

# FEEDING THE CITY

## Green City Market Celebrates 10 Years of Sustainability

By Elizabeth Heiberger • La Chambre Noire Photography

**F**or the freshest of fresh produce, the place to go this summer is Green City Market. TCW spoke with a few of the key founders and employees of Green City to see what's new on its tenth year anniversary.

Supplied by local farmers from Michigan, Indiana, Wisconsin and Illinois, The Green City Market (GCM) started a decade ago in an alley by the Chicago Theatre. Chicago's only sustainable market now resides in the south end of Lincoln Park and boasts two Edible Gardens (hands-on educational facilities where children learn every aspect of organic farming, from soil preparation and planting to weeding, harvesting and composting) in the Lincoln Park Zoo. This summer, around 6,000 to 7,000 visitors are expected every week.

The 22-member board of the GCM, comprised of farmers, chefs and others interested in bringing more sustainability to Chicago, screens every farmer who applies to sell at the market. "There's a very intensive screening process that the farmers go through," says Jeanne Pinsof Nolan, an organic vegetable gardener for GCM who takes care of the two Edible Gardens. "The goal is to ensure we have high-quality food represented in the market grown by local farmers who are taking care of the earth."

And the GCM goes far beyond just providing a space for farmers to market their tasty produce; there are also workshops for farmers to learn more about marketing and making specialty goods. "One of the finest growers at GCM is a great guy named Chris Covelli. His operation is called Tomato Mountain," says Jeanne. "When I started working there in 2004 he was basically selling tomatoes – amazing, organic tomatoes. But shortly after he got a grant from Chef Rick Bayless' Frontera Farmer Foundation and started making prepared food. Now he sells incredible



Jeanne Pinsof Nolan and Sarah Stegner photographed at Chicago Botanic Garden.

Bloody Mary mix, salsas, tomato soup, pasta sauce and jams made from his organic produce. The market puts a lot of effort into the workshops to help farmers find out how it can be a win-win situation: they're bringing something that Chicagoans are looking for and also bringing added value and income to their lives."

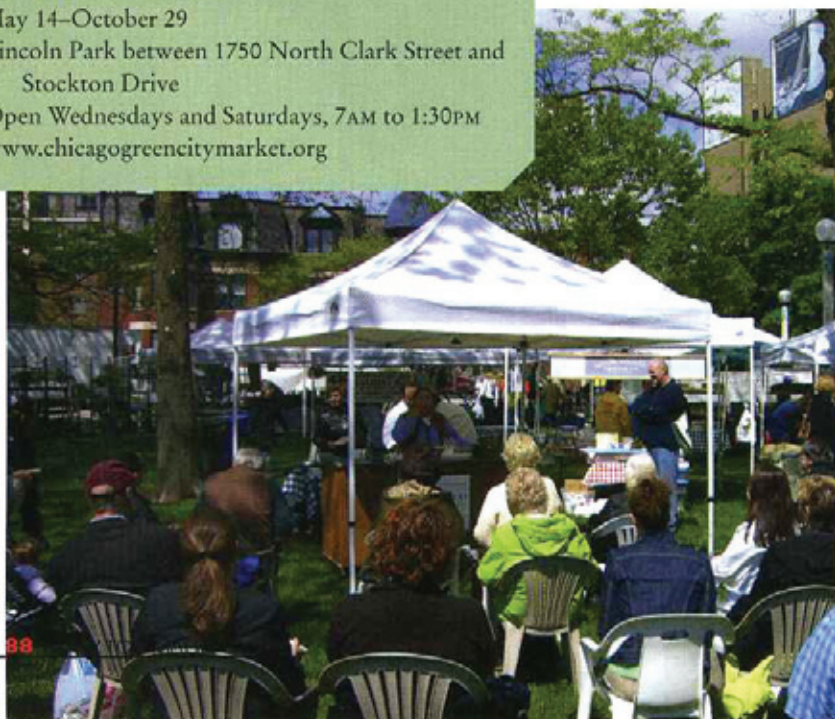
### GREEN CITY MARKET

May 14–October 29

Lincoln Park between 1750 North Clark Street and Stockton Drive

Open Wednesdays and Saturdays, 7AM to 1:30PM

[www.chicagogreencitymarket.org](http://www.chicagogreencitymarket.org)



### GOING GREEN

If this sounds vaguely reminiscent of European markets, you're on the same track as GCM President and Founder Abby Mandel when she dreamed up the concept. "I got the idea through working in very famous restaurants in Europe where the chefs would shop daily and meet the farmers to see what they had," says Abby. "I realized they had a food culture we were missing in this country." She took that insight and ran with it.

In the '80s Abby started the Best of the Midwest Market, which took place once a year. "The idea was to show what was growing in the Midwest, because most people didn't know," says Abby. "They looked at California and New York and skipped the Midwest. After about eight or nine years that market had lived its life because people knew what was available in our area. My goal in starting that market was to start this market (GCM)."

But that didn't happen until 1999. Around that same time, Prairie Grass Cafe Chef and Owner Sarah Stegner (currently a GCM board member) had just come on as the dining room chef for the Ritz-Carlton. "I started to really look for sources," she recalls. "I was thinking, 'How can I make my restaurant better? What can I do to



serve the guests as best as possible?" The answer that Sarah kept returning to was to bring it back to the basics. "The best taste, to me, came from restaurants that were using ingredients from local farms. Because of that I began to source for my restaurant," says Sarah. Knowing that her friend Abby Mandel was big into fresh, local produce, Sarah approached her to find sources and increase her connections to local producers. Abby liked the idea so much, she wanted to make it available for the public.

Despite its initial beginnings, Sarah stresses that the creation of the resulting GCM wasn't a two-woman job. "We had a lot of help," she says. "Chefs came forward with their sources and we put together a list to contact all the farmers. It was small, but it was there."

## GO TO MARKET

The GCM is more than just a scattering of produce tents on the south side of Lincoln Park. "The first time I went to GCM was before I started working with them. I was struck by the feeling in the air – it was a great atmosphere," remembers Jeanne. "There's music and children playing on the lawn. Celebrity chefs are giving cooking demonstrations and there are seminars on different food and health-oriented issues. It's definitely where our world is heading – real, sustainable community. It's something special that Chicagoans have an enormous appreciation of."

When chefs such as Bruce Sherman of North Pond Restaurant, Paul Kahan of Blackbird, Sarah Stegner and George Bumbaris of Prairie Grass Cafe, and Carrie Nahabedian of NAHA frequent GCM, you know the selection has got to be good. No matter what your fresh favorite is, it's likely to be found at GCM, which is a whole lot more than just vegetables. "I love local fresh-picked apples and the fresh yogurt from Traders Point Creamery," shares Jeanne. "I personally really like the mild, soft goat cheese spread that Leslie Cooperband sells."

The market selection even includes prepared foods that can be bought and enjoyed right on the spot. "We do crepes made with organic ingredients using as many local ingredients from the market as possible," says Sarah. "As soon as strawberries are in season, we might have strawberry crepes or crepes with rhubarb compote, because rhubarb comes into season before strawberries."

Meat, including chicken, cuts of lamb and many others, are also available at the market. There are stands with fresh flowers and stands with chestnut products such as chestnut flour and chestnut cherry salsa. Some more unique produce choices include zebra stripe heirloom tomatoes and hen-of-the-wood mushrooms.

Rest assured, the list of 40 producers is always growing. "We have a forager on staff that sources out sustainable farms that are committed to growing their food naturally," says Sarah. "We also have a wish list of things we want at the market – such as oats and dried beans – that we're looking for. A very viable way to connect with farmers is still through the chefs. The forager will network and ask them if they have any new sources or connections."

## CELEBRATING A DECADE

This month marks the tenth anniversary for GCM, and a lot has been planned to celebrate. "We're having a big rally to support local sustainable farming," Abby says with enthusiasm. "We've asked all the culinary schools, chefs, various organizations, schools and hospitals to come and show support for local sustainable farming." The Sustainable Food Rally (Saturday, May 17 from noon to 1:30PM) features Maggie Daley as keynote speaker and features the largest, and likely the only, local organic carrot cake, which will be wheeled onstage after the program for a ceremonial cutting.

Celebrations will carry on throughout the year as GCM continues to plan a variety of demos by professional chefs for the Savor the Seasons initiative. Demonstrations will show people how to use, store and benefit from a variety of different produce available at the market. Also on the calendar are the 2008 Chef's Summer BBQ Festival on July 17 and the Second Annual Localvore Challenge from September 10-24, during which GCM shoppers are invited to commit to eating only locally grown food.

## MARKET MEMORIES

Going to the GCM is much more than simply picking up a few things for dinner. "Last year we did a demo using different heirloom apples to try to get people to eat varieties they didn't normally try," says Sarah. "When I was working on the project I talked to Lloyd Nichols, one of the farmers at GCM, and he told me he has 147 different varieties of apples. I was blown away. It was educational for me."

GCM also opens doors for personal relationships, something Jeanne has experienced firsthand. "On market days I'm stationed over at the vegetable garden, so I'll see a family coming over with a stroller overflowing with vegetables and fruits," she describes. "As they wheel up to the garden, the kids run out because they've been coming here for three years and we know each other by name. They hug me and I say, 'Let's do some gardening.' That's community and shared values. We're helping ensure these children are learning the taste of healthy food. That's a pretty cool feeling. That's beyond a farmers market." ■



### Jeanne's Tips for Shopping the GCM

- Don't panic: It's not as overwhelming as it looks
- Take your time: There's a lot to experience; don't rush through it
- Ask questions: The farmers are more than willing to talk
- Interact with farmers: This is a great way to find out what's best this time of year
- Bring bags: You're going to leave with a lot of produce
- Try something new: With the variety available, this shouldn't be hard
- Make a morning of it: It's more than just filling your grocery bag
- Come to the vegetable garden: See vegetables from inception