

## Local producers fill a niche with fresh, better tasting products

BY Kenny E. Perry, Extension Agent for Agriculture and Natural Resources

Producers that grow specialty products are scattered throughout Kentucky. Almost all of those local farmers have developed a market based on freshness, quality and taste. And for good reason; because when we have the choice of home grown or locally grown, we'll usually choose that over store bought most every time. It's fresher, more nutritious and the difference in taste is unbelievable.

Graves County is blessed with some excellent local producers. Some you may be familiar with and others, maybe not. One such example is Barber Farm's sweet potatoes. Jerry and Carolyn, along with their son Chad, operate a farm just outside of Lynnville. They produce several acres of tobacco, some row crops and five to ten acres of sweet potatoes.

Most people think of planting sweet potatoes in May or June, but the Barber's main cash crop, like many other farmers in Graves County, is tobacco. So they generally don't plant their potato crop until late June or July when tobacco setting is complete. They generally grow 3 varieties of sweet potatoes and experiment with new varieties to see how they produce before growing on larger acreage.

After the potatoes are dug, they're washed and cured for a couple of weeks to preserve the flavor and moisture level of the product. Jerry says that's what sets their potatoes apart from others. The Barbers sell from their farm and several local stores like Food Giant, Falder's and Mathis Orchard.

Speaking of Mathis Orchard, there's another high quality, local producer in Graves County. Coleman and family have been producing several varieties of apples, pumpkins and other fall items for many years now just outside of Mayfield on Spence Chapel Road. He works very closely with the UK horticulture department and integrated pest management program to use the best and safest products on his fruit. Coleman tells me that he has a good crop this year, but it's going fast.

Another specialty product that you can get locally is honey. Numerous beekeepers are scattered throughout the county and region. Kent Williams is president of the Lake Barkley Beekeepers Association and he says that the quantity of honey production is fair this year, but not great. He generally knows which beekeepers have honey available during different times of the year. Kent and Valerie sell honey from their home and a couple of local stores like Falder's, Southern Red's in Pilot Oak and Hill's BBQ. If you need information on who's got honey for sale, call Kent at 970-1307.

These are just a few examples of fresh, high quality products that are produced locally in Graves County. Many more producers have filled niches throughout the county and region. Visit one soon and support our local economy. Your taste buds will thank you for it. For more information contact the Graves County Extension Office at 247-2334.

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Sweet potatoes ride up an automated belt after being dug out of the ground by the harvester on Barber Farms in Lynnville. Several workers ride the harvester to sort the potatoes by size and quality, and then pitch them into wooden crates where they're stored until being washed and cured.

