

CNY Bounty marks a milestone: 10,000th delivery of locally grown, healthy food

The organization works with 110 different farms in the region and offers more than 900 products

By Aaron Gifford



Author Michael Pollan with CNY Bounty's Jody Horsman and Sue Parker.

Three years ago, a group of Chenango County residents devised a plan to help local farmers stay afloat.

There was a significant demand for locally grown produce, dairy products and meats, but the businesses were small and the farmers didn't have time or money to spend on marketing and distribution.

A newly formed organization, CNY Bounty, helped them establish a system for advertising their goods on the Internet and delivering them to customers' door steps in a matter of days.

Essentially, CNY Bounty shortened the distribution chain between farms and their neighbors' dinner tables.

"The idea was, you do all the gathering and pulling orders Monday through Wednesday, and the delivery happens on Thursday," said Jody Stokoe Horsman, marketing coordinator for CNY Bounty. "That's pretty fresh."

The plan worked. There were plenty of customers in Chenango County when CNY Bounty made its initial launch in 2007, and the program quickly expanded into neighboring Madison and Broome counties.

Three years later, the initiative has extended well into Onondaga County and recently tallied its 10,000th home delivery. Revenue for the non profit program is approaching the \$500,000 mark, with \$364,000 of that going back to the farmers who participate in the program, said Steven Holzbaaur, CNY Bounty program coordinator.

All told, CNY Bounty currently does business with 110 different farms in the region and offers more than 900 products.

It began as a season attraction, but in recent months hydroponic growers like Finger Lakes Fresh began offering produce year round.

"Right now the biggest growth potential is in expanding to other markets," Stokoe Horsman said. "We're getting calls from Rochester, Ithaca, Cortland. We could also see our list of products get longer. We have 900 products — beef, lamb, yogurt, bakery products — but there's always room for more."

She attributes CNY Bounty's success to the notion that communities want to help their local farms. She also said people of all ages are increasingly

more interested in knowing where their food comes from.

"When you hear about massive egg recalls at the grocery stores, the public decides to buy local," she said. "And if you are paying more for organic eggs, you deserve an explanation of why it costs more. With our program, you can literally get into your car, drive there and take a look for yourself."

Leigh Gantner, a Cicero-based dietitian, said interest in locally grown and organic foods is skyrocketing locally and nationwide. People are increasingly more health conscious, she said, in part because of the nation's obesity epidemic. Americans are also becoming more environmentally conscious and mindful of the importance of supporting local economies during this economic recession.

Locally grown produce is healthier, Gantner explained, because the nutrients in fruits and vegetables begin to diminish as soon as they're picked. Vitamins and minerals are lost when the goods are handled, packaged, stored, shipped long distances and then handled again in grocery stores.

"As soon as it's picked, it's starting to rot," Gantner said. "Cells start breaking apart, enzymes set off a reaction. Taste, color and smell are affected. We don't think of it as putrid, but the reaction has been set off."

Moreover, crops cultivated on massive commercial farms have been genetically engineered to sustain more handling, storage and transports. By contrast, the owners of smaller farms can focus on soil quality and the quality of crops over quantity.

"They'll taste different than foods that are made for mass markets," Gantner said.

Gantner, who is also a CNY Bounty customer, acknowledged that the price of many locally grown meats, fruits and vegetables is higher than the out-of-state goods sold at local supermarkets. But, as she sees it, the additional cost is offset by the money that goes back into the local economy.

Gantner describes home-grown beef as having a "richer taste without being higher in fat," mainly because the cows spend more time in the pasture. She said there's absolutely no comparison between farm fresh eggs and those that are bought in a store.

"The yolk is a deep orange/yellow color," she said, "and it doesn't get runny right away. It's a beautiful egg."

Participants in CNY Bounty hold open farm days in the summer where customers and potential customers can tour their facilities, Stokoe Horsman said, and most of the growers have been receptive toward customer inquiries and requests.

Within its first year of operation CNY Bounty began accepting payments via EBT cards from low-income customers. It has also opened drop-off centers in poorer communities, like Syracuse's South Side.

Bounty staff coordinates weekly product availability with farmers and producers and upload the products, prices, photos and descriptions on the website. Each farmer/producer decides on its own price. Bounty staff operates on a 23 percent margin to cover overhead costs of marketing and distribution. The weekly deadline for customer orders via the website is Monday at noon. Orders are collected from the farms on Tuesday evening and Wednesday morning by Bounty staff, taken to the distribution center, packaged and then distributed to customers in Chenango, Madison, Broome and eastern Onondaga County.

Participating farms are not required to be certified organic, though many of them are. Several participants who are not registered as certified organic have still pledged not to use growth hormones or pesticide.

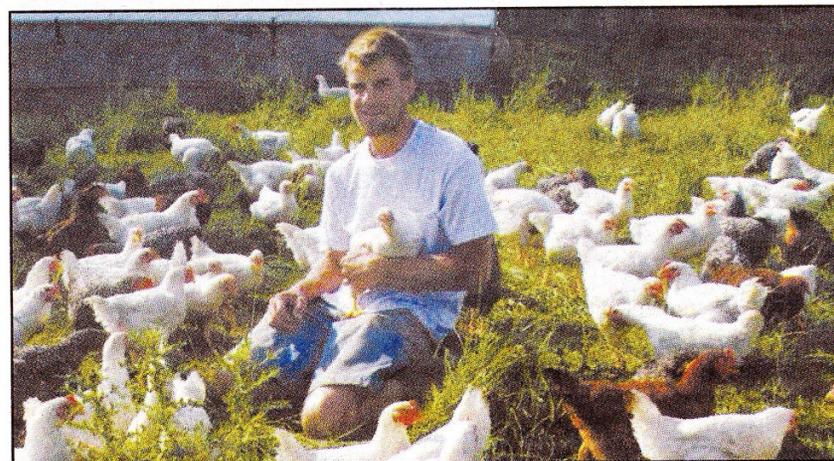
William Lipsey, who raises beef and pork at his Hamilton, Madison County, farm, signed on with Bounty in 2007. He bred beef cattle for nearly 30 years before he started selling goods to local restaurants and at area farmers markets. He thinks initiatives that help growers sell goods to local customers via the Internet can make Central New York agriculture vibrant again.

"Local farmers, especially the dairy farmers, have been having a hard time. This can help them stay in business," he said. "This enables people not to sell on a commodity basis. Now they can get a fair price for their goods, and it gives the farmers a chance to set their own prices."

Adam Perrin, of Sherburne, Chenango County, was among the first farmers to sign on with Bounty. He left his full-time job as a soil and conservation technician three years ago to raise organic beef, lamb, pork, chicken and eggs. He says Bounty has given many hobby farmers a chance to make a full-time living producing and selling goods.

"Without this, it would have been more more difficult getting through the winter, because there were no winter farmer's markets," he said. "I do think this is just the tip of the iceberg. People want to eat healthier, and it tastes better because it's full of vitamins. This is the future of farming. This should be hugely scaled up across the country."

For more information, visit
cnybounty.com



Adam Perrin, owner of Quarry Brook farms in Sherburne, is one of the farmers covered by CNY Bounty. He says: "CNY Bounty is providing a unique and essential component of a local sustainable food system through the direct connection of consumers and producers. When you order from CNY Bounty you get the healthiest food and you help keep local farmers and producers in business."