

As seen in the

Long Island
BusinessNEWS

The good earth

Local foodies, farmers lean on Holtsville market

By AMBROSE CLANCY

On a wickedly hot Friday at noon, Holbrook resident JoAnn DeSantis passed on buying fruit and vegetables in an air-conditioned supermarket to shop in a broiling asphalt parking lot.

"It's just so much fresher and about the same price as the big stores," DeSantis said about the recently opened Long Island Farmers Market run by J. Kings Food Service Professionals.

The market, located next to the giant food distributor's 125,000-

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Long Island's bounty stocks the J. Kings farmers market.

Bob Gaglione

Market: Local farmers sell LI's harvest in Holbrook

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square-foot Holtsville facility, has been up and running since late last month. Nine Long Island farms are participating — with two more set to come aboard — joined by 10 New Jersey farms and two from Pennsylvania. There is also a California section, but the lion's share of produce comes from a short drive away.

Joel Panagakos, J. Kings' executive vice president, was shucking raw sweet corn and handing out cobs.

"Try this, it's like candy," he said.

He didn't have to convince one 10-year-old boy who was back for thirds.

The company is one of the largest food distributors in the region, servicing restaurants and food emporiums in a 100-mile radius of Columbus Circle in New York City, said Panagakos. The farmers market was originally set up for Long Island chefs who didn't have the time to travel to farms out east or to New Jersey or Pennsylvania for fresh produce.

"But then we decided to let the public come in," Panagakos said. The market is open Wednesday to Saturday, 9 a.m. to 2 p.m.

Long Island farmers were attracted by the no-sweat process offered to them, said Paulette Satur, who farms 160 acres in Cutchogue.

J. Kings picks up Satur's produce, including golden beets,

purple carrots and baby bok choy, in refrigerated trucks and sets it up at the market. No one from her farm has to be there, since shoppers bag what they want and take it to one checkout spot.

This time of year, Satur said, it has to be close to an emergency to drag farmers away from their fields.

"It's a seven-day-a-week, 18-hour-a-day business," she said. "They're the only market we sell at," Satur added.

When the market is finished for the day, J. Kings will take her unsold produce and donate it to a charity or use it in its own cafeteria, Satur said.

There are about two dozen farmers markets operating on Long Island with more coming, according to Sarah Lansdale, executive director of Sustainable Long Island. "People are becoming more used to local, fresh food," she said.

Sustainable Long Island is pushing for farmers markets in less-affluent neighborhoods, she said, where there are practically no fresh food markets available.

"We believe that access to fresh, local food is a human right," she added.

Price is also part of the equation, Lansdale said.

"When food is sold where it's grown, it becomes much more affordable," she said.

John King, founder and president of J. Kings, took a break

from demonstrating to a crowd of shoppers the pleasures of balsamic vinegar reduction drizzled over fresh strawberries.

"It's not a marketing myth that people want local, organic and fresh food," he said.

Prices to the consumer are down because less fuel is required to bring food to the market, King said. He pointed at a tractor trailer parked nearby.

"That refrigerated truck costs \$10,000 in gas to come from California with lettuce," he said. "One thousand cases of lettuce were once selling here for \$10 a case. Do the math."

Karen Catapano of Catapano Dairy in Calverton sells discs of her handcrafted chevre goat cheese at the J. Kings market. Like Satur, she likes the idea of free pickup of her cheese, but also said the company's name has given the market credibility. And a new market for her cheese and goat milk products has opened.

"Out here there are lots of markets and stands, but there aren't too many in Holtsville, so that's good for us," she said.

Lisa Thristino of St. James was at the market with three friends from work, taking their lunch hour from Verizon in Patchogue. She held vine-ripened North Fork tomatoes, smiling.

"Everyone is looking for the freshest food," she said. "And the price is right here."

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