



Connecting Regional Food Producers to Consumers

Peoria, IL (September 5, 2012)—The Illinois River Road National Scenic Byway is heading to market. The Byway is using a \$99,000 USDA Rural Business Enterprise Grant it received last year from the USDA to reach out to local foods and wares producers to bring awareness to the concept of purchasing locally-grown foods. The goal is to reach out to the hundreds of farmers, entrepreneurs and small business owners along the Byway and connect them to each other and to the visitor.

Byway Director, Anaise Berry, says “Think about all of the farmers along the Byway who take their products to local farmers’ markets each week or sell items at road side stands. Then add in all of the entrepreneurs who are trying to sell their homemade wares to local consumers. We want to direct visitors to these local producers in an effort to enhance economic development along the Byway.” The program is also designed to connect visitors to restaurants and stores that feature locally grown/raised/produced foods and wares as well as connect the producers to one another so they might be able to partner with each other and find an even greater benefit to their endeavors.

The Byway has already started compiling an extensive list of producers/farmers but as Berry explains, there are dozens if not hundreds more that are harder to reach. “We have a small committee already working on this outreach, but in an effort to reach more people, we are asking regional farmers and producers to visit our website and fill out a form telling us if you have a retail set-up, if you sell at community markets or if you provide local products to restaurants and which ones.” Small business that want to (or already do) sell or utilize local products can also complete the form and in turn receive similar recognition for helping grow local business. “Our newly designed website will include a listing of these small, locally owned businesses that support the visitor market and the site will also include a section on local foods and wares producers so you can connect with them.” The form is available now by visiting www.illinoisriverroad.org.

The Illinois River Road was designated a National Scenic Byway in 2005 by the U.S. Department of Transportation Federal Highway Administration, which recognizes roads having outstanding archaeological, cultural, historic, natural, recreational and scenic qualities. It stretches 291 miles alongside the Illinois River from Ottawa to Havana and is notable for its natural and historic qualities. The Byway covers ten counties including Peoria, Tazewell, Woodford, LaSalle, Bureau, Putnam, Marshall, Stark, Fulton, and Mason. The Byway has six gateway communities including Ottawa, Princeton, Peoria, Pekin, Canton, and Havana. Learn more at www.illinoisriverroad.org. If you have questions or would like more information please contact Byway Director Anaise Berry at 309-495-5909 or aberry@edc.h-p.org.

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