

J. Kings' CEO spreads the word about buying local produce

"Going local" is nothing new for John King, chief executive and chief customer officer at J. Kings Food Service Professionals in Hoitsville, N.Y. King started buying local produce and promoting local farmers 20 years ago. He raised the bar on marketing the program with a press conference at the end of the summer.

The message, which focused on the importance of bringing fresh, healthy local produce to schools, colleges, universities and restaurants, was delivered by Long Island politicians and officials. New York State Sen. Kenneth LaValle, R-District 1, who is involved in educational issues, said he was excited that two of the schools he works with are on the list to be served local fruits and vegetables this fall. Sen. Brian Foley, D-District 3, praised the fact that students would have been nutritional choices.

J. Kings serves a number of educational facilities, including Stony Brook University on the North Shore of Long Island, which features a course in sustainability.

and October. It's a prix-fixe promotion that will feature soups and salads made with Long Island produce and five chef's select entrées served with local greens and veg-

etables. We're also working with elementary schools and colleges to have their culinary staff take tours of the farms who supply the products we sell.

How will you continue going local through the dead of winter?

We buy a lot of products locally beyond produce. In all, we spend \$41 million locally. We still have cof-

fee roasted locally, cheesecake, pasta, meats — and we've even started offering lobster rolls. So we are able to go local all year round.

— **Caroline Perkins**

Why did you get the politicians involved in this press conference?

The politicians are very big into supporting local business. I felt this would demonstrate that support, and it would get media attention.

Who else participated?

We had town supervisors, an assemblyman, a county legislator and councilmen.

You started buying and selling local produce years before it became popular. What motivated you to take this path early on?

I did it 20 years ago for quality reasons. Also, none of my competitors was offering it then, so it was a competitive advantage.

Did the people attending the press conference get to taste the products?

We had a lunch prepared by our culinary team. The whole menu featured local produce and other products. We set it out on long tables — sort of a "down on the farm" style. All the farmers were able to meet and greet the speakers and all the foodservice operators who were there.

How will you continue to build awareness?

We're creating a promotion for our customers to offer in September

NATION'S RESTAURANT NEWS

OCTOBER 5, 2009 • 75