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Local Harvest Dinner Sept. 21 Celebrates Region's Agricultural Bounty

UNH Dining, Office Of Sustainability Partner With Local Producers

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DURHAM, N.H. -- Pork raised in Barrington glazed with honey from Hudson ... buffalo burgers from Durham Point Road ... stuffed organic tomatoes grown on the University of New Hampshire campus.

This menu is not from a fine dining restaurant but rather from Stillings Marketplace dining hall at UNH, which hosts the second annual Local Harvest Dinner Thursday, Sept. 21, 4:30 – 7:30 p.m. The gourmet meal celebrates the region's producers as well as its rich agricultural heritage. The Local Harvest Dinner, offered to all students on the UNH meal plan, is open to the public (\$11.50 adults; \$6.00 youth under 13). Stillings Marketplace is located near the intersection of Garrison Avenue and Stafford Avenue, behind Stoke Hall.

"The dinner offers students a chance to enjoy delicious, fresh food while learning some of the benefits of supporting local agriculture," says Elisabeth Farrell, a program coordinator for UNH's Office of Sustainability, which partners with UNH Dining in Local Harvest. Significant among those benefits, she notes, are supporting local economies and maintaining the vibrant agricultural landscape for which New Hampshire is known.

While the food at the Local Harvest Dinner has local roots, many menu items are exotic: mussels provençale (with mussels raised at UNH's Open Ocean Aquaculture project off the Isles of Shoals); mushroom, cheddar and egg torta (made with cage-free eggs from Pete & Gerry's of Monroe); and Szechuan broccoli and shiitake mushroom stir-fry. Lasting Legacy Farm of Barrington will provide lamb, beef, chicken, and pork; the latter will be glazed with honey from Bee Rich Apiaries of Hudson. Rochester's Full Moon Farm will offer goat cheese on pizza and in cream and goat cheese cakes, a popular item at last year's dinner. Apples from UNH's Woodman Farm will be baked into tartes, and Portsmouth Tea Company will provide gourmet tea. Roasted free-range chicken (Lasting Legacy Farm), broiled fresh Maine haddock, corn on the cob (Tuttle's in Dover) and blueberry pie cater to more traditional tastes.

"Diners will see a huge variety of local food," says Ralph Coughenour, director of culinary services for UNH Dining, noting that given the region's short growing season – even shorter this cool, rainy year – the range of local food is surprising. Coughenour and his colleagues have collaborated with the Boston-based supplier Costa Produce to bring local foods to the UNH table. "They're working very closely with us to try to get as much local produce as they can," he says.

UNH Dining also has forged a strong relationship with the UNH Organic Gardening Club, which

grows produce on two acres of certified-organic land on the UNH campus. "We buy just about everything they have," Coughenour says, adding that he's worked with the club to tweak their production to better serve UNH Dining's needs.

Last year's Local Harvest Dinner, the first, was such a success that the organizers moved it to the larger Stillings Marketplace. The larger space will provide more room for farmers and other producers to meet with diners and educate them about their products and operations.

A partnership of the UNH Office of Sustainability and UNH Dining, the Local Harvest Dinner is part of UNH Dining's Local Harvest initiative, which brings local food, including cage-free eggs and organic produce, to UNH's three student dining halls regularly. UNH is the first land-grant university in the nation with an organic research dairy; it is home to an active Organic Gardening Club, a food waste composting program, and the New Hampshire Farm to School Program, which connects state K-12 schools with New Hampshire farms. For more information, go to www.unh.edu/dining/localharvest.htm or www.sustainableunh.unh.edu.

The Local Harvest Dinner is supported by the Durham Marketplace, the New Hampshire Farm to Restaurant Connection, New Hampshire Made, and the College of Life Sciences and Agriculture (COLSA) at UNH.