

back again

I recently walked up to Gayle's Best Ever Grilled Cheese stand at the farmer's market near my apartment in Chicago. On this particular day, Gayle didn't ask for my name, but instead just wrote "Abby" on the bag. This is when I realized I was a regular.

Every Saturday morning, I go for a run before heading to the farmer's market either for a doughnut or a grilled cheese. There are worse habits, right?

In this month's Fresh Perspectives article, I spoke with Kara Kading from Milaeger's in Wisconsin, which hosts a weekly, year-round farmer's market that you can read more about on page 12.

"The most exciting thing about the farmer's market is that there's this return to people communicating again," Kading says. "We aren't just all on Facebook or texting. People are actually getting together and seeing their neighbors, seeing their friends."

I'm always talking up my local farmer's market, taking out-of-town guests or bringing something to close-by friends so they'll check it out the next week. And I'm not alone.

According to the U.S. Department of Agriculture, there were 8,268 farmer's markets in 2014. Five years ago, there were only 5,274!

The sense of community is strong at a farmer's market — even Gayle remembered my name! The desire for locally grown fruits, vegetables and, of course, flowers is growing. And there are numerous ways to get involved.

The answer might not be hosting a market like Milaeger's, but you could be a vendor at an already established market, or you could dip your toes into other community events or form partnerships with local businesses.

born and raised

What exactly is local? Is it your town, your state, your country? People want to be a part of something larger and show pride in their community.

On a recent trip to Michigan, Lawn & Garden Retailer toured seven garden centers, with some of the highlights documented starting on page 58.

Our first stop was Sawyer Home & Garden Center. The store had a lot of plants and a little of everything else: apparel, grocery, etc.

Christina Allis, Sawyer's marketing director, says the company has found an unexpected niche in Sawyer- and Michigan-branded apparel. The store started carrying clothing two years ago, and she has seen that one area really take off.

Necklaces in the shape of a state, T-shirts with area codes on them ... many gift items scream local. Adding some of these to your product lineup might make sense, but I can guarantee your garden center already has some products that appeal to local-minded shoppers.

What gift items do local artists make? How do your displays tell customers what you grow yourself? Do people come into your garden center to purchase things they can't buy anywhere else?

I walk to Gayle's Best Ever Grilled Cheese to get a sandwich I can't get anywhere else, much like your customer comes to the garden center to get something they can't get at that box store across the street.

What is that something? **LGR**




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