



Competition is Healthy

A new vibe is now part of the local foods scene - competition. According to the USDA, local foods represented a \$7 billion industry in 2011, and it is now starting to attract those who are not looking for a cause, but for a business opportunity. They have no pre-conceived notions about farming, may not be aware of any of the politics surrounding sustainability, organics or local foods, or if they are, they are not consumed by them. They are people who, instead of opening a dry cleaners, or a hair salon, or a printing franchise, are thinking instead that they like working outdoors, they like physical work, they like the idea of producing a product everyone wants and needs, they see lots of people flocking to the farmer's market and farm to table restaurants, so they think they would like to try farming to see if they can make a buck.

SPIN-Farming is right down their alley because it provides a low cost and fast entrée into this multi-billion dollar market. Its practitioners are now multiplying throughout backyards and neighborhood lots in several countries. Farmers markets are increasingly occupied not by Mr. Hayseed Farmer from the middle of nowhere, but the tattooed hipster from across town, or the retired IBM'er pursuing his encore career.

But these non-traditional backyard farmers also understand that to thrive in this rapidly developing and increasingly competitive marketplace they have to think beyond the farmers market. Some of the most interesting developments in the food industry are happening in a pop-up restaurant in a warehouse somewhere, or via our mobile phones. Opportunities can be low tech and grassroots like these, compliments of Keri Fox who operates Green Sister Gardens in Moose Jaw SK and is in her third year of SPIN-Farming.

**A friend of mine teaches yoga, and she invited me to come to her Thursday night class this week and promote my business so I took each person in the class a bag of pea and radish greens mix to try and gave a little talk at the beginning of class about my product and where to get it.

**I had one of my CSA members ask me if I would come and set up a table at the local college in the cafeteria over the lunch hour and sell greens. So I am planning to do this in September when classes resume.

**I helped organize a recycling/composting program at an event in the park called Park Art. I put totes out with signs attached to them. The signs had my logo and business name as well as instructions on what could be put into the bins and a blurb explaining that the compost would be turned into soil to grow veggies for Green Sister Gardens. Next year I will set up a booth and sell greens at the event as well.

**I talked to another friend of mine who has a natural path clinic on Main Street about setting up a stand a couple times a month (or more) to sell greens. It is located in between our two local health food stores (neither of them sell greens mixes), so I am considering setting up on the two sale days that they both have each month and maybe more if it turns out to be worth while.

**I took salad mix samples into a local coffee shop (that saves me their used coffee grounds) and followed up with the owner today. She really likes them and is currently waiting for me to send her pricing.

Or opportunities can be more high-tech and scalable.

Whatever else it has become in today's culture - activist cause, political hot potato or star-studded entertainment - food remains a necessity of life. And for those in the business of growing it, it is not a zero sum game. When one business wins, another does not have to lose. As SPIN farmers and entrepreneurs reshape the local foods scene to their own ends, competition drives innovation and professionalism, and it is a healthy, and welcome, part of the scene.



photo courtesy of City Grown Seattle

SPIN-Farming Makes Agriculture Accessible to Anyone, Anywhere!