

# *A passion for all natural, local foods at Simply Fresh Market!*

*By George Moses*

Simply Fresh Market in Brighton is a locally owned family operated business. Owner Tony Gelardi says his key interest is supporting our local economy. "So, right out our front door, where can I get food closest to home? That's what I kinda concentrate on. From organic produce that's locally grown to dairy, meat, dry goods,"

Anthony Gelardi is 33. He graduated from South Lyon High School. Then he got his business degree from Cleary College in Ann Arbor and took some cooking classes at Washtenaw Community College. He started his wholesale business out of the bed of his pickup truck. He knew some restaurateurs and would go down to the Eastern Market and shop for them. And it led to one restaurant owner saying "Hey, I'm getting my produce from this guy" and his reputation grew. Now they're up to seven delivery trucks and over 200 wholesale customers. "Produce is what we do." he says.

Gelardi opened Simply Fresh Market in Brighton in September, 2009. "It was pretty much about 80% conventional



and 20% organic at that time. We didn't have many Michigan made products. And as we've grown, that table has reversed. It is 80% organic now, 20% conventional. The only reason we have conventional is that sometimes we can't get organic things. We have over 500 Michigan-produced items. Over 30 Michigan farms that we're purchasing from. I would say 83% of the money stays right here in the county. Everything is locally contracted out."

I asked where he finds all of these local food producers. "What I do is, like anything else, research. I taste something that I like and I try to figure out what's behind it. Why does it taste so good? Well, less is more. Less ingredients. Things made the old fashioned way are better for a reason. I would hop on

the computer at night and I would search for local Michigan products. Michigan farms. I send emails. I make phone calls. Two weeks ago I was up at Full Circle in Howell watching 300 sheep give birth to lambs. That is the food that I want. People that grow the food is where I want to buy the food. And, when people shop here, they're trusting the source of where their food's coming from. Those are the relationships that I'm making with people. So, anyone you know that has a Michigan made product, please have them contact me. I love to support Michigan." said Gelardi.



"We have a whole animal coming from Premium Quality Beef in Brighton. We're gonna be excited to have his grass-fed beef in the store with no growth hormones, no antibiotics, free range. It's very exciting to get beef from literally five miles up the road. This summer we'd like to set up field trips for people to visit, to see the animals. To see the free range and see the grass that they're eating. So when they put meat on their child's plate they know what they're feeding. Farm to table. It's where we're headed. It's where we need to head."

"We jar all our own honey. This comes from Buell's, in Hartland. It's raw, unprocessed, never been heated. Has all the enzymes in it. Not pasturized. The biggest issue we have right now with honey

is it's being labeled 100% honey and 9 times out of 10 there's no pollen found in that honey. When you come here and buy honey, it's right out of the hive, from a farmer right down the road that is open for visits and educational exhibits.

Gelardi held up a beautifully formed loaf of bread. "Crust Breads is an artisan bread made with King Arthur flour. It's what bread should be like. King Arthur is an employee-owned flour mill. All domestic flour. You can see how beautiful this crust is. They had imported Italian ovens that were hand build up in Fenton that give it a 350 degree steam bath, which forms this thick crust. And then, inside it protects the beautiful flavor of the bread. We get this delivered fresh every Wednesday and Saturday. Here are some of the cookies that they are making and some of their pastries.

Just take a look at that double blueberry pie! It's just fabulous ingredients! Onion rolls. Baguettes. No artificial anything! Real ingredients. You can pronounce everything. Very important to me. I mean, if you can't pronounce it, it shouldn't be in your food!"

"Fresh green beans. We're really into the greens. Brussels sprouts. One of the most popular vegetables we sell here. We always carry a domestic. These are Florida. And these are California organic Brussels sprouts. As soon as local starts, we'll have local."

"These are our hand-packed fresh blackberries. Each one is perfect and ready to be consumed. You can just pick up and walk out. You don't have to look at anything. We do all of that for you. If it doesn't taste like it should, it will not be in the store. There's enough variety in the fruit and vegetable business that we can carry things that are seasonal. Things that are ready to eat."

"First and foremost we try to bring in organic produce if it's available. So you can see, we'll have 3 different varieties of organic pears here that you can't find in the local supermarket. Westwind Milling. Interesting story about them. A couple bought the old mill in Argentina and refurbished it. They grow crops and mill all of their mixes right there in Argentina. Very cool company! These are baking mixes. So these are flours used to bake your own bread. We have gluten-free rice flour, rye flour, garbanzo bean flour, sorghum flour and they also do mixes where you would add eggs, some butter and you can make your own muffins from Michigan made and grown ingredients."

"Michigan maple syrup. We have a gentleman north of us who harvests all fresh Michigan maple syrup. Five miles from here in Hartland we have a raw local honey bee farmer."

"We carry three Michigan dairies. We carry Calder Dairy which is an old dairy out of Carelton, Michigan. We have Hellhoff, which is a certified organic grass-fed old fashioned bottled milk. You can see the cream rises to the top! They also do whipping cream, a fantastic item. The Thomas family is in Henderson, Michigan. They do a cream line organic grass-fed milk."

"We have soy-free organic eggs. These I get from Full Circle Organic. She has a 300 acre farm up in Howell, Michigan. She also raises the organic lamb that we carry. I buy one animal from her a month. It's all USDA organic. It's all packed in a USDA facility. Just great stuff! Free range, certified organic soy-free diet."

"Everyday you'll see that we do fresh salads that we get grown locally. These come from Stone Coop Farms right here in Brighton. They're over on Musch Road. So these are all grown in greenhouses right now."

"We pack our mushrooms fresh everyday. We kinda have an in-house special. All our white mushrooms are always buy one, get one free. Those are grown in caves in Pennsylvania."

"Fresh green herbs grown right here in Brighton. Right down the road! So, it's local agriculture that we're supporting. All of our root vegetables and onions are organic because, if you think about it pesticides seep into the ground, so everything you buy here in a root vegetable is gonna be organic, from the fingerling potatoes to the beautiful Yukon Gold potatoes. You don't even have to peel these. They make the best mashed potatoes."

Supporting the local farmers and natural food producers. That's what Tony Gelardi is all about. He wants you to have healthy food on your table, and he'll go to the ends of Livingston County and beyond to find it and put it on his shelves for you.



**Simply Fresh Market is Located at 9984 E. Grand River near Old US-23 in Brighton  
Phone: 810-360-4292**