

## Testa-to-Farm Tour Highlights Local Produce

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The "Testa-to-Farm" tour program, launched three years ago, is one part of the distributor's comprehensive, long-term commitment to locally grown products. Indeed, this summer marks Testa's 10th year of offering local produce and its program has grown substantially during that time. "We've seen more than ten-fold growth in sales of local produce since we started focusing on this part of our business. We've also seen a 30 percent to 40 percent increase in fresh products that we're able to source locally," says Testa. "Both supply and demand are up substantially and we've made getting locally grown products to market a calling card."

Local products distributed by Testa hail from farms within a 250-mile radius of Chicago, says Corporate Chef Courtney Barton. "Some customers have tight restrictions on what they'll market as local — within a 100-mile radius, for instance," she says. "But for others, we're able to source products a bit farther out and work with farms in Ohio, Wisconsin and Michigan as well as right here in Illinois. We currently work with 30 to 40 different local farms of varying sizes, 10 or 15 of which are our primary vendors. Some of the closer farms will ship their products to us, but in most cases we're able to pick up at the farms and backhaul to our facility."

With summer harvest in full swing, Testa in early July was offering roughly 40 different locally grown items, from beets to corn, collard greens to pea shoots, peppers to zucchini. "Even customers who don't specify local get local when the products are in season," Barton says. "It's always what we lead with when we can. The quality is superior and the prices on local are typically significantly lower."

All of the local farms with which Testa works are inspected and certified for food safety, and many have passed additional third-party audits required and commissioned by individual operator customers.

Lists are distributed each week letting customers know what's available from local farms. Testa also has, over the past three years begun coordinating Farmers Markets at larger noncommercial customer locations, who offer them as a popular perk to employees. "We're scheduled to do 40 markets this summer. It's really taken off," Barton says. "We supply the products and set up the markets for them. It's become an important way for us to reinforce our commitment to and expertise in local produce."