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Published April 6th, 2016

Best Heirlooms on Sale at Moraga Garden Farms

By Sophie Braccini

Since the mid-1990s Moraga Garden Farms has sold its produce to the best local restaurants, from Chez Panisse in Berkeley to Postino in Lafayette. The heirloom tomatoes that the farm grows from seeds are among the favorites.

Local foodies will rejoice that through April 24 farm volunteers are selling the same plants to the public that local chefs seek. The proceeds help fund the group, which also gives its surplus to those in the area that most need it.

"We have used their tomatoes for many years," says Beth Wells, head chef at Chez Panisse in Berkeley. "We try to buy as much local and organic produce as possible. Their tomatoes are great!" Deva Rajan, founder and director of the farm, confirms that Heirloom tomatoes are the most popular items.

"Star Grocery loves our hybrid tomatoes also, especially the Early Girls," Rajan said. "We are also delivering fresh summer squash and cucumbers."

Farm volunteer Claire Curtin says that there are four restaurants in Lamorinda that are buying the produce:

Postino, Metro Lafayette, The Rustic Tavern and the Moraga Ranch Cafe on School Street. She adds that in Berkeley and Oakland there are several: Chez Panisse, Cesar, Pizzaiolo, Penrose, The Grease Box and Kroner's Burgers. "Our produce are also sold in markets, like Star Grocery on Claremont Avenue in Berkeley and Diablo Foods in Lafayette," she adds.

Rajan says that the number of delivery points will not grow because the organization is and will remain small. "We deliver about 300 pounds of tomatoes, about 200 lbs. of summer squash, cucumbers, eggplants and peppers, twice a week," he says. "Deliveries continue from late June through mid-October. The sale of fresh produce represents about two-thirds of our farm income. One-third is from plant sales."

The farm is located at 1290 Moraga Way, next to the fire station in downtown Moraga, on a property rented from the Bruzzone family. The non-profit group is 60-members strong. They work on the farm every week and share the produce that isn't sold, while some goes to charity.

Every year the farmers grow their plants from seeds in their greenhouses and produce enough that about 3,000 small plants can be sold to the public between 10 a.m. and 3 p.m. every Saturday and Sunday through April 24. Each 4-inch pot costs \$3.

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