



## LOCAL FOOD AND HEALTH:

# CONNECTING THE DOTS

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If the buzz from this winter's Farms, Food & Health Conference in Traverse City is any indication, we don't get healthy by popping vitamins.

Think local farm fields, woods and orchards instead. Farmers markets. Simply prepared meals, rich in variety and color. And forgotten food traditions that actually add up to health, without our knowing it.

Keynote speaker and physician Daphne Miller, the nationally acclaimed author of *Jungle Effect* and *Farmacology*, brought that message to the sold-out conference. It drew 220 participants from such a wide diversity of professions that Miller said it "blew her away."

Physicians, nurses and registered dietitians rubbed shoulders with farmers and school teachers, anti-poverty advocates, employee wellness officials and hospital and school food service directors.

"These conversations will reverse the epidemic of chronic disease," Miller said.

Indeed, connecting health and wellness to locally grown foods is gaining momentum here.

Bluestem Farm in East Jordan distributes food to families through the Health Department of Northwest Michigan. Munson Medical Center is starting a fruit and vegetable prescription program that partners with the Grand Traverse Commons farmers market. Employers are working with Providence Farm in Central Lake to make weekly worksite deliveries a part of employee wellness benefits.

Pat Friedli, medical director of Munson's Healthy Weight Center, recalled a slide he saw at Farms, Food & Health that said: "We are fed by the Food Industry, which pays no attention to health, and are treated by the Health Industry, which pays no attention to food."

"Brilliant," Dr. Friedli said. "It rings so true in our everyday health care world. It is too easy to rely on medications to fix a health issue rather than emphasize the real, whole and organic foods which nourish our body to repair itself."

As an example of how old food traditions turn out to be health giving, Miller said corn tortillas have a glycemic index of 62 and beans of 22. Put together they level out to a healthy 35.

Cherry salsa, anyone?



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