

Upcoming Events Will Bring Local Producers And Buyers Together

URBANA, ILL.

The Illinois Farm Bureau and University of Illinois Extension are sponsoring a "Meet the Buyers" event aimed at regional fruit and vegetable farmers.

According to extension educator John Pike, the program will start out with some educational programming to highlight the basic needs and expectations of commercial buyers. It will use the MarketReady program, a U of I Market-Maker project that has been designed to educate potential local suppliers about the variety of expectations, certifications, and other requirements that must be met to satisfy the needs of the commercial buyer.

"We'll also address some food safety issues that are important to the food supply chain," said Pike. "The rest of the day will be spent with short presentations from a variety of commercial buyers for grocery stores, restaurants, and food service companies who are interested in developing relationships with local growers to source more local fruits and vegetables and, potentially, meat."

Pike says that the program will be useful for existing large commercial growers who are looking to expand their markets as well as newer growers or people that are just thinking about getting in the business to help them identify potential opportunities.

"It is also to help folks who are in the process of developing their market plans for a new busi-

ness or expansion to decide whether the commercial market is a good fit for their particular operation," said Pike.

A separate event held at the same location will be a food hub summit, organized by the Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity and the U.S. Department of Agriculture Rural Development-Illinois, that will talk about potential funding opportunities and options for developing food hubs and aggregation centers around the state.

The program schedule for "Meet the Buyers" is:

- March 27, 2012, 8:30 am - 5:00 pm, Champaign County Farm Bureau, 801 N. Country Fair Drive, Champaign, Ill. RSVP to 217-352-5235 by March 22.

- April 4, 2012, 8:30 am - 5:00 pm, John A. Logan Community College, 700 Logan College Drive, Carterville, Ill. RSVP 20 618-993-2609 by March 30.

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Link Directly To: **AGROTAIN**



Link Directly To: **CASH RIVER**



Link Directly To: **SYNGENTA**