Bidders vie for locally-grown goods at Plowboy Produce Auction, LLC

by Nancy Brewer

A business that has given Lawrence County a "growing reputation" also provides local farmers a good outlet for their labor and brings a regular stream of visitors to the county.

It’s a busy time of year at Plowboy Produce Auction, LLC, where growers bring their best work—washed, graded and boxed—for buyers from throughout the region.

Any farmer can bring items to sell, but most of the growers are Amish. Owner Bill Hudson is not exactly joking when he says “You can follow the mud tracks from the parking lot back to the farm where it came from.” He estimates that about 95% of the sellers live within a 10-mile radius of the 469 South Brace Road location.

Amish resident John Yoder approached Hudson with the idea of a produce auction in 2004, when the Elder was visiting from his home in Florida. The company Hudson worked for there agreed to transfer him to Lawrence County as he researched Yoder’s idea to bring produce to the community.

One member of the original group is an Amish farmer who brings three wagonloads every auction day—Monday, Wednesday, and Friday, April through October. “I have a machine shop, but I don’t even go in the door during the summer,” he says.

The produce auction is an important source of work - and income - for himself, his wife and their 11 children. Six of his brothers and eight brothers-in-law also bring produce to sell. Wendi Smith, the Horticultural Agent with Lawrence County Extension, estimates that local vegetable production has increased three-fold since the auction opened.

This particular Amish household grows tomatoes, cucumbers, and cantaloupes, harvesting each five times through the season. That way, a fresh crop is always coming in as the previous one is dwindling out, keeping the quality high.

“Lawrence County has a growing reputation for high-quality goods,” says Smith.

A five-member board elected by the Amish community sets strict guidelines about quality and packaging. Growers are told to “bring the best and leave the rest,” the Amish farmer says. From the beginning, producers have had regular training about everything from drip irrigation to food safety and quality. Smith and Calvin Bryant of the Lawrence County Extension Service and other experts.

Every box of produce contains a label listing its type, size, grade, the date it was picked, the grower’s identification number, and the location where it was harvested.

Susan Ayers of Ayers Farm, who has been attending the auction since it opened in spring 2006. “I think you can’t beat the quality you find here,” she says. “You can’t beat the quality you find here.”

Ayers has been attending the auction since it opened in spring 2006. She’s seen a growing trend to fresh vegetables and finds herself bidding against more buyers every year.

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1. Plowboy Produce Auction, LLC owner Bill Hudson.
2. Auditor/Chief Clerk Dwayne Clark.
3. Manager Lynn Ward (left) talks to auction regulars Kay and B.R. Smith of Ashlandville, AL. The couple make the 250-mile round trip five days a week, primarily for the fun of it. Last Monday they were looking to buy bulk loads of squash and corn, Kay said, but they usually give most of their purchases away to neighbors.
4. The most recent addition to the Plowboy facility is a “drive through” auction building where farmers can park wagons or truckloads of produce in front of bidders, who sit on the stadium-style seats.
5. A sampling of the produce available last Monday at Plowboy Produce Auction.

For more information phone 931-309-0159

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