

Fair at SPASH allows people to swap seeds, information about food grown locally

Written by Nathan Vine Stevens Point Journal Media
Feb. 13, 2014 |

stevenspointjournal.com

STEVENS POINT — Ross Ferkett's journey as a farmer in Wisconsin is just beginning, while Chris Malek's is coming to a close, making them a perfect pair for a seed swap.

Just such an exchange was made possible during the 2014 Local Food Fair, hosted by Central Rivers Farmshed on Thursday night at Stevens Point Area Senior High. The seed swap offered an opportunity to trade, give or take seeds to share different plant varieties throughout the gardens or farms of central Wisconsin.

Ferkett, along with his wife, Brigid, just completed his first full year of farming at Gravel Road Farm in Waupaca in 2013, growing potatoes, cucumbers, tomatoes, peppers, onions and herbs. On Thursday, Ferkett picked up packets of seeds for lettuce and various melons, such as galia and honeydew. Malek, who has been farming organically for 13 years at Malek Family Stewardship Farm in Stevens Point, plans to move to Colorado and had two boxes of seeds for Ferkett to choose from.

"We've made it through the first year and now we're looking to expand a little bit, so this was a good opportunity to find some different crops," Ferkett said.

Other events on Thursday included a free local potato bar, workshops, and an information fair featuring local food activists, advocates and educators.

Krista Engelhardt, a project coordinator with Central Rivers Farmshed, said the event was an opportunity for residents to connect with local food, which is part of the nonprofit organization's primary goal.

"People don't always realize all of the opportunities there are to get involved and learn about where their food is coming from, and hopefully people have a good experience here and want to start doing more," Engelhardt said.

Sherry Daniels, a family living educator at the University of Wisconsin-Extension Portage County in Stevens Point, held a workshop where she provided the results of a survey conducted at the farmers market in downtown Stevens Point in 2012.

Daniels, who spoke with nearly 100 customers at the market, reported that they wanted more products offered including grass-fed meat, raw milk and handmade noodles. Sixty-five percent of those surveyed said quality was the most important factor when they bought produce at the farmers market, while just 6 percent indicated price was the most important factor.

"That really got vendors excited because it shows them that there is a demand out there, and people will come and buy if they provide quality food," Daniels said.

Nathan Vine can be reached at 715-345-2252. Find him on Twitter as @SPJNathanVine.