

# WHAT'S FOR DINNER?

Today, the answer to this simple question is increasingly complex. We have access to a seemingly limitless variety of foods, but we know little about what we consume. Daily food choices profoundly affect our personal well-being, the lives of those who produce what we eat, the character of our communities, and the global environment. A lot is riding on what we put on our plates.

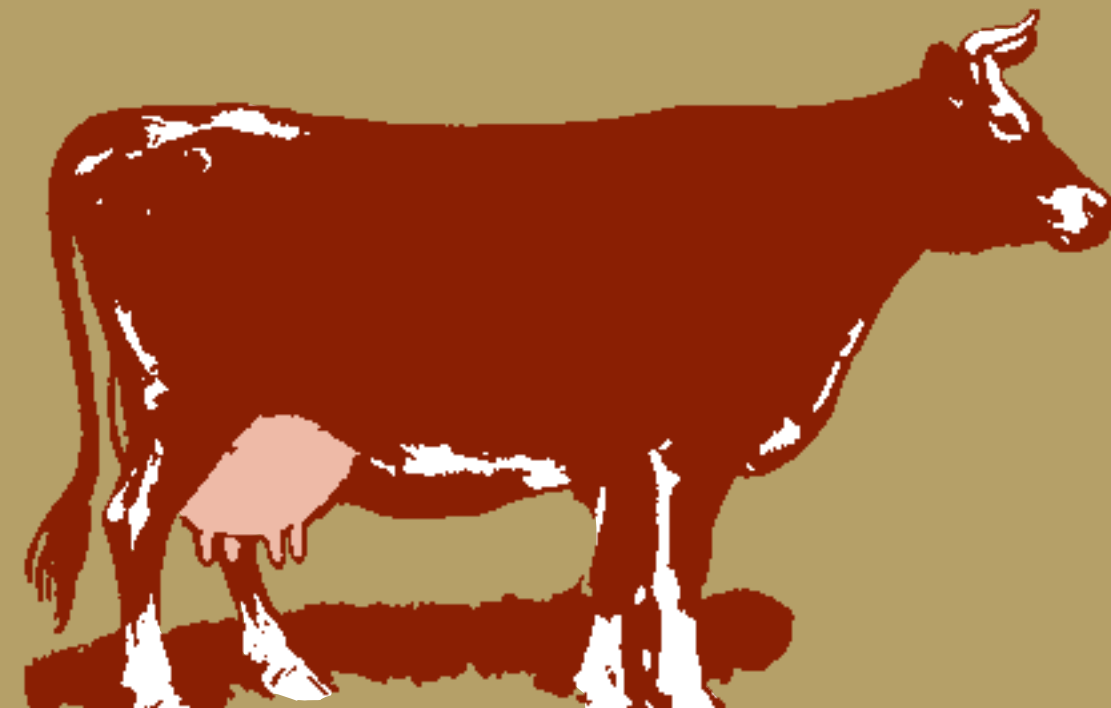
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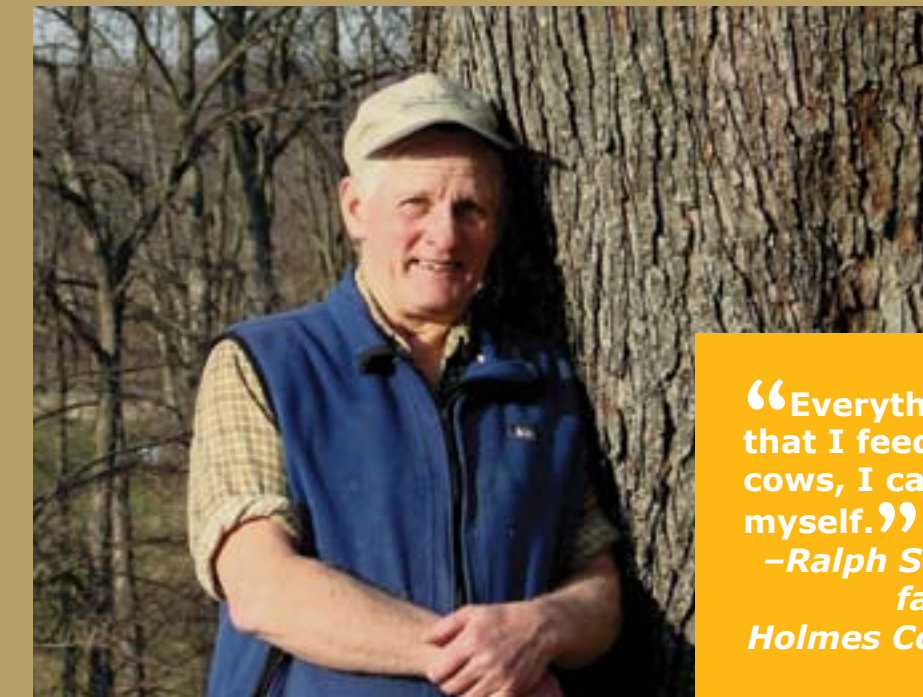
## NUTRITION

When eating a meal, it is important to think beyond calories and fat. Fertilizers, pesticides, and growth hormones used to grow food affect our bodies as well as the environment. Food produced in damaged soil may have a reduced nutritional content. Growth hormones given to cows to produce more milk and beef enter our bodies and may affect us. We are what we eat eats.

One simple way to make each meal healthier is to choose additive-free milk from a local farmer. This milk may taste different, but it is not overly processed, allowing it to maintain higher nutritional value. Local milk will also be fresher because it is not treated for a long journey.



Ralph Straits is a farmer who long relied on chemical products to generate a higher yield. Over time, the land became unproductive, and his animals were constantly sick. He gradually adopted natural ways to encourage growth, such as using animal waste rather than chemical fertilizers on his land. Today, he has a thriving farm, and he mentors others.



**“Everything that I feed my cows, I can eat myself.”**  
—Ralph Straits  
farmer  
Holmes County

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## FOOD AND HEALTH

Today, 64% of American adults are overweight or obese. The drastic rise in obesity over the past twenty-five years results directly from unhealthy food consumption and the choices available. When we sit down for dinner, we should be fully aware of how our food decisions contribute to this national epidemic. We must respect our bodies by acknowledging health as a primary concern.

The average American adult consumes 3.2 cups of coffee per day, and the addictive nature of caffeine in coffee makes it a hard habit to kick. Heavy caffeine consumption is a major health hazard, and many are not fully aware of its effects. Caffeine negatively alters heart and respiratory rates; it also causes headaches, fatigue, irritability, and depression when in withdrawal.



With twenty-seven years in medicine, eighteen of them practiced traditionally and holistically in Mt. Vernon, Dr. Allan Bazzoli is a strong advocate of healthy eating. He advises his patients to eat a balanced diet while avoiding caffeine and nicotine. He leads a healthy lifestyle himself by consuming local foods in balanced meals and exercising regularly.



**“The food problem is a societal problem. There are a lot of patients that would like to eat healthier. They just don’t have the time...there isn’t enough money.”**

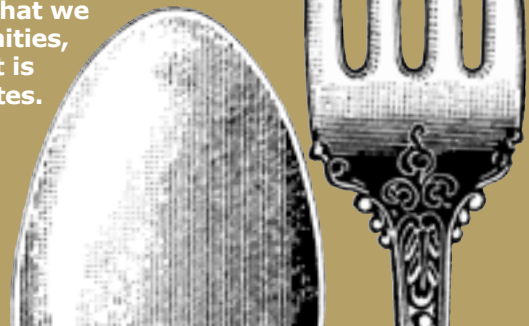
**—Dr. Allan Bazzoli  
physician  
Mt. Vernon**



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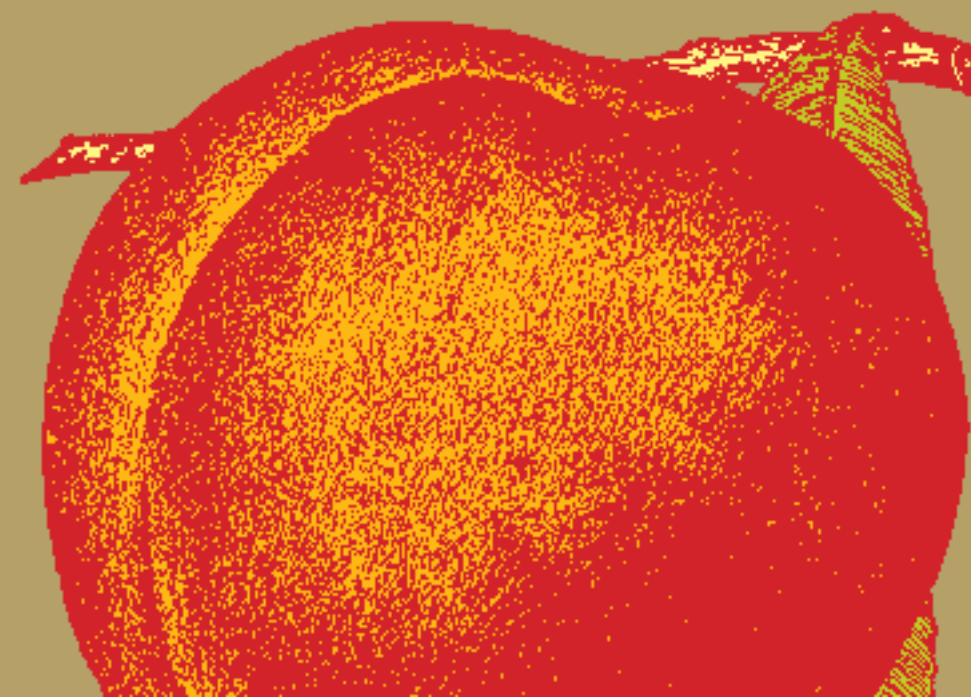


## EATING HABITS



A hundred years ago, most people lived off their land. Town visits were infrequent, and people canned, dried, or stored food in preparation for winter. Now, seasonality is secondary; few of us grow our own food or make special preparations for winter. Buying food from supermarkets, we have little regard for where it came from or who grew it. What is the cost in quality or fulfillment for this convenience?

Canning is a quick, simple process that can provide deliciously peachy-tasting peaches throughout the year. Most people have eaten those slippery, crescent-shaped canned peaches from the store. But commercially canned peaches hardly compare in taste or texture to a perfectly ripened peach preserved in light sugar syrup in your own kitchen.



Liz Keeney, a Gambier resident, is an avid canner of produce grown mostly in her own garden. Ideally, Keeney would like to live off of her garden year-round. Although it is no longer necessary for survival, Keeney cans because she likes knowing where her food comes from and because nothing beats the taste of summer on a cold winter night.



**“I don’t think that most children realize milk comes from a cow ... they would just tell you that it comes from the store.”**

**—Helen Green  
farmer  
Gambier**

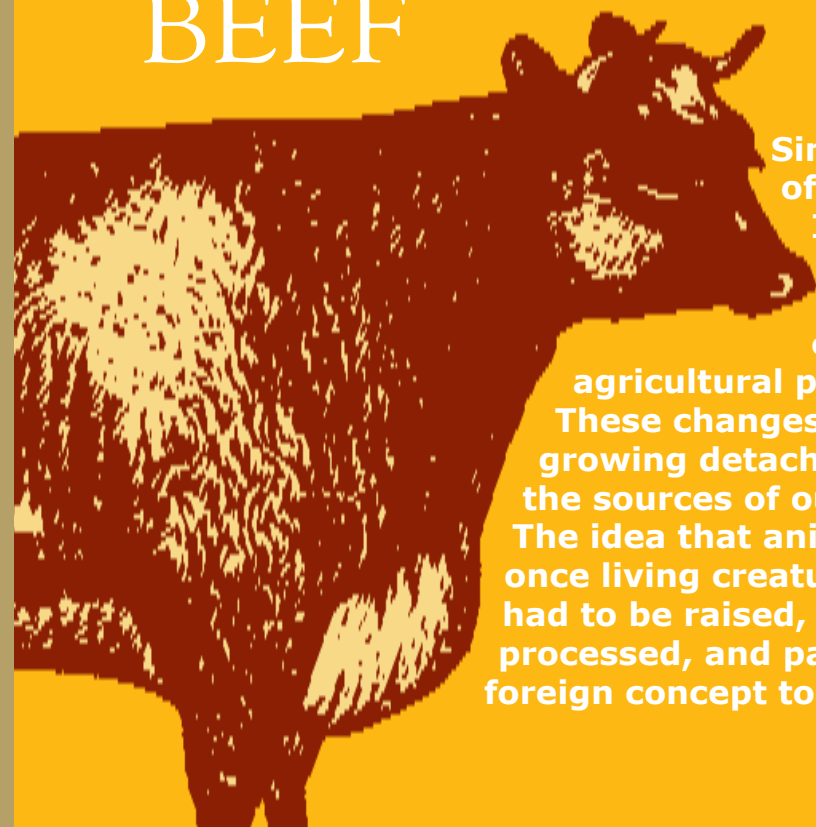
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## FOOD PRODUCTION: BEEF



Since the end of World War II, there have been dramatic changes in agricultural production. These changes have led to growing detachment from the sources of our food. The idea that animals were once living creatures that had to be raised, harvested, processed, and packaged is a foreign concept to many.

An average head of cattle is raised to be between 900 and 1200 pounds. Once an animal is mature, it's harvested to yield approximately 60% of "take home meat." Select cuts are then packaged individually for retail. The average American eats seventy pounds of beef annually, an important dietary source of iron and essential amino acids.



Bruce and Fran Conard have farmed in Martinsburg for over twenty-five years. Both were raised on farms and have been farming their whole lives. They raise corn, wheat, oats, alfalfa, and soybeans, but the main commodity that the family raises is cattle. A portion of the beef produced by the Conards can be found in the dining halls of Kenyon College.



**"I wouldn't produce food that I wouldn't eat myself; not everybody can say that."**

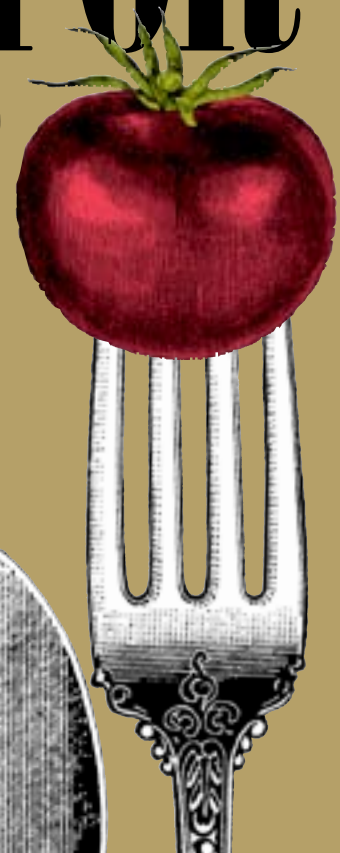
**—Bruce Conard  
cattle farmer  
Martinsburg**



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## FOOD PRODUCTION: MAPLE SYRUP



Buying a product as simple as maple syrup involves complex choices about health, taste, and food sources. Pure maple syrup differs drastically from the artificial product in its ingredients.

Artificial syrup is primarily corn syrup and artificial flavoring, while pure maple syrup comes solely from maple trees. Pure syrup has a higher nutritional value, comes from a single source, and is important in the economy supporting local food producers.

Pure maple syrup is entirely dependent upon the weather; sap flows only on warm days following cold nights in early winter. Production is a labor-intensive process involving tapping the trees, collecting sap, and reducing over forty gallons of sap into one gallon of syrup. In the end, the pure syrup is a satisfying natural sweetener that is well worth its cost.



Lisa and Eric Dilts have been producing maple syrup since 1983. They collect syrup using traditional buckets; this is a time-consuming process, with eight hundred trees to tap, though this is considered a small-scale operation. The Dilts take pride in the high quality of their syrup and have trouble meeting demand for their syrup each year, attesting to its popularity.



“Maple syrup is a great family hobby. It’s a great way for people to get together and have a good time. That’s how we approach it.”

—Lisa Dilts  
maple syrup producer  
Fredericktown

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## FARM POLITICS

Government policies have encouraged the overproduction of corn in the United States. During the Great Depression, the New Deal created a subsidy system to restore the grain reserve by paying farmers a fixed rate. In the 1970s, new initiatives pushed farmers to "get big or get out," further increasing corn supplies in a global market. Today, the United States government is the largest purchaser of the surplus corn.

Corn's overabundance has contributed to its incorporation into nearly every aspect of our lives. We feed it to our children in the form of high-fructose corn syrup: the ingredient is found in soda, chicken nuggets, and cereal. Feedlot livestock spend their days munching on grain rather than grass. Corn fills our gas tanks, makes our magazines shiny, and keeps our teeth looking and feeling clean.



In 2006, John Marsh of Gambier began working as a liaison between Kenyon College's dining service and the surrounding community. His goal is to create a sustainable food system by purchasing products from local farmers. Buying locally supports small family farms, promotes economic growth in the area, and reduces fossil fuel emissions. A farmer himself, Marsh views our food choices as political acts.



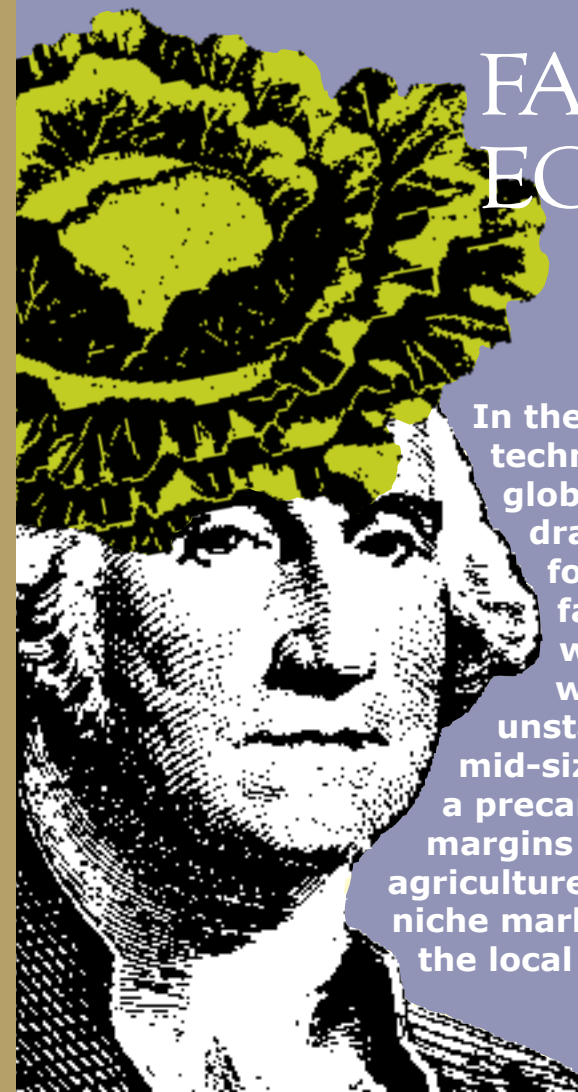
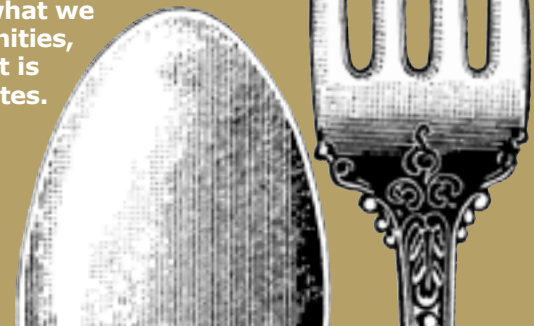
**"Corn flows around the world, just like oil."  
—John Marsh  
food liaison  
Gambier**



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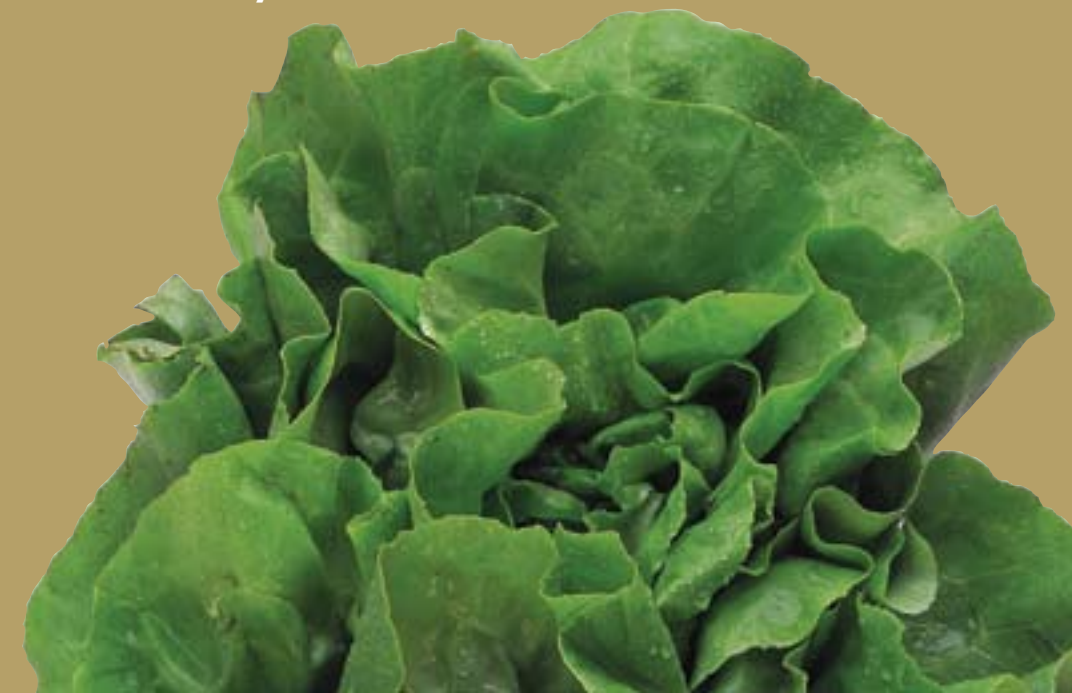
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## FARM ECONOMICS

In the past half-century, new technologies and increasing global competition have drastically raised costs for the average American farmer. In addition, when faced with volatile weather patterns and unstable financial markets, mid-sized family farms are in a precarious position. As profit margins shrink, the future of agriculture lies in farm expansion, niche marketing, and the power of the local consumer.

The United States, traditionally a net exporter of fruits and vegetables, has become the world's leading importer of produce. Recently, this \$32 billion enterprise has stimulated renewed interest among American growers. Local production is on the rise, as producers and consumers alike see the quality that local venues provide and the benefits their food purchases can have upon the local economy.



Born and raised on a seventh-generation family farm in Gambier, Timothy McKee and his family are living proof of the changing face of agriculture. While he remembers the days when they had "a little bit of everything" on the farm, today McKee sticks to cash commodities. He works a hundred acres more than his father and has an outside job, to make ends meet.



**"You must love what you do, be real committed to it, and have money to put food on the table when the crops don't pay out."  
—Chuck Dudgeon  
hog farmer  
Gambier**



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## FOOD AND COMMUNITY



Knox County's festivals celebrate agriculture as central to community identity. Whether the symbol is a tomato, a turkey, a season, or a past era, the common thread is pride in rural life. Of course, food is available for purchase and prizes are awarded each year for the largest tomato, but you are just as likely to see festival traditions such as square-dancing tractors or Little Miss Turkey at these annual events.

Turkey production ended in Danville, Ohio, years ago. Nevertheless, the Danville-Howard Turkey Festival pays tribute to the twenty-five families who once raised the birds. The festival is now primarily a fundraiser for the fire department, but the Friday turkey dinner is still a major highlight. Fire safety demonstrations have replaced turkey races, yet advertisements for the festival still feature the iconic bird.



Susie Oswalt and Wilbur Buxton have been involved with the Centerburg Oldtime Farming Festival since its inception in 1992. Both have rural backgrounds, and they hope that the festival will teach new generations about farm life in the past and how it relates to the community today. At the festival, Buxton's grandchildren in Cincinnati have a chance to visit family and take part in their heritage.



“There is pretty much nothing to do with tomatoes in the Tomato Show. It's the tradition of it-- people expect it and take pride in it.”

—Jan Schild  
festival treasurer  
Fredericktown



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## FOOD AND ENVIRONMENT



Choosing the food we eat is one of the most intimate ways in which we engage with the natural world. The food we place on our tables has a profound environmental impact. Industrially or sustainably grown, organically or conventionally raised: each product carries a story about the way it was produced and its toll on the environment. By making informed food decisions, we have an opportunity to determine our own environmental impact.

Lamb from the Rickards' Fox Hollow Farm in Fredericktown is raised under a system of intensive rotational grazing. Here, the livestock move frequently between small pastures so that they eat down an area uniformly before it is left to rest. The result: an environmentally friendly system with more evenly distributed manure, fewer weed and erosion problems, and better forage production and quality.



Rex Spray of Mount Vernon has been farming in Knox County for over sixty years, for most of that time as an organic farmer. The yields from his 750 acres match those of conventional farmers, and he extols the environmental benefits of organic agriculture. Spray has eliminated the use of chemicals, has successfully maintained the ecological balance of his land, and has enhanced biodiversity, soil health, and biological cycles.



**"You eat because you need to eat-- whatever is handy or inexpensive or appealing; [you] don't think of it being part of the natural world."**

**—Lisa Rickard  
farmer  
Fredericktown**