.386.5437, westonredbarnfarm.com

Deanna Rose Children's Farmstead

What to do: Entertain kiddos at this 12-acre, turn of the century-style farm with pony rides, a fishing pond, flower and vegetable gardens and more than 200 animals. You might even get to bottle-feed a baby goat. Admission is free Monday-Thursday and \$2 per person Friday-Sunday. Kids under 2 get in free.

When to go: The Farmstead's open from 9 a.m.-5 p.m. daily through Oct. 31. Those hours extend to 8 p.m. on Tuesdays and Thursdays in the summer, between Memorial Day and Labor Day.

Where: 13800 Switzer Road, Overland Park

More info: 913.897.2360

Karbaumer Farm

What to do: Have a picnic, relax by a bonfire or take a ride on a wagon pulled by this farm's Belgian draft horses, which have hooves the size of dinner plates. This farm is seriously old-fashioned: The Karbaumers don't use chemicals, and they use their horses — not a tractor — for plowing.

When to go: Tours and farm visits by appointment only. Send email to karbaumerfarm@yahoo.com for more info.

Where: 12200 Missouri 92, Platte City

More info: karbaumerfarm.com

The Berry Patch

What to do: Pick your own blueberries and blackberries, buy blueberry plants and homemade muffins and cobblers.

When to go: The Berry Patch sells frozen berries year-round from 9 a.m. to noon on Tuesdays and Saturdays, but the you-pick patch is only open when blueberries are in season, typically June through the first half of August. During those months, the Patch is open 7 a.m. to 9 p.m. Tuesday through Saturday. The smaller blackberry patch bears fruit in August and September.

Where: 22509 State Line Road, Cleveland, Mo.

More info: 816.618.3771, theberrypatchonline.com

Knapp Family Farms

What to do: Tour a six-decade-old family farm that raises cows and pigs in pastures, without the use of growth hormones or antibiotics. The animals here are locavores: They eat corn that's grown right on the farm.

When to go: Tours by appointment only.

Where: 18411 158th St., Bonner Springs

More info: 913.724.2001, knappfamilyfarms.com

Somerset Ridge Vineyard & Winery

What to do: Stroll through a lush vineyard 20 miles south of Kansas City, then sample wines made from grapes grown without the use of pesticides or synthetic fertilizer. The winery hosts gardening classes, live music and other special events. A master cigar roller will be at the winery on Sunday.

When to go: The tasting room is open from 11 a.m. to 5 p.m. Wednesday through Saturday and noon to 5 p.m. Sunday.

Where: 29725 Somerset Road, Paola, Kan.

More info: 913.491.0038, somersetridge.com

Stone Pillar Vineyard and Winery

What to do: This Olathe vineyard pairs its locally made wine with appetizers at regular wine-pairing parties and features a summer concert series every Friday between May 25 and Oct. 19. Tickets to the concerts are \$5 each, or \$50 for a season pass.

When to go: The tasting room is open from noon to 6 p.m. Wednesday through Sunday. For more info on the wine-pairing parties and concerts, go to stonepillarvineyard.com.

Where: 11000 S. Woodland Road, Olathe

More info: 913.839.2185, stonepillarvineyard.com

Louisburg Cider Mill

What to do: Sip local apple cider and root beer floats made with locally brewed Lost Trail soda at this cider mill's country store, famous for its fresh cider doughnuts. In September and October, watch the cider press in action or explore a corn maze and pumpkin patch.

When to go: The general store is open from 8 a.m. to 6 p.m. Monday through Saturday and 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. Sunday. The corn maze and pumpkin patch are open in September and October.

Where: 14730 Kansas 68, Louisburg, Kan.

More info: 913.837.5202, louisburgcidermill.com

Fire Lake Camp

What to do: Pick your own asparagus, picnic near a lavender field, attend a gardening class, kayak or dine al fresco on farm-fresh dinners prepared with local ingredients. Saturday's Cinco de Mayo farm dinner (\$50 per person) features paella made with local chicken and pork, empanadas made with local beef and, of course, freshly picked and prepared asparagus.

When to go: Check the website for the latest info on classes and farm dinners, or make an appointment by calling or sending email to info@firelakecamp.com.

Where: 29580 Lone Star Road, Paola, Kan.

More info: 913.544.9260, firelakecamp.com

Bauman's Cedar Valley Farms

What to do: See chickens, cows, turkeys and ducks raised naturally in pastures, without hormones or antibiotics. You can also tour the onsite processing plant.

When to go: Tours by appointment only.

Where: 24161 N.W. Kentucky Road, Garnett, Kan.

More info: 785.448.2239

Green Dirt Farm

What to do: Tour a working sheep dairy and creamery, peek inside the milking parlor and cheese kitchen and taste cheese made with milk from grass-fed sheep. Green Dirt Farm also offers wildlly

popular farm dinners and cheese appreciation events. This year's farm dinners sold out almost immediately after they were announced, but tickets to some of the cheese appreciation events (\$40) are still available.

When to go: Tours are by appointment only at 2:30 and 5 p.m. Sundays. Tickets cost \$8. For details on specific events, visit the website.

Where: 20363 Mount Bethel Road, Weston, Mo.

More info: 816.386.2156, greendirtfarm.com

Crum's Heirlooms

What to do: Learn about organic growing methods as you tour a working farm that supplies heirloom fruits and vegetables to Kansas City restaurants such as Bluestem and Room 39.

When to go: Crum's participates in the annual Kaw Valley Farm Tour, which is Oct. 6-7 this year. The farm also gives tours by appointment. Email crumnob@sunflower.com for more info.

Where: 16211 Stillwell Road, Bonner Springs, Kan.

More info: 913.422.1630, kawvalleyfarmtour.com

Holy-Field Vineyard and Winery

What to do: Sample Holy-Field wines at this 16-acre vineyard, which packs its calendar with all sorts of fun events. Murder mystery dinners, live jazz, an Oktoberfest celebration and grape harvests on Sundays in August and September are on this year's lineup.

When to go: The tasting room is open from 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. Monday through Friday, 9:30 a.m. to 6 p.m. Saturday and noon to 6 p.m. Sunday. Sign-ups begin in July for those popular harvest days.

Where: 18807 158th St., Basehor, Kan.

More info: 913.724.9463, holyfieldwinery.com

Vesecky Family Farms

What to do: See chickens, turkeys, ducks, geese and guineas roaming on a family farm. There are hay rides for larger groups. Purchase free-range chicken and duck year-round and heritage turkey in the fall.

When to go: Tours by appointment only. Send email to veseckfamilyfarms@yahoo.com for more info.

Where: 1814 N. 600 Road, Baldwin City

More info: 785.594.3477, veseckfamilyfarms.com

Gibbs Road Farm

What to do: Get your hands dirty working on a certified organic vegetable farm. Volunteers here can be a part of the entire growing process, from seeding and weeding to harvesting and washing.

When to go: The farm welcomes volunteers for Work the Farm days from 9 a.m. to noon every second and fourth Saturday of the month. Send email to volunteering@cultivatekc.org for more info.

Where: 4223 Gibbs Road, Kansas City, Kan.

More info: 913.831.2444, www.cultivatekc.org

Grinter's Sunflower Farm

What to do: Park alongside rolling acres of blooming sunflowers to take photos or pick as many blooms as you like — just leave \$1 per head in the honor box.

When to go: When the sunflowers are blooming, usually mid-August through early September.

Where: This year's sunflower field is on U.S. 24-40 between Lawrence and Tonganoxie, about 7 miles northeast of the "Teepee Junction" intersection where North Third Street meets U.S. 24-40.

More info: krisgrinter.blogspot.com

Screamin' Oaks Farm

What to do: Tour a working farm with enough roaming animals to fill Noah's Ark. The cast includes chickens, cows, goats, ducks, donkeys, geese, horses, turtles and peacocks. Go home with fresh goat's milk ice cream and peacock feathers.

When to go: Group tours are by appointment from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. Monday through Saturday. Admission costs \$5 for kids 2-15 and \$2 for adults. Kids younger than 2 get in free. To schedule, send an email to screaminoaksfarm@yahoo.com.

Where: 18171 198th St., Tonganoxie

More info: 913.845.2775

Pendleton's Country Market

What to do: Pick your own asparagus (through mid-May) or buy in-season produce and flowers grown on this picturesque farm in the Kaw River Valley. The on-site butterfly house is open August through October.

When to go: The market's hours vary by season, but in May it's open from 8 a.m. to 6 p.m. Monday through Saturday and noon to 5 p.m. Sunday.

Where: 1446 E. 1850 Road, Lawrence

More info: 785.843.1409, pendletons.com

Urbavore Urban Farm

What to do: Tour a working vegetable farm and budding orchard planted in a surprisingly beautiful space just 5 miles east of the Plaza. Farmers Brooke Salvaggio and Dan Heryer make easy-to-follow maps so you won't get lost wandering the 13.5-acre urban farm, which features a garlic patch, chicken coop, strawberry field and a very friendly dog named Zeus. You can purchase eggs and seasonal produce from the farm stand and drop off unwanted compost on the pile near the parking lot — Salvaggio and Heryer will use it to nourish growing vegetables. FYI, Urbavore accepts SNAP, the food stamp program funds.

When to go: The farm stand is open 2 to 6 p.m. on Saturdays, June through October.

Where: 5500 Bennington Ave.

More info: badseedkc.com