



The Roadside Gourmet

• THE LARGE TO SMALL OF FARM STANDS •

by Henry Verden



We've all seen them. Take a drive in the country and you'll pass a couple, at least. They come in sizes ranging from supermarket to wheelbarrow. They're a place to get some of the freshest fruits and vegetables available.

Farm stands have been around just about as long as there have been farms and roads, maybe before that. Once that road went by a farm, the farmer quickly realized that he could pick up some extra cash by selling surplus crops to people going by. Many farm stands today are much more commercial, but you can still find, without too much trouble, family-run stands in someone's front yard selling garden-raised produce.

The big ones offer more variety, while the small ones generally offer better prices. Together, they make a great way to spend an afternoon and provide opportunities to buy really great produce and more.

The Big Boys

On the large end of the scale are places like Peck's Farm Market West on U.S. Highway 14 near Spring Green and run by Brad Peck, the fourth generation to run the family business that started in 1889. "My wife and I took over in 1997," said Brad, "since then we've expanded quite a bit. We're open from June through October, seven days a week."

By any standard, Peck's is huge. Their store is a size that would be the envy of many small town grocery stores. The range of products for sale at Peck's is staggering. Spring brings fresh-picked peas, Amish candies, jams and jellies, cheese, and squeaky cheese curds, raspberries, and lots more. In summer, homegrown sweet corn, watermelon, muskmelon, snap peas, cabbage, beautiful, juicy tomatoes, and fresh-baked goods get added to the shelves. Fall ushers in piles of pumpkins, gourds, Indian corn, crisp apples, apple

From large...



(Top) The high-visibility exterior attracts customers on busy U.S. Highway 14 near Spring Green. (Bottom left) The clean, inviting interior of Peck's invites customers to stay for awhile and browse. (Bottom right) Peck's offers more than just their store. Pygmy goats are just one of the attractions in their free petting zoo.

cider, wonderfully sticky caramel apples, autumn raspberries, hardy mums, and maple syrup. "Early in the year we get produce from other sources," explained Brad, "but by the second half of August, 90% of what we sell we grow on our farm not too far from here."

There's more to do at Peck's than shop till you drop. Peck's is family friendly with a free petting zoo featuring deer, pot-bellied pigs, pheasants, swans, ducks, alligators (no, you don't get to pet the alligators), camels, wallabies, pygmy goats, llamas, bunnies, and more. "We have school field trips from preschool all the way up to eighth graders," explained Brad. "All the kids really like the petting zoo. Families have a great time too. Another thing the kids really like is the playground. We have swings and jungle gyms; we're adding new stuff all the time." In the fall, kids can challenge themselves in a corn maze designed just for them. It's a great place to take a wagon ride and then select that perfect pumpkin to carve into a scary jack-o'-lantern. You can also take home cornstalks, hay bales, and other Halloween decorating supplies.

There's No Place Like Home

Not all farm stands are large, commercial enterprises like Peck's. Towards the other end of the scale are the simple roadside stands. Some are structures built specifically for that purpose. Many are like the stand that sits in front of a

To small...



(Top) Mid-range farm stands offer serve yourself simplicity with great prices. This stand is on U.S. Highway 51 a few miles east of Stoughton. (Bottom left) Often, smaller farm stands are a great place to buy fresh-cut flowers at a fraction of the price you would pay elsewhere. (Bottom right) Stand owner Marge Stokstad (Right) and her assistant Mara Biggs (Left) keep the farm stand stocked and ready for customers.

warm and friendly farmhouse on U.S. Highway 51 a couple of miles east of Stoughton.

Owned by Marge Stokstad, the stand is an old farm wagon with a roof added to protect the contents. Bins full of fresh vegetables and bouquets of delicate flowers fill the wagon. Buckets of vibrantly colored gladiolus are lined up along the wall of an old barn that squats behind the stand. In one corner of the wagon, a battered yellow box holds a bit of change because everything is on the honor system, which is not unusual for this type of farm stand.

"I haven't had time to look, but this is either our 13th or 14th year," Stokstad explained as we sat on overturned five-gallon plastic buckets in her front yard. "I got into it because I like farming. I was raised on a tobacco farm but I thought vegetables and flowers utilized my talents better than tobacco."

Stokstad's has an impressive variety of produce. "We start with asparagus and peas, then move into green beans, zucchini, cucumbers, tomatoes, okra, a variety of peppers, eggplant, and dill. In the fall we offer pumpkins and 15 varieties of hard squash. In addition to the produce, beginning mid-June we have a lot of glads and other flowers for fresh and dried bouquets."

Stokstad doesn't just rest on her farm stand laurels. A little way down the highway, closer to Stoughton, stands a

To hardly anything at all.



Farm stands can be as simple as a wheelbarrow or utility vehicle (Above) full of produce placed in the front yard with a homemade sign. These stands operate on the honor system.

pretty 1870's cream brick farmhouse built by Stokstad's grandparents. It's the home of Altemus Corners House Bed and Breakfast that she owns and operates. Fresh flowers from her farm adorn the B&B and her fresh produce makes every meal a joy and delight.

Whether you go to one of the mega-stands or buy a dozen ears of corn off the card table in the front yard of a farmhouse, you can rest assured that you are buying local in the truest sense of the word. All it takes is a drive in the country and keeping your eyes open to find your way to really good eating. Enjoy the drive ... and the food.

• IF YOU GO •
FARM STAND LOCATIONS

Peck's Farm Market West
E3217 U.S. Highways 14 & 60
Spring Green, WI 53588
(608) 583-4977

Stokstad's Farm Stand
305 U.S. Highway 51
Stoughton, WI 53589

**Altemus Corners House
Bed and Breakfast**
1345 Tower Drive
Stoughton, WI 53589
(608) 695-0693
www.altemuscornershouse.com



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