

## Farmers, shoppers cope with rising costs

By Yadira Betances, Staff Writer

July 07, 2008 12:41 am

LAWRENCE — Families in search of fresh fruits, vegetables and herbs head to farmers markets each summer to buy local crops.

But this season, the ever-rising cost of everything from fuel to fertilizer to pesticides, farmers say, has caused them to increase the prices of their produce.

"I see it as another challenge," said Dave Dumaresq, manager at Brox Farm in Dracut. "We're thrown a curve ball every year, and we have to be on our toes. It's like how do you make lemonade out of lemons?"

He said the increase in fuel has affected him greatly because of the amount it takes to run farm equipment, trucks and irrigation systems. Eight years ago, Dumaresq bought oil for 89 cents a gallon. It was \$2.40 last year, and today it costs him \$3.70, he said.

He is using more organic fertilizer and compost to build healthy soil and recycling fertilizer water to combat cost and become more efficient.

Since 2002, the prices of fuel, fertilizer and pesticide have increased dramatically, according to the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

This year, the cost of fuel and oil will rise 12.6 percent, while fertilizer is expected to increase by 18.4 percent and pesticide will see an increase of 8.9 percent.

On the first day of the Lawrence Farmers' Market on Wednesday, a quart of strawberries was selling for \$5. At market last summer, the red berries sold for \$3. Zucchini are selling for between \$1.50 and \$2 each, and summer squash for \$1 each this season.

Most customers seemed to take the higher prices in stride, saying they didn't mind paying a little more for freshness.

"There's nothing like eating fresh fruit and not having to worry where it comes from," said Diana Severino of Lawrence, who stopped at the farmers market on Appleton Way during her lunch break to check the produce harvested just a few miles down the road. After examining the corn and tomatoes, she promised to return after work.

"I like to support the local agriculture," said Chris Smith of Lawrence. He shops at the market three to four times during the season, and on this day with his daughter, Julia.

Besides Brox Farm, also participating in the farmers market are Riverdale Farm in Groton, Boston Hill Farm in North Andover and Carrasquillo Farm in Lowell.

Manolo Moquete, manager of Riverdale Farm, said the rising price of gasoline for his truck and tractor has been the most taxing. The farm is a 35-mile trek from Lawrence, and he makes it every week for three months.

Also, the 20 acres he used to plow with \$30 worth of gas, he said, costs \$100 to plow today. And, like Brox, the 100-acre Riverdale Farm is also using more cow manure and less fertilizer to save money, he said.

Moquete enjoys his time at the market too much to stay at home. He'd rather be selling zucchini, squash, strawberries and hanging plants on a nice afternoon and making friendly conversation.

"I do it because I enjoy farming and bringing fruits and vegetables to the people," said the farmer for 15 years. "Unfortunately, you have to adjust the prices to make a profit."

Terry Donnelly said Boston Hill Farm has also had to pass rising costs onto customers, and increased the prices of tomatoes and strawberries this season.

The harvest has been good so far, bringing lots of luscious strawberries, peaches, plums and blueberries, as well as strong eggplants, she said.

Growers at farmers markets that have already opened for the season elsewhere in Massachusetts and New Hampshire have also reported similar fine yields.

"Shoppers at the farmers market can enjoy the convenience of having fresh-picked fruits and vegetables available right in the heart of downtown, with the confidence of knowing where their food is coming from," said Rose Gonzalez, who organizes the Lawrence Farmers' Market for Groundwork Lawrence.

For shopper Geraldine Lorden of North Andover, it reminds her of times gone by.

"I like it because this is what I've known growing up," she said. "It's really nice because as the season goes on, I know what's available and it's fresh."

## **Local farmers markets**

### **Massachusetts**

Andover Historical Society, 97 Main St.: Saturdays, July 12 to Oct. 11, 12:30 to 3:30 p.m.

Haverhill, GAR.Park, Main Street (Route 125): Saturdays, July 19 to Nov. 1, from 8 a.m. to 1 p.m.

Lawrence, Appleton Way next to City Hall, Wednesdays through Oct. 29, 10:30 a.m. to 6:30 p.m. Live Lawrence! Farmers' Market Concert Series is at 1 p.m., beginning July 9, with Los Sugar Kings; July

16, Acting Out; July 30, Goodtime String band; Aug. 6, to be announced; Aug. 20, Brian Quirk; and Aug. 27, Dixie Hot Four.

## **New Hampshire**

Kingston, The Plains across from the fire station, Tuesdays through Oct. 14, from 2:15 to 5:30 p.m.

Pelham, St. Patrick Church, 12 Main St., Mondays through September, from 4 to 7 p.m.

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### **Photos**



Manolo Moquete, who grows vegetables at Riverdale Farm in Groton, sets up his farm stand on Appleton Way, between Essex and Common streets, in Lawrence. Staff photo



Melody Rajotte, left, 10, and her sister Cynthia Rajotte, 11, both of Lawrence, arrange squash and zucchini for Riverdale Farm at the Lawrence Farmers' Market, which is open on Wednesdays through Oct. 29, from 10:30 a.m. to 6:30 p.m. with free entertainment during lunch time. Staff photo



Santos Cintron of Lawrence buys corn on the cob on opening day of the Lawrence Farmers' Market on Wednesday. Staff photo