

Organic On-Farm Market Open Saturdays in Libertyville

By Posted By ecummisford, Community Contributor

Jul 6, 2014

Radical Root Farm, Libertyville's first certified organic farm, is open to the public from 8 a.m. to 1 p.m. on Saturdays, now through October. Locally grown products available for sale include seasonal certified organic vegetables and pastured eggs produced on-site as well as pastured pork, grass-fed beef, organic grains and other products from other local farm partners. Radical Root is located at the centennial Casey Farm at 31330 Milwaukee Ave., just south of Casey Road. The farm entrance is across the street from the dog exercise area at Independence Grove.

Radical Root owners Alex Needham and Alison Parker have been farming since 2009, and are alumni of the Farm Business Development Center (FBDC), a Liberty Prairie Foundation program that supports the development of successful family farm businesses. Radical Root's sold-out community supported agriculture (CSA) program serves customers in Grayslake and Libertyville as well as the Lakeview, Edgewater, Lincoln Park, and Logan Square neighborhoods in Chicago. They also participate in Chicago's Logan Square and Green City Farmers Markets, and their new on-site farm stand.

1

Modeled after the business incubator model of the tech industry, the Farm Business Development Center allows new farmers to establish their business on a small acreage and gradually scale-up to serve the local food needs of the region. The Farm Business Development Center provides certified organic land, farm infrastructure, and a positive learning environment that helps beginning farmers develop the entrepreneurial skills, farming knowledge and market networks needed to become successful professional farmers. Farmers are a part of the incubator for approximately five years, at which time they "graduate" to the next level of independence.

"The Farm Business Development Center has helped us immensely with growing our business," says Alex Needham, co-owner of Radical Root Farm. "We're thrilled to continue to grow our business at Casey Farm."

Radical Root's transition to Casey Farm was made possible through an innovative partnership between Conserve Lake County, the Lake County Forest Preserve District, and the Liberty Prairie Foundation. In 2010 the Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning (CMAP) adopted the GO TO 2040 regional plan, the first comprehensive regional plan since 1909. Sustainable Local Food was identified as one of 12 regional priority areas within the theme of Livable Communities. This created momentum for diverse organizations to partner to advance local food initiatives, and set the stage for Casey Farm's transition from conventional corn and soybean production to sustainable local food farming.

Conserve Lake County purchased Casey Farm in 2007, in partnership with Libertyville Township and the Lake County Forest Preserve District. Casey Farm is located in the 5,800-acre Liberty Prairie Reserve, where public and private landowners have partnered for more than 20 years on land conservation, resulting in 3,400 acres of protected land. This strategic land acquisition allowed the organizations to preserve open space in the Reserve and enable a critical trail connection. Libertyville Township restored their parcel to prairie, while the others initially remained in conventional agriculture.

"We're very pleased with this partnership at Casey Farm," says Jim McConoughey, President of Conserve Lake County. "This has been a great opportunity to demonstrate farming methods that take care of the land and water

while responding to community demand for locally-raised foods and honoring the farming heritage of the area. It shouldn't be forgotten that local food farming like Radical Root's enterprise at Casey Farm gives a boost to the local economy."

The Liberty Prairie Foundation's 10-year lease for Casey Farm is the first long-term lease of publically owned land for sustainable local food farming in the Chicago region. The Liberty Prairie Foundation is the leaseholder at Casey Farm and is subleasing the property to Radical Root for organic farming operations. The Foundation plans to use this pilot project to help create more opportunities for Farm Business Development Center graduates to transition other public and privately owned agricultural land into local food production to meet the demand of the Chicago region.

"We're very proud of the success of Radical Root and all the other farmers who have come through our Farm Business Development Center and their increasing ability to provide the Chicago region with locally grown organic food" said Brad Leibov, President and CEO of the Liberty Prairie Foundation.

For more information about Radical Root's Saturday farm stand, visit www.radicalrootfarm.com. Further information about the independent organizations partnering to bring sustainable agriculture to Casey Farm is at each of their respective websites: Conserve Lake County (www.conservelakecounty.org), the Lake County Forest Preserve District (www.lcfpd.org), and the Liberty Prairie Foundation (www.libertyprairie.org).

Copyright © 2014, [Chicago Tribune](#)